



SPARROW

MORNINGSTAR MCRENO BOOK SIX
D WILLIAMS

SPARROW

MORNINGSTAR MC NOVEL RENO CHAPTER BOOK SIX

D WILLIAMS

CONTENTS

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introducing...](#)

[MSMC RENO MEMBERS](#)

[Motorcycle Club terms](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Also by D Williams](#)

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[Curious of how King met Gianna??](#)

[Eternally Bound, Book One in the Eternal Love Series](#)

[Shock: A MorningStar MC Novel Reno Chapter Book 7](#)

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[The Return of Avalon](#)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCING...

MSMC New Orleans Chapter

Coming 2024

NOLA Chapter

Genny & Miya's son Fabien (Seer)

President

Westin Blair (Cowboy)

VP

Kooper Justice (Scull)

Medic

Noah Phillips (Jester)

Pilot

Oliver Brooks (Blaze)

Fire Fighter

Lacey Miller (Glitch)

Cyber Tech

Maverick Deacon (Mayhem)

MMA Fighter

Maddox Deacon (Nova)

Escort

More to be announced...

MSMC RENO MEMBERS

Franklin Hoss Jr (Wolf)

President MSMC Reno Chapter,

Owner of Juicy Delights

Damaris Brooks (Rebel)

Daughter of Abel (Cannibal) and Dylan Brooks,
twin of Davina Brooks, Sister of AJ “Menace” Brooks

Issac Hamilton (Spark)

Vice President and Mechanic MSMC Reno Chapter,

Owner of Nuts and Bolts Chop Shop

Davina Brooks

Kindergarten Teacher, Daughter of Abel (Cannibal) and Dylan
Brooks,

twin of Damaris Brooks, Sister of AJ “Menace” Brooks

Micah Cross (Viper)

SAA Angels of Brimstone

Abel Brooks Jr - AJ (Menace)

Road Captain MSMC Reno Chapter and Lead Vocalist of
Menacing Angel, Son of Abel (Cannibal) and Dylan Brooks,

Brother of Damaris and Davina Brooks

Darius Ortega -DJ (Priest)

SAA MSMC Reno Chapter, Veteran

Son of Dorian (Pinky) and William Ortega

Aspen Franklin (Sparrow)

Enforcer MSMC Reno Chapter, Veterinarian

Sister of Franklin "Wolf" Hoss Jr

Hannah Garcia (Shock)

Medic MSMC Reno Chapter

Lacey Miller (Glitch)

Cyber Security Expert MSMC Reno Chapter

SPOILER: More to be announced

MOTORCYCLE CLUB TERMS

Cage: Covered vehicles, cars, trucks, etc.

Colors: Tattoo of the club logo.

Cut: Club leather vests with logos.

Old lady: Wife of a club member.

President: Head of the club, majority decision-maker.

VP: Vice President of the club, second in command, and in charge of the day-to-day running of club activities and businesses.

SAA: Sergeant at arms, club's principal protector, and in charge of enforcers/prospects.

Treasurer: Club finance expert, handles all the financial aspects of the club and businesses.

Road Captain: Organizes events and club rides.

Prospect: Club recruits trying to earn membership.

Enforcer: Club protectors.

SYNOPSIS

I spent the first years of my life in silence, so I never thought I would crave it again. I live for the moments of solitude now and enjoy animals way more than people. My family says I'm introverted, and in many ways, they're right. They will never understand how loud this world really is.

I may not be deaf anymore, but I'm still treated differently, special, and fragile. Until he arrives in the dead of night and makes me feel alive again. When his world is crashing around him, I am the only one he seems to need to make his world right again. When the club disapproves of our relationship, I'm left with only one option, leave the ones holding me back behind because love waits for no one. They just need to remember...

Even in your darkest hour, a Sparrow will always guide you home.

Content Warnings

Gun Violence

Animal abuse (avenged)

Kidnapping

Murder

PTSD

PROLOGUE

“Aspen,” I turn away from the ultrasound machine I was staring at.

“Yeah?” I rub my eyes, which are tired and strained from counting the number of vertebrae on the black-and-white screen.

“Jeez, how many are in there?” Gretchen smiles as she walks over to me to take a closer look.

“I can clearly see fourteen, but I’m not one hundred percent sure.” I stand and stretch out my back.

“Poor Pussy.” I laugh at her joke and nod.

“It’s the biggest litter of kittens we’ve had to date, for sure. Did you need me?” My partner was out sick today, but thank God the weather was keeping people home.

“Just to tell you, the last appointment just canceled. Oh, and by the way. He’s back.” She winks at me before leaving me standing in the room dumbfounded.

“Are you serious?” I call after her a few moments later when my brain restarts.

“He’s been parked outside for the last half hour. You also got those delivered today.” I glance at the flowers she points to and sigh.

“This has got to stop. I realize he’s grateful for me saving his partner, but no means no.” I stomp over to the front doors and push it open.

Officer Malachi Nassar has been the thorn in my side for weeks now. Every night, he’s parked outside my veterinary clinic. He follows me home and doesn’t leave until I turn off my lights.

I’ve lost count of the number of flower deliveries I’ve gotten over the last eight weeks. I politely asked him to stop when he brought Foxy, his K9 partner, in to get her cast removed last week. To which he ever so politely ignored my request.

This is starting to make me wonder if he’s got some type of stalker fetish, and every time I think of that, a shiver runs down my back. I groan because I should be disgusted, not turned on by that fact.

No more romance novels for me.

A strong gust of wind grabs ahold of it and slams it into the brick wall, shattering the glass and spraying me with sharp shards.

“FUCK!” I scream above the howling wind of the thunderstorm pouring on me.

I managed to block my face, but I could feel a couple of cuts from the glass.

“ASPEN!” I heard him call my name and a loud bark a moment later.

Great.

I just gave him a reason to play hero.

Gretchen is pulling on my arm to get me back inside when Malachi and Foxy reach us, hovering by the now broken glass door.

“Clean her up. I’ll call this in to get it fixed. ” He takes control of the situation like his training demands, but this is my business.

“No, you will get Foxy home and out of this storm. I will call my insurance and handle it. Why are you even here?” I snatch the gauze Gretchen appears with and whisper sorry so she knows It’s not her that I’m mad at.

“Aspen,” I glare at his smooth, calm tone.

“NO. Thank you for the flowers. Now leave, Officer Nassar.” I snap and try to push him outside.

“Foxy, stay. Excuse us a moment.” The man grabs my hand, and

drags me into one of the examination rooms, and slams the door close.

I open my mouth to curse him out, but he’s got me pinned up against it by my neck a moment later, and my panties go up in flames when I see the look in his eyes.

Passion, possession, and pain.

“Is it just me you have a problem with or any man that tries to show you interest? Are you incapable of letting someone take care of you?” The fucking audacity of this man.

“Oh, it’s just you. Clearly, you haven’t gotten the point that I don’t need to be cared for.” He nods at my words, and I swallow hard.

The motion makes the hand around my throat tighten for a second.

I close my eyes and just enjoy the feeling of having him this close because I have to end this before it begins. We are all wrong for each other. No matter how attracted I am to him, we can not be together.

“You aren’t saying no. You’re saying goodbye. Why?” I sigh and bite the inside of my cheek.

How do I answer that? You’re a cop, and I’m an MC princess? You’re Iranian, and my family is healing from a situation in your motherland? No matter how I phrase it, he’ll think I’m a racist bigot. So, I chose the national cop-out.

“Listen, it’s not you. No, really!” I protest when he rolls his eyes at me.

It’s such a carefree thing for his serious face to do that a small giggle slips from my lips.

“Just one more kiss then.” He moves his face closer to mine, which I didn’t think was possible.

“I want to remember your taste on my tongue.” I gasp, and he moves in to plunder my mouth.

I feel the tie on my scrub pants loosen, and I push him away.

“You said one kiss!” I protest as my pants hang open in his hand.

“I did, but I never said where.” Malachi kneels and drags my scrubs and panties down my legs before lifting my leg over his shoulder and kissing my clit.

“I did come here to ask you to dinner. I hope you don’t mind me skipping to dessert.”

CHAPTER ONE

SPARROW

“THIS IS DATE NUMBER, what? Four? Have you put out yet?” I laugh around the rim of my margarita glass at Hannah’s nosy question.

“A lady never kisses and tells,” I smirk as she looks around us in confusion.

“Well, good thing, I don’t see any ladies around. Just us dirty hoes now spill.” I drain my glasses and signal the waiter to bring me another.

“No, not since that mind-blowing orgasm in my office.” She frowns at me.

“Why are you looking at me like that? It was fucking epic.” She narrows her eyes clearly in thought before finally answering me.

“It’s just weird. The man sucks you off within an inch of your life and then hasn’t kissed you or touched you since. I’m starting to think he’s an eunuch.” I almost spill the brand-new drink the waiter is handing me when she drops that bombshell.

“Jesus, Hannah.” I hiss and smile at Lacey as she slides in next to me.

She snatches my drink and empties it in three big swallows.

“Rough day?” Hannah asks as she slides her drink to her as well.

Lacey nods and finishes that one, too. A loud whistle stops everyone in the restaurant as Hannah yells to our waiter, who’s across the room at the bar.

“Better bring a pitcher and an extra glass!” I cover my face to hide it going bright red.

My two best friends are equally embarrassing, but I love them both like sisters.

“I don’t want to talk about it. I just want to get drunk. Now, who’s an eunuch?” I groan when Lacey brings it back up and sit, listening to them discuss my sex life.

My phone buzzes in my lap, and I flip it over and grin.

“Is that no dick?” Hannah whispers.

“SHOCK! Fuck, you do not need to live up to your road name.” Lacey laughs at me.

“Yes, I do.” I ignore her and read my text.

Azizam, how is your girl's night going?

A pitcher of margaritas was just delivered to our table, and you have become the topic of the evening.

Should I be worried?

Very!

I smile as I put my phone down to thank the waiter, who is pouring me a fresh glass when I catch a whiff of Turkish tobacco. I freeze when I feel his hand on the nape of my neck and glance at Hannah and Lacey.

They're both staring up at Malachi.

"Ladies," he greets my friends, and I start shaking my head when I see the smirk cross Hannah's face.

"Dickless?" I'm going to fucking kill her.

"Excuse me?" Malachi chokes out on a laugh.

"We're just wondering why, with the body of a Greek God and a tongue of legend, why the hell you haven't dicked our girl down yet." Wait, what did she just say?

"Greek God? He's not in uniform?" I turn before letting them respond to find him in a dark navy suit.

The top buttons of his white shirt are undone, showing off tattoos and skin. What the fuck?

"What are you wearing?" I hear the girls laughing at my reaction.

"Uniform?" Lacey asks, and I realize my fuck up.

"I'm off duty and having drinks with a few guys from work. One of them is getting married tonight." He twirls one of my curls around his fingers and pulls slightly.

"Well, we won't keep you then! Call me later?" I ask in a rush to move him along before Lacey starts the next Spanish Inquisition.

He leans down, pulling my hair to raise my face to his.

"Behave, Assizes. No driving." He kisses my lips softly and then disappears into a crowd of men gathering at the other end of the bar.

"Holy fucking shit!" Hannah says, fanning her face.

"I hate you both." I slap my napkin on the table and chug my drink.

“What the fuck does Azizam mean?” Hannah whispers, and Lacey takes her phone out to google it.

Absolutely perfect.

“Azizam, Farsi for ‘my dear,’” Lacey looks up at me through narrowed eyes.

“He’s Iranian by birth. His parents passed away when he was super young, and he was raised here by his godfather, his father’s best friend.” Lacey places her phone on the table and leans in.

“Occupation?” I lean back and close my eyes again.

“Law enforcement.” There it’s out.

“Aspen Hoss! Does Wolf know?”

FUCK.

CHAPTER TWO

MALACHI

I MISS the toast meant for Josh because I'm too busy watching the table across the way. Aspen looks upset as she tosses her napkin on the table before pushing her chair back and heading towards the restrooms.

“Excuse me,” I place the shot glass still full of whiskey on the bar and follow after the woman who has quickly become an obsession for me.

The hallway is dark, with only two doors marked with the appropriate genders. I lean against the wall between them and wait for her to come out. It's loud in the hall from the noises coming from the bar but not loud enough to cover her shouting at someone in the bathroom.

I kick open the door, ready to protect her from whoever must be attacking her to find her on the phone screaming at whoever she's speaking to.

She spins and stares at me as she continues yelling.

“Look, asshole, I am not a child. I don't need fucking permission from you, Bear or God to date. The only people involved in that decision are standing in this room.” I cross my arms and watch as my timid, shy woman turns into a hellcat.

“Franklin, I am done with this discussion.” She starts pacing, and I snag her waist, drawing her back to my front to rub her arms so she’ll settle down.

I can hear the angry voice of a man yelling right back at her. The words are muffled, but I make out two words clearly before he hangs up on her.

“END IT.”

“Shit,” her head leans back into my chest, and I kiss her temple.

“I know you’ve mentioned your family wouldn’t approve of us, but I honestly didn’t think it was that serious. I think it’s time you explained in more detail.” She sighs but nods.

“Not here or tonight. We need privacy for that conversation.” The door swings open, and two women pull up short when they see us.

“Um,” the one woman tries to point out I’m in the wrong bathroom, but before she can finish, Aspen is pulling me out into the hall.

“Just needed a moment alone with him, ladies. The room’s all yours now.” I listen to them giggle as the door closes, and I pin Aspen to the wall, kissing her thoroughly.

“Malachi! The party bus is here. Oh, sorry!” I glance at my guys as they smile at us.

“Coming,” I call to them.

“I wish,” Aspen mumbles, and I grin down at her.

“That can be arranged, Azizam. How about breakfast in bed tomorrow?” I pull out my keys and slip them into her hands.

“I expect you in my bed when I get home. Naked.” I kiss her mouth once more before turning to join my friends.

I leave her watching my ass which I can see from the reflection of the glass doors as we exit to climb into the bus. As soon as I’m on board, the guys start asking questions.

“Who was that?”

“Is she even legal?”

“What the hell does she see in you?”

Laughter fills the bus as we pull away from the bar.

“Ha, ha. Her name is Dr. Aspen Hoss. She’s the veterinarian who saved Foxy. So yes, she’s legal, jerk off.” I point at Josh, who had asked that question.

“Just looking out for you, man.” I roll my eyes at the groom.

“Hoss?” Steve asks, scratching his chin in thought.

“Yeah,” we’ve worked enough undercover jobs for me to know that this is somehow work-related.

“Any relation to Franklin Hoss?” Shit, that was the name of the person she was just yelling at.

“Why?” I’m not giving any information until I know where this is going.

“Franklin Hoss Jr is the President of the MorningStar MC. His so-called club has been associated with a few of my investigations, but nothing we’ve found has stuck. They claim they’re not one-percenters, and their mother chapter is known to help law enforcement out down in Vegas, but this Reno chapter seems like trouble.” Suddenly, the reason Aspen’s family wouldn’t accept me is crystal clear.

They're possible criminals.

CHAPTER THREE

SPARROW

THE TAXI PULLS UP outside Malachi's house, and the driver taps his fingers on the steering wheel, waiting for me to get out.

"I can't believe I'm here," I mumble as I dig through my purse to tip the driver.

"Sorry, is this the wrong address?" The driver turns to look at me, and I smile at the poor kid.

"You have no idea. Thanks." I pass him the ten-dollar bill and open the door.

I open the gate and make sure it closes behind me.

This is so different from the last time I visited this little cottage. That was purely professional. Foxy had gotten her cone off and chewed open her stitches. I stopped by to clean her up and close her back up. It had been two in the morning, and Malachi had freaked out when he came home to find her covered in blood.

As I approach the door, I can hear her barking at the door.

"Hold on, Foxy," I call out as I unlock the door and brace myself so I'm not knocked down by the rambunctious German Shepard.

"Calm," I order as she goes to lick my face.

“You gotta go potty, girl?” I move over and let her rush past me and watch as she does her business and then comes right back inside.

I close and lock the door.

“Hope your daddy has an app for this electronic lock.” I shouldn’t feel as comfortable as I do in this man’s house.

I place my purse on the kitchen counter and slip off my heels.

Foxy comes over and sniffs my feet before licking my toes. I grin at her as I walk over to her food and water bowl. I pick them up and carry them to the sink. I wash them both out and refill the water one.

I set them down as my cell phone lights up.

“Be home soon, Azizam.”

“Did you tell Daddy I’m here?” I ask the dog, who tilts her head to the side with one ear up.

“Well, guess I only have a few minutes to snoop around. Where’s he hiding the good stuff?” Foxy keeps looking at me like I’m crazy, and I smile.

“Bed,” I issue the command, and she moves to a big dog bed in the open living room area.

“That’s not exactly what I meant, but good girl.” I look around properly and go down a small hallway.

I open the first door to find a bathroom. The second door is a gym with one wall made of all mirrors. I grin with dirty ideas as I follow the hall down to one last door.

I push it open, and the smell of Turkish tobacco fills my lungs.

His bed is perfectly made in the center of the massive room. Directly behind it is a set of double doors that are open to show a whirlpool tub with his and her sinks on either side.

I rub my fingers on the soft bedding as I make my way into the ensuite. I reach behind me to pull the zipper of my dress down and let it float to the floor. I find his closet in the bathroom and hang it up with his clothes.

The large walk-in closet has uniforms on the left and dress clothes on the right.

“You must really love suits.” I muse as I flip through the hangers, looking at labels.

If the labels were any indication, Malachi was taking bribes, or he came from money. I come to a built-in dresser and open the top drawer, expecting to see the typical socks most men have there.

Nope, guns.

I shake my head and close it, turning and yelping when the man in question is leaning up against the door jam, watching me. I glance down to Foxy sitting by his side, wagging her tail happily.

“Traitor, you were supposed to bark when he got home.” She lets out a small one now, and I smile.

“Foxy would never alert anyone to my presence. Find what you were looking for?” I roll my eyes at him.

“No, actually. I was hunting for your sock drawer and any secrets you have hidden there. Sadly, all I found were guns.” I shrug, unclasping the front of my bra, and drop it on the floor of his closet.

“I’m fairly certain I said naked in my bed Azizam.” I grin, grabbing the sides of my thong, and shimmy them down my legs.

His eyes go from my body to the mirror directly behind me to watch the show.

“Oops, is this close enough?” I take the panties, open the dresser, and place them inside the second drawer, which happens to have his socks and underwear.

“Ah ha, found them.” I giggle as I close it softly.

“Are you always this naughty?” I nod as I step in front of him.

“Always,” I push the suit jacket off his shoulders and start undoing the buttons on his shirt.

“I’m starting to see that.” I frown and stop to look up at him.

I raise an eyebrow.

“Care to explain what that comment means?” I drop my hands and step away, suddenly feeling cold as all the heat I had leaves my body.

I’ve never felt so naked in front of anyone in my life.

He watches me closely and tilts his head to the side in thought. Whatever he’s thinking, I’m done waiting for a response.

“Fuck this,” I scoop up my underwear and bra.

I grab my dress and step into it. I’m zipping it when Malachi finally reaches for me. I think he means to stop my movements, but instead, he pulls the zipper up for me.

My eyes burn, wanting to fill with tears, but I refuse the sensation.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, kissing my bare shoulder.

I shrug away his affection and walk out of his room.

“You are sorry. A sorry excuse of a man. If you didn’t want me here, why give me the keys? Is this a fucking game to you? Guess what, I’m done playing. Have a nice life, Malachi.” I pick my purse and phone up off the counter, and I’m pulling up the taxi service before he utters a word to me.

“You shouldn’t have lied to me.” What?

“Lied? About what!” I hiss, turning to face him.

“Your family.” I recoil like he slapped me.

“Fuck you. I’ve never lied about anything. In fact, I was honest from the start. I told you they would never accept you, but you pursued me anyway. Now, you want to stand here and act high and mighty?” Foxy whimpers at the sounds of us arguing.

I open the front door and then bend to get my shoes. I don’t bother putting them on as I walk onto his porch and slam the door behind me.

The taxi service says it’s three minutes away, and I send a driver a text to pick me up at the corner, wanting to get as far away from Malachi’s house as possible.

The chill in the air makes me acutely aware of my lack of clothing, as well as the fact that I look like a woman taking the worst walk of shame in her life.

The roar of a Harley breaks up the silence of the early morning hour, and I glance in the direction of the noise out of habit. As soon as I see the familiar bike, I curse.

Of all of the neighborhoods this fucker could pick, why on Earth is he in this one? My anger skyrockets when he stops in front of me and smiles.

“Need a ride, gorgeous?” Spark smiles at me.

“Franklin send you?” He nods as if I should have known better.

I cancel the taxi and then text Lacey before letting Spark help me onto his motorcycle.

Take the tracker off my phone. NOW.

No

“Fucking stupid club.” I hug Spark’s waist as he roars past Malachi’s house.

The man is standing on the porch watching me drive into the sunrise with an angry look on his face. I flip him the bird and turn my face away.

“Isaac?” I yell into his ear.

“Yeah?” He slows to a stop at a red light and turns to me.

“Take me to my brother.”

CHAPTER FOUR

MALACHI

“WHAT HAVE I DONE, FOXY?” I sigh as I flop down on my couch and hold my head in my hands.

I let all the talk from the guys tonight get to me. I judged Aspen based on rumors and prejudice because I was mad at being surprised by my coworker’s information on her family.

“FUCK!” I roar out in frustration.

I grab my phone and text her, but it bounces back.

She fucking blocked me. I can’t blame her. I was a total asshole. My mother would be so ashamed of me.

I was young when she died, but she taught me that women were precious and meant to be taken care of like my father did for her. I stand and walk over to the mantle and lift the small framed photo of my family. It’s the only one I have, and it was taken about a year before they died.

My uncle had it with him when he picked me up from the hospital three days after they died in a bombing that should have claimed my life as well. Somehow, my parents knew and got me into the shelter just before the earth shook from the explosion that devastated Mashhad. I was buried under rubble for hours before a rescue team found us.

My arm was broken, but my parents had been crushed.

I sigh as I try to stop the memories from drowning me in even more sorrow. I grab my mail that's been piling up to distract myself. I flip through and frown when I come to a letter with the Pahlavi family crest on it.

I tear open the seal and carefully take out the paper.

Mr. Nassar,

Important family documents have recently been found and are awaiting retrieval at the Iranian Consulate located at the address below.

Please bring your passport and birth certificate to claim the documents.

I google the address and sigh when it comes up seven hours away, damn near in Vegas.

“Car ride?” I ask Foxy, who has been laying quietly on the floor since we came back inside.

Maybe a road trip is what I need to clear my head. If I leave now, I should be back before Aspen closes the clinic tonight. I'm going to park my sorry ass outside her business and pray she forgives me for being an idiot.

It worked once.

I stretch my arms over my head and groan at the bright sun beaming down on me. Reno to Vegas in less than six hours is a record for me. I know I broke some of the laws I swear to uphold, but apparently, I was the world's biggest hypocrite today.

Foxy ran over to a tree as soon as she jumped out of my truck in the parking lot and started peeing as I looked around. I whistled to her as she started to wonder smelling around the area.

I walked to the door, and two armed guards stopped me.

"I'm sorry, sir. No animals." I smiled and pulled out my badge.

"I'm Officer Nassar, and this is my partner. We're just picking up some papers." The guards exchanged a short conversation in Farasi, which I was proud I understood after so many years.

They opened the door, and I nodded in thanks as I entered the building.

The interior looked familiar, like something out of a dream I couldn't place. I was sure I'd been here before but couldn't remember when or why.

"May I help you, sir?" I nodded and pulled out the letter I had received along with my identification.

"I'm claiming some documents found." I wait as she reads the letter and nods.

"It'll just be a few moments. Please have a seat." She indicates a seating area and disappears through a door.

"Foxy, sit." She comes to my side and follows my directions perfectly.

After a couple of minutes, an older gentleman in a suit approaches me with a smile on his face.

“Malachi?” I stand up and offer him my hand to shake.

“Do we know each other?” He nods and looks at me closely.

Just like the building when I arrived, I know I’ve seen this man before, although he’s aged.

“You look so much like your mother.” That comment throws me for a loop, and I step back.

“Apologies, my name is Cyrus Pahlavi.” So my mother’s family.

“Are you my uncle?” I ask as I look closer at him, noticing similar features.

“I’m your mother’s oldest brother and the crown Prince.”
What?

“Come again?” He slaps my shoulder.

“Let’s go into the conference room. You look like you have a lot of questions.” You think?

I knew my mother was closely related to the royal family from the inheritance I’d received when she died. My uncle, who raised me, wasn’t actually family but my father’s best friend. As my godfather, he was named in their will to care for me if anything ever happened.

My mother’s family had never contacted me. Until now, anyway. Clearly, my uncle had left key points out during my upbringing. I take a seat, and Foxy lays at my feet.

“Should we rip the bandaid off? That is the saying, correct?” His smile grows as he passes me a folder.

“Ah, sure,” I open the thing carefully.

It’s a deed, followed by a contract, and I frown when I read the top line.

MARRIAGE CONTRACT

CHAPTER FIVE

SPARROW

“FRANKLIN!” I scream as I enter the clubhouse.

Rebel appears through the kitchen doors, holding a tub of ice cream and a spoon dangling from her mouth.

“It’s seven in the morning, woman. Are you trying to give my niece diabetes?” I go over to her and pat her belly.

“Nope, why are you bellowing for my husband? Do I need to go pay his life insurance?” The man in question comes running down the stairs, and I narrow my eyes at him.

“Maybe,” I hiss as he slowly approaches us.

“Well, I’ve done it alone before.” She shrugs and walks over to the couches to watch the show.

“Sissy?” This motherfucker.

“You know what. I won’t kill him, but she’s never getting you pregnant again when I’m done castrating him!” I grab my brother by the balls, squeeze, twist, and pull until he drags me down to my knees while he falls, turning green.

“Amen, sister.” Rebel calls over the whimpers of her husband.

“Jesus fuck Aspen, let up! I’m going to puke.” I nod.

“Good, I hope you choke on it, you fucking bastard.” The main living room of the clubhouse is slowly starting to fill with tired-looking bikers, all wondering why I’ve got their President in his current position.

“Um, Sparrow? Wanna tell us why you got Wolf by the balls?” Priest tries to hide his humor but fails epically when the last word is spit out of his mouth on a laugh.

“Just a small family matter. My big brother forgets he’s not my father and has no fucking business getting involved in my love life.” I hiss in his ear, finally letting his junk fall out of my hands.

I push his head hard as I stand, but Wolf catches himself before it hits the floor.

“Gods! Even Uncle Asher was never as overbearing as you. I’m twenty-eight years old, I have two degrees, my house is paid off, and I own my company outright, yet here you are thinking you have a snowball’s chance in hell of telling my grown ass what to do or who I can fuck.” Hannah pops up next to me with a grin.

“So, dickless finally put out. Nice.” Wolf growls at us, and I cross my arms, waiting for him to rise to his feet.

“Stop talking like a bunch of,” I cut him off.

“Bikers? New flash! That is what we are no matter how hard we try to escape it.” His face pales as I hit a nerve.

He knew I never wanted to join the club. I did it for him because I knew he couldn’t bear to lose me like he was losing Rebel. I glance at his wife, who is silently scolding Wolf from where she’s sitting.

“I’m done putting my life on hold for everyone else’s to thrive around me. I deserve happiness, too. Not that it matters

you have successfully run him out of town.” I go and sit next to Rebel and take the ice cream away.

“Hey!” I point the spoon at her.

“When was the last time you got laid?” Her cheeks turn red, and I nod.

“I need this more,” Hannah growls at my statement, enraged on my behalf.

“All this bullshit, and you didn’t even get the cop in bed?” She covers her mouth at her slip-up.

I let the spoon fall into the half-melted ice cream and close my eyes, readying myself for the next part of this blowup.

“COP!” Wolf hollers, and I frown at Hannah.

“Shock, honestly, please stop living up to your damn name. Who I’m fucking is no one’s business.” I put the tub down and go to stand.

“Stop saying that! My little sister is pure and innocent.” I snort as I grab my keys off the coffee table where I left them last night when I went out with the girls.

“I haven’t been innocent since Blaze took my virginity on prom night.” The room erupts in shouts as I let that information fly.

“WHERE IS HE?” Wolf growls, and I roll my eyes as I leave the clubhouse in chaos.

I hop in my work truck and text Oliver.

Heads up.... The prom night bomb was just dropped.

Shit. You couldn't at least say good morning first?
I'm in the air, ready to drop into a forest fire
woman.

Nothing good happened this morning. Be safe,
call me when you are home.

I sigh and start the truck.

Blaze being in California is a godsend. He's been a smokejumper for years. He'd done me a major favor on prom night. I didn't want to be a virgin in college, and I needed someone I trusted.

It was a perfect first time, but it lacked the passion of being in love. At least, I think it did. There were no epic fireworks, not like when Malachi touched me.

Why was love and hate such a close emotion? How the hell am I supposed to figure out which I was feeling? Maybe a nap would help.

I drive across town to my house and pass out as soon as my head hits the pillow. I have to close the clinic tonight.

I'm already ready for bed tonight.

"Thank you, doc," I smile at the young girl as she takes her bunny out with her mom's hand on her shoulder.

I clean up the room and then walk out to the waiting room and frown.

Foxy is sitting in the middle of the area with a basket of roses in front of top her. I glance around but don't see

Malachi. I pick up the basket and pat her head.

“Good girl. You, I like, your owner can suck it.” I open the card, which has one word written on it.

Dinner?

I crumple up the paper in my fist and look around for the owner of this sweet dog. I catch him out the corner of my eye outside the glass windows and sigh.

I walk calmly to the new door he so graciously had fixed for me once and would not let me repay him for. I yank it open and stick my head outside so he can hear me yelling at him.

“I want lobster mac and cheese, then the biggest slice of chocolate cake you can find.” An elderly couple walking by stopped to look at me, screaming at what must seem like air.

“Deary? Are you alright?” Great.

I’m going to get myself landed in a psychic ward all because of a to handsome man with the sweetest dog in history.

“I’m fine, ma’am. Just letting my boyfriend know what he needs to get me for dinner tonight.” I point at the corner of my building, and the woman smiles.

“Oh my, why is he hiding from you.” I smile at her wrinkled expression.

I can tell she was a spitfire when she was younger. Her husband pats her hand softly and answers his wife for me.

“He’s scared of her love.” I snicker at his answer and nod.

“As he should be.” They start walking again, and I watch them go.

A whistle has Foxy running to her owner, and I can just see the pink of his cheeks as he gets into his patrol SUV. I tilt my head to the side to see him better, and he blows me a kiss before pulling off.

“Fuck,” I hiss at myself.

I got it bad for that man.

CHAPTER SIX

MALACHI

I'M ORDERING from her favorite restaurant before I leave the clinic's driveway. I pat Foxy's head as we get home with dinner and dessert in hand. I should have just enough time to grab a shower before Aspen gets off.

I put the pasta in the oven to keep warm and the cake on the counter. My phone rings as I'm pulling my shirt off, and I curse.

"Hello?" I answer without looking too preoccupied with getting the water temperature right.

"Malachi Nassar? This is Arman Turan. I believe you were made aware of who I am today?" Well, shit.

I thought this would take longer, but apparently, my uncle had other planes.

"Yes, sir. I was handed a copy of the marriage arrangement earlier today. I haven't had a moment to discuss it with my attorney, but I can assure you that I have no intention of marrying your daughter. I'm truly sorry if that offends you. However, I was not raised in my mother's culture, nor do I practice those beliefs. Since I was a child when these arrangements were made, I hope you understand my position." I sit on the edge of the tub and wait for him to speak.

“I see. Thank you for the clarification on the matter. So you are prepared to lose your inheritance?” I laugh without humor.

“Every dime, sir. I’m not marrying anyone I don’t love over money.” When my uncle had mentioned that part, I just shrugged.

I barely touch my trust fund.

“That is a very cavalry way to look at fifty million dollars.” I snort.

“I’m not sure where you got that figure, sir, but I assure you that is not what my parents left me.” I run my fingers through my hair and look at my watch.

I need to wrap this up.

“It is the marriage dowry that I refer to. Or did your uncle fail to mention that upon your marriage to my daughter before her twenty-fifth birthday, you will both have access to the funds?” Son of a bitch.

“He left that part out.” I sigh and rub my temples.

“My Soraya will be twenty-five this fall. We have delayed the process long enough.” I hear the doorbell and frown.

“Sir, I appreciate your situation, but my previous statement stands. I do not know you or your daughter. There will be no marriage. Goodbye.” I hang up and turn off the shower before running to open the door.

“Um, not that I’m complaining, but shirtless services may be a little over the top.” Her face lights up with a wide grin as she surveys my bare chest.

“Sorry,” I rush back inside and try to put a shirt on, but she stops me with a sharp exclamation.

“What the fuck is this?” I clutch the shirt in my hands and curse.

“Shit,” I left the paperwork on the coffee table.

“We should talk.” She waves them at me and nods.

“You think?” I look up at my ceiling, looking for some type of clarity.

Why is my life so fucking complicated?

“Stop looking for help from above and explain this. Wait, these were signed over thirty years ago.” I nod and plop my ass on my couch, tired beyond words.

I spent the better part of the day driving to and from Las Vegas just to cover the end of a friend’s shift because his wife had gone into labor early. Now I feel grimy, haven’t gotten a shower, hunger, and my girl is reading about me marrying a stranger.

“It’s been a fucked up day, Azizam.” She sits next to me and kicks off her sneakers.

That’s a good sign. She isn’t running away from me screaming. I stand and go over to the oven to get our dinner out. I plate up two servings, then turn to bring them over to the couch and place her’s on the coffee table.

She’s taken her hair out of the messy bun it was in and has her lip caught between her teeth as she reads through all the papers.

“Do you have an attorney?” She flips to the next page without looking at me.

“I do, but I think this may be over his head. There’s more,” I sigh when her eyes met mine.

“Gods, you’re beautiful,” I whisper.

“Says the man with a fiancé and millions to lose.” She slaps the papers on the table and picks up the bowl full of the pasta she requested.

“Wait, that’s in there?” She stops with the fork halfway to her mouth.

“Haven’t you read through it yet?” I shrug.

“MALACHI!” Foxy barks at her tone.

“Easy, girl. I had to drive damn near to Vegas to get them and was distracted by meeting my uncle, the Crowned Prince of Iran.” She gasps, and I nod.

“Yeah, fourteen hours in a car, more desert than I care to see for a while, and then a two-hour cover shift. All before coming to the clinic to beg you for dinner so I could apologize and tell you how fucking sorry I was.” I shove food into my mouth, exhausted and hungry beyond imagining.

“So what you’re saying is you had a shit day?” I nod, trying to devour my meal so I can get her naked.

“All I want is to finish this food, take a nice long shower, and bury myself so far inside of you that I forget this day.” I’ve never been so blunt with her.

“Sex? Like actual penetration?” I raise an eyebrow at her.

“There’s a story here, I sense.” She places her half-eaten bowl down and folds her hands in her lap.

“Malachi, we have never had intercourse. I have not seen you naked once.” The conversation she and the girls were having at the bar the other night finally makes sense.

“No, that can’t be,” I comment, knowing that I was waiting for the right time.

I’ve made her come multiple times, but then stop us from going further. Not tonight. I need her too badly.

“I’m going to stab you.” I laugh at her frustration.

“How am I supposed to fuck you raw then?”

CHAPTER SEVEN

SPARROW

“THIS ISN’T A GAME.” Hannah’s taunts repeat in my head, and if I don’t have this man’s cock in my mouth in the next ten minutes, I will stab him with my fork.

“No more waiting, Azizam.” He keeps eating like his words aren’t wreaking havoc on my body.

I slap the bowl out of his hands and climb into his lap. I grab his throat and squeeze. I stare at him, and only when I’m sure I have his undivided attention do I speak very clearly.

“I want you naked and your cum dripping out of my mouth. Now.” His eyes blaze, and before I can blink, he has me over his shoulder, slapping my ass.

“You filthy little thing. The only place my cum is going is in your hot cunt. And only after I’ve had my fucking fill.” He drops me on his bed and yanks my scrubs pants off, flinging them over his shoulder before ripping my panties off my body.

“Holy shit,” I exclaim when his mouth lands on my overheated flesh.

It’s like I’ve unleashed a tiger that’s been starving for ages. Swipe after swipe of his tongue attacks my clit while his fingers work me with such expertise that I sob at how good it feels.

When he pulls away and runs his thumb over his chin to catch and then suck my essence, I groan. He pulls his shirt off and unbuckles his pants, letting them fall to the floor.

“You go commando?” I gap at him and stare at his dick.

“Hannah is going to be so disappointed.” I pull my shirt off and unhook my bra.

“Excuse me?” He stops crawling up the bed.

“You aren’t dickless.” I smirk at him.

He lets out a growl and flips me on my stomach.

“Far from it, Azizam. But let me prove it to you.” He grabs the nape of my neck and slams into me.

“FUCK!” We both call out.

He holds me down and sets a punishing pace.

“I’m not wearing a condom Azizam. I can feel every ripple of your cunt squeezing me. I’m going to imprint myself so deep inside you that you’ll never question my devotion to you again. Do you understand me?” The kiss he places on my neck after speaking into my ear is in complete contrast to the brutal force of his hips.

“I’m not on birth control, Malachi.” He grunts and moves my face so he can kiss my lips.

“Good. Our future starts now. The only person that will ever call me husband is you.” I feel his fingers on my clit, and I moan.

“We need to discuss this more.” I hiss as I feel my orgasm barreling down on me.

“No.” He growls and pinches my clit, drawing my orgasm to the surface.

“YOU. WILL. BE. MY. WIFE.” His cock strokes me deeper with each pump of his hips while his fingers draw out my ecstasy.

“That’s it, Azizam. Cum hard on my cock and open up that womb. Milk every drop of me.” My vision blurs as he cums so deep inside me that it triggers another earth-shattering one for me.

He rolls me on my back without pulling out and lifts my legs onto his shoulders. He bends me in half to kiss me while micro tremors run down my spine.

He kisses my lips, neck, tits, nose, and finally my forehead before slowly pulling out. When he sees his cum leaking out, he pushes back in, causing me to curse out at how good it feels.

He lifts a brow and runs his thumb up the juices to my clit where he forces another orgasm from me before I beg him to stop.

“What have we done?” I ask once I catch my breath.

He’s laying down next to me, tracing one of my nipples with his left hand. It pushes in its circling to pin my chin. He pulls my face towards his and smiles.

“We’re loving each other on our terms. No one else’s. I’m going to handle this arrangement, and as soon as that’s taken care of, we are going to take care of your family’s hangups.” I gulp but nod.

“I’m a patient man Azizam. I’ve waited a lifetime to find you. I won’t lose you over family obligations made before I could write my own name.” My eyes fill with tears, but I hold back the sob to ask.

“But what about the money?” He shakes his head.

“There isn’t a dollar amount on this planet that would make me walk away from you. I love you.” I gasp and cry as he holds me.

“Nothing will keep us apart unless we let it, and we won’t.” He kisses my forehead and sighs.

I nod into his chest in agreement.

No more running and no more hiding. The club will either accept us or not. Either way, Malachi is in my life to stay.

“It’s time I tell you what you will be walking into when you meet my family.” He nods and grins at me.

“Do you work tomorrow?” I sit up and look around the room.

“No, why?” I take a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“This story requires liquor. Lots of it.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

MALACHI

I COME BACK into the bedroom to find Aspen sitting cross-legged in the middle of my bed, wearing one of my t-shirts. Possession that I've never felt before fills me at seeing her in my clothes.

I hand her a glass of bourbon and place mine on the nightstand. She swallows hers in one go and then motions for mine. I raise an eyebrow at her but pass it while I get back in the bed with her. Before I'm settled, she's knocking the second one back, and worry fills my stomach.

What could possibly be so bad?

"My father was a crooked cop, wife-beater, and molester. He killed my mom when I was barely four years old." Well, that would explain the drinking.

"Gods, Azizam," I reach for her hand and rub my thumb over her knuckles.

"Oh, it gets worse before it gets better." I nod and bite the inside of my cheek to keep quiet.

"Franklin Hoss Sr was involved in human trafficking. He was pimping his wife out, and when my mom found out he planned to sell me, she fled to seek help from my uncle, but she never made it. He ran her off the road and shot her several

times. She was only a few miles from help. Uncle Asher took us in, and when the club found out our story, well, let's just say MCs have their own form of justice." Suddenly the motorcycle club doesn't sound so fucking bad.

I can't say I wouldn't have killed him myself today if he was still alive.

"I was born deaf, Malachi. My father viewed women as assets, and I was defective. I got my implants after my mom died. The club paid for everything. They all learned ASL for me. When I say they are family, I mean that with my whole heart." She squeezes my hand as she says this, and I nod.

"I'm a member of the club. I always will be. A legacy through my uncle and my brother. When I told you that the club would have a problem with us dating, it wasn't just the cop part. It's your background." She tenses when she says it.

"Background? As in my nationality? They're racist?" She winces.

"No, fuck. There's no way of saying something like this easily." I see her struggle with her words, searching for a way not to offend me.

"Aspen, just say it." I nod and give her a small smile.

I can't say that I've not had my share of hate for my ethnic background. I've grown a thick skin over the years. It fucking sucks that people can't see past that to the man standing before them, but humans just haven't elevated to that level yet. Maybe one day.

"The club is mostly retired military. Three of our members were POWs recently." She bites her lip, and a memory pops into my head of a news article I read a few weeks ago.

“The local soldiers rescued recently?” She nods, and then it becomes crystal clear to me.

“Oh,” it’s the lamest comment in the world, but it sums up the situation perfectly.

“We have four soldiers who were tortured and raped by Iranian soldiers. All active members of our club. The wound is fresh, Malachi. Bringing you home now would be like throwing salt into it. But my brother already knows about you, so it’s just a matter of time before he pays you a visit.” Her eyes widen, and she rushes out of bed, stumbling for the bedroom door.

“Aspen?” I follow her and find her pulling at her hair and holding her phone.

“Fucking shit!” Foxy growls at the door before the doorbell rings.

“I forgot to turn my tracker off.” the doorbell rings again, followed by the pounding of a fist.

“ASPEN! I know you’re in there. Tell lover boy to open this fucking door.” Oh, so that’s how he wants to play this.

She grabs my arm and tries to stop me.

“Malachi, you’re naked.” I shrug her off my arm.

I swing open the door, and while Franklin “Wolf” Hoss Jr looks at my junk, I punch him.

“Fuck!” He yells as he holds his bleeding nose.

“That’s assault, asshole!” I laugh at him.

“Sure is. I’m going to go get dressed, and I’ll drive you down to the station to file a report. Aspen, get your brother an

ice pack. I'll be back in a moment." I turn my back on her brother and smirk.

At least now he has a legitimate reason to hate me.

CHAPTER NINE

SPARROW

“COME ON. You’re getting blood on the floor.” I pull him inside and close the door.

Foxy growls at him, and a whistle from the bedroom has her running to Malachi’s side.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” I sit him on a bar stool at the kitchen counter and turn to the freezer.

“Look, Shock was worried about you. When I got to your house, you weren’t there,” I turn, cutting him off, only to see him shrug.

“You panicked?” I shake my head and slam the ice pack on his face.

“OUCH!” Barking, followed by nails of hardwood floors, following his yell.

“Foxy,” I call at her, and she stops before using my brother as a chew toy.

“You shouldn’t be listening to commands from others. We’re going to talk about this later. Kennel.” Malachi pats her head as she leaves my side and walks slowly to her cage.

I look at him and smile when he’s back in uniform. I shake my head at him. If he thinks my brother is going to be intimidated by that, he’s got another thing coming.

“That supposed to scare me?” Wolf snarls at Malachi.

He we go.

“Manners, this is his house.” I hiss at him.

“Yeah, he’s the asshole that made my baby sister cry. Where the fuck are your clothes?” I roll my eyes at him.

“Look, I’m fine. So go home.” He nods and stands.

“Fine, as soon as you do.” I grind my teeth.

“Azizam? Do you want to go home?” Malachi says the words sweetly.

“No.” I stare at Wolf.

“Do you feel safe with me?” I nod, not breaking the eye contact I have with my stubborn ass brother.

“Do you love me?” I blink and swivel to look at him.

“WHAT?” Wolf and I say at the same time.

“You really are related.” Malachi laughs at our expressions but walks in front of me and takes my hands.

“Your brother interrupted us. I need to know if you feel the same, Azizam.” I swallow and start to nod but stop.

“Yes,” I whisper.

He starts to kneel, and I gasp.

“Oh fuck no,” Wolf says right before he punches Malachi in the face.

“SHIT! Franklin STOP!” I try to pull them apart, but we cross into the coffee table, shattering the glass.

The next few minutes are a complete and utter disaster.

Police break down the door. Wolf is dragged out in cuffs. An EMT is checking my arms to make sure I don't need stitches as I watch Malachi giving a statement.

"I'm not pressing charges. DROP IT." He walks over to me, leaving another police officer watching us closely.

"The cuts are all superficial. I don't see a need for her to go to the hospital, sir." He nods at the EMT and then kisses my head.

"What a mess." I sigh as I look around the living room but mean the whole fucking situation.

"I'm sorry. I don't know what I did wrong." I cup his face.

"Nothing. For the record, I do love you. My brother is just an asshole." I press my forehead to his.

"Go get dressed." I raise an eyebrow at him.

"We need to get your brother out of lock up." I nod and hop down from the kitchen counter.

"What the fuck do you mean you can't let him out?" Malachi says to the officer.

"Andrews wants to hold him for questioning." Malachi bangs his fist on the counter.

"Azizam, can you wait here?" He kisses me and walks into the back of the station.

I hear a door slam and shouting.

"Is it always this exciting around here?" I ask the guy at the desk, who snorts at me.

“Captain, this is bullshit! I’m not pressing charges on my future brother-in-law. It was a misunderstanding. In my private residence while I was off duty.” I can hear Malachi’s voice clearly through the closed door.

“You were in uniform.” A voice I don’t recognize says.

“That’s a fucking technicality! I had just gotten off. Captain?” He pleads, but I don’t hear the rest of the argument because the front doors slam open, drowning them out with a woman screaming about being set up.

Malachi comes storming out of the office he was in and takes my hand. He pulls me up and out of the station before he speaks a word.

“Does your brother have a lawyer?” He opens my door for me.

“Yes?” He nods and closes the door after I get in.

He rushes around the truck and gets in.

“Call them.” I let my head fall on the headrest as he drove out of the parking lot.

“Why?” I ask the question with my eyes closed.

“Andrews is our lead narcotics detective. He’s claiming Franklin was in possession of heroin.

“Bullshit!” I sit up straight and look at his face.

“I know it is. But this is just the start. Call the attorney Azizam.” He gets in the right lane to turn back to his house, but I stop him.

“No, go straight. We need to go to the clubhouse.” He glances at me before following my instructions.

“Why?” He looks confused.

“Because I got the President arrested and have to tell them what’s happening. You wanted to meet my family.” I shrug.

“Yeah, but not like this.”

Same.

CHAPTER TEN

MALACHI

I FINGER COMB my hair and curse to myself, wishing I was in regular clothes and showered.

“Stop fidgeting. All they’re going to see is a cop. Hopefully, at this time, most of them are asleep.” Aspen bites her lip as she places her hand on a scanner to unlock the door.

I let her lead me inside and look around slowly.

It’s a huge room with tons of couches, chairs, tables, a pool table tucked into a corner, and a bar with a stairwell behind it. A few doors are scattered around, and standing in front of one is a huge man with bright red hair. His massive arms are crossed over his chest, but I can still see the VP patch on his leather vest from where I’m standing.

I narrow my eyes at him because I can tell he’s the one who drove off with my girl after our fight.

“Issac?” Aspen calls to him, but he shakes his head without speaking.

“SPARK! Pay attention. We need Judge, now.” His eyes move from me to Aspen, and a soft look of concern fills his face.

“You ok, Sparrow?” She takes my hand and squeezes it hard.

“No. Wolf’s in lock up.” Spark snorts.

“Have lover boy get him out.” I step forward against Aspen’s struggles to keep me at her side.

“I tried. He’s being held on drug charges.” I quickly give him the facts, and he curses, pulling out his phone.

A man holding a fussy baby walks into the room and stops dead.

“Milly, go back to the room. I got Cole.” The woman following him frowns before she looks up at us, standing with Spark.

She turns white as a ghost before a scream pierces the room. She falls to her knees, holding her head in her hands, rocking as the room fills with people searching for whoever is in distress.

“FUCK! GET HIM OUT!” The man tries to calm the woman and the baby.

“Give me Cole.” A blonde woman I meet at the bar takes the baby and walks through another door.

“Sparrow, his kind aren’t welcome here.” My spine tingles.

“His kind?” I hiss as I turn to face the man who addressed me so ignorantly.

The man standing in front of me looks like he just dragged himself out of a war zone. I open my mouth and then close it. He’s missing a fucking leg. I look around the room, and the eyes meeting mine are angry and full of fear.

“Please, Malachi. Let’s go.” Aspen takes my hand again and pulls me to the door.

I don’t resist.

“I’m sorry,” I look over at the woman, clearly having some type of episode that I’m the cause of.

“You have nothing to be sorry for. But they all do.” Aspen hisses at the room before slamming the door closed behind us.

“You said it would be bad, but I never dreamed,” I rub my face and let out a long breath.

“Hey!” We turned to see the man that was holding the baby.

“Priest, is Milly ok?” Aspen steps between us.

“Next time you wanna bring a man home, maybe call us with some details to prepare. She’s easily triggered. It’s not personal, and I’m sorry for that awful reception. I’m Darius,” He holds out his hand to me.

“Malachi, was that your wife?” I shake his hand, much to Aspen’s relief.

“Yes, and she’s going to feel terrible when she snaps out of it. But what King said was dead wrong, and I wanted you to know that.” I nod at him.

“No apology needed. Trauma defenses can vary. Aspen warned me about the circumstances, and that may be an issue. I’m just sorry for any pain I caused you tonight. It wasn’t our intention.” He slaps my shoulder.

“I’ll talk to King.” He says that to Aspen and then rushes back inside.

“I need a shower and a nap.” She takes my keys from my hand.

“That sounds great. I’ll drive. You’re dead on your feet.” I smile and get into my truck.

SHOCK

“Here you go, you hungry boy.” I bounce Cole in one arm while shaking his bottle.

I shove it into his open mouth, and the crying changes to a sucking sound instantly.

“Typical man,” I smile at his cute chubby cheeks.

“Let’s go check on your mommy.” I walk back into the living room area and frown.

Aspen and Malachi are gone. I catch Priest walking back in and nod at him. He heads to Milly, who isn’t crying anymore but is still in a comatose state. I tap Spark’s shoulder and shove Cole into his arms.

“Damnit, Shock, take him back.” I roll my eyes.

“He’s not fucking contagious. I’m the medic, I have a patient.” I point at Milly, and he groans.

“Oh, give him here.” Mercy takes pity on her man, taking the baby from him.

“Daddy, can I have a brother?” Lucy says, and I laugh when Spark starts coughing on his own spit.

“Hey, how are we doing over here?” I take her pulse as I try to get her to focus on me.

“Anyone home?” I smile as her eyes blink.

“Mmm,” Milly mumbles, something that sounds like water.

“How about we get you over to that couch and then will get you a drink?” I take her arm and gently pull her to her feet.

I move us slowly and then help her sit. Her pulse is steady, and the color is coming back to her face.

“Cielo?” Priest sits next to her and rubs her shoulders.

“Cole,” She snaps, looking around for her son.

“Hey, he’s safe. Mercy is feeding him. Do you need to hold him?” She nods, and he’s lowered into her arms moments later.

“What happened.” I frown and look at her husband.

“Tell me what you remember.” She looks around the room, searching for what set her off.

“The police officer with the beard and amber eyes. Oh my god! That was Aspen’s boyfriend? No,” she starts crying, and Priest kisses her shoulder.

“It’s alright, Ceilo. I explained.” She shakes her head.

“He will not be coming back here. You’re safe.” King announces from behind the couch.

I glare at him.

“What do you mean? It’s not his fault I had a flashback. It’s late, we haven’t been sleeping, and he shouldn’t be banned from the clubhouse because of me.” He shakes his head at her.

“No, we don’t need any of them around us.” Oh, hell no.

I stand to curse him out, but Milly beats me to it.

“Absolutely fucking not. We do not judge an entire people for the actions of a few. Shame on you, Lucas Cole. What the fuck would your mother think? Is that the type of person your

father would want running his club?” King stumbles back from her comments and pales.

He turns and leaves the room without a word.

“Harsh Ceilo,” Preist whispers.

“Fuck that. It was exactly what he needed to fucking hear. We can’t keep tiptoeing around him. He lost his leg over there, not his fucking brain.” I pat Milly’s leg.

“How about I take this little guy so you can both rest?” She nods, and I take a sleeping Cole from her arms.

I hang around while everyone goes back to their rooms, and then I go searching for Lucas. I knock on his door, but he doesn’t answer. I open the door anyway and find him with a photo of his parents in his hand.

“Big shoes to fill, huh?” He puts the photo down and doesn’t turn to look at me.

“Can I give you a piece of advice?” I come around to face him.

His eyes are so sad and lost.

“You need to remind yourself of why you fought so hard to live.” I place Cole in his arms as he starts to protest.

“Steady, hold his head. Good.” He turns panicked, filled eyes on me.

“Look at your namesake, Lucas. He is why you fight to live. You need to figure out how you are going to give him a reason to look up to you. The next generation doesn’t need a Satan to run this club. They need a King.” I walk slowly to the door so he knows I plan to leave him with his baby cousin.

He needs to find himself again. Cole will help ground him.
I hear a small sob as I close the door.

And it's not from the baby.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SPARROW

“SPARROW?” Malachi sounds sleepy when he speaks.

“Do you know the legend of a sparrow for sailors?” I turn into his driveway and shut the truck off.

“No,” I nod and smile.

“My grandfather was Navajo. He was drafted into the Navy when he was young. According to sailors, a sparrow will carry the soul to heaven after death. Grandpa had the tattooed on his chest. My mother always said I brought her back to life. When I joined the club, my brother gave me the road name to honor her.” He reaches over and takes my hand, raising it to his lips.

“Thank you for telling me. Ready for that shower?” I smile.

He gets out of the truck, and we climb up the porch steps to find the front door.

“Seriously, those fuckers left my house open?” We left with a few officers still taking pictures of the house to get Wolf out of jail.

That seemed like days ago. This has been the longest day in history.

Malachi turns a lamp on, and I squeal at the shadow of a body on the couch. He pulls out his gun and points it at the person who does not belong in the house.

This is wrong. Why isn't the dog barking?

"Foxy!" I call out, but no sound returns my call.

"Is that the animal's name?" I'm shocked when it's a feminine voice coming from the shadows.

"Stand slowly and put your hands up. Where is my partner?" I go to the wall and turn on the main light.

As soon as I can see the room, I rush over to Foxy.

"It would not stop barking." The woman speaks so calmly, like she has all the right in the world to be here.

"Who the fuck are you, and what did you do to this dog?" I open the kennel and take Foxy's pulse.

Jesus, she's barely breathing.

"A few sleeping pills. Soraya Turan," I glare at her.

"What kind and dose? You could have fucking killed her!" I curse at her.

Malachi stands frozen with the muzzle of his gun now pointed at her feet.

"She broke into the house and poisoned Foxy. Malachi, she's barely breathing." That snaps him out of it.

"Miss Turan, you need to leave and not come back. There is not a damn thing here for you." He's not going to arrest her?

What the fuck.

"I need to get Foxy to the clinic." I lift her into my arms and move out of the house to my truck.

I wave my foot under the tailgate, and it opens. I place Foxy down carefully. I rummage in my bag and pull out a medicine that will make her vomit. I need to clear the meds from her system quickly.

I hold Foxy's head so she doesn't choke as the medicine starts to work.

"I got you, girl." I rub her back and hear a door close.

That's when I noticed the limo parked on the opposite side of the street. A man in a suit is leaning against the driver's door, and I can see the imprint of a gun under both arms. He watches me as I stare at him.

"Lovely meeting you." The woman walks past me, and the thug with the weapons opens the limo door for her.

"Who the fuck is she?" I have a suspicion that I hope is wrong, but if the last twenty-four hours worth of luck hold, I know I'm right.

"The woman from the contract." I shake my head.

"You're fucking fiancé. Fantastic." He growls and grabs my chin.

"NO, she's just a woman that I had never met before tonight. Now she's gone." He kisses me quickly and then climbs into the truck, pulling Foxy into his lap.

"For the record, your fiancé is a bitch and animal abuser." I slam the tailgate closed and get in the driver's seat.

"Stop calling her that." He says it with venom in his voice.

"As soon as it stops being true." I speed down the street to my clinic.

“I’ll get the back door. Bring her in.” I say as I rush to get Foxy inside.

I ran some blood work and started an IV to flush the sleeping pills out of her system. She wakes up about an hour later, weak but alert. I stare out my office window while the world outside goes from dark blue to bright pink and orange.

I rub the back of my neck and yawn.

“Hey, did you get any sleep?” Malachi sits up from my couch, and I shake my head.

“None. Foxy is going to be fine. She’s going to be starving when she wakes up.” He rubs his face.

“How about you?” I snort.

Question of the week. Will Sparrow be alright? I wish I fucking knew.

My cell phone rings, and I see my brother’s name on the screen.

“Thank fuck. Hello?” I hear yelling and clothes rustling.

“Franklin?” I put it on speaker.

“We got you now, asshole. You’re never getting out.” I scrunch up my face.

“For what? Is office Nassar pressing charges?” Laughing fills the line after Wolf’s question.

“Nah, he’s not playing ball. But we have you on drug possession.” I glance up at Malachi, and he whispers to me.

“Andrews,” he raises his finger to his lips and presses a button on my phone screen that starts to record the call.

“Drugs? Nah, I don’t do those. Sorry, you got the wrong guy.” I can hear the smirk in his voice.

“The heroin on your person when arrested say otherwise. Is that why you’re covered in tattoos? To hide your track marks?” Andrews laughs at his lame attempt at a joke.

“So, who found these drugs? I was never even searched. Hell, which one of you motherfuckers was in charge of reading my rights? Funny thing, if you’re going to break the laws we taxpayers pay you to protect, you should at least pat them down. If you had done that you would have found my phone. Which is on a live call with my attorney right now.” Curses fill the line now.

Malachi smiles at me.

“Did you get all that, Judge?” Wolf says, and I check my screen, seeing her name is also on the call.

“Gentleman, I advise you to release my client before I arrive in Reno. This recording is being sent to the DA as we speak. I’d clear out your desk. A word of advice for you all. If a hair is missing off my client’s head when he leaves the station, we will be pressing charges.” I choke and cover my mouth to hide the sound.

“Sissy, I need a ride.” The phone goes dead.

“Smart motherfucker.” Malachi laughs.

“You sound surprised.” I stand and stretch, grabbing my keys.

“Nope, you go home and get some sleep. I’ll pick up your brother. We need to have words.” I sigh and nod.

“By home, I mean my place, Azizam. And remember the rules.” I glance at him.

“I want you naked and asleep when I get back.”

I lick my lips and wink at him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WOLF

WHAT A CRAZY ASS NIGHT.

I just wanted to make sure my sister was okay, but instead, I spent the night in lock up with the lowlifes of the city. Hustlers, hookers, and drunks all making the whole night unbearable.

It was like usual torture, and I could see why innocent people would say or agree to anything just to get out of the cesspool. I sigh as I park my ass on a bench outside and breathe in the fresh air.

“I’m never going to take this for granted again,” I say as I dial Glitch.

“They spring you yet?” I grunt, feeling too tired to talk.

“I have information that can’t wait, and you are not going to like it.” Could this day get any better?

“Give me the good news first.” I lean forward and hold my head.

“Officer Nassar is engaged to be married. It’s all over today’s socialite pages. His fiancée is Soraya Toran, daughter of Armin Toran. He’s a known arms dealer with ties to,” I cut her off before she can say it.

“The Baez brothers.” I sigh and pinch the bridge of my nose.

“Is there a cherry on top of this fucked up cake?” I look around when I hear a gasp.

“Sorry,” I whisper to a mom walking her dog and pushing a stroller with a little girl looking right at me.

“Cherries are my favorite, so of course I saved the best for last.” I nod.

“Of course you did.” I sit back and turn my face to the sky.

“Malachi doesn’t know anything about their companies. He’s a good guy for a cop.” I curse again, shaking my head.

“An all-American good boy, I’m sure.” Glitch coughs like she choked on her coffee.

“What?” I’m not sure I can take any more of her news.

“After your arrest.” I corrected her.

“Detention, no official charges have been filed.” She laughs.

“Semantics. After you got your ass locked up, Sparrow showed up here with Malachi. He’s an Iranian Wolf. Milly saw him and broke down. It was a shit show.” I rub my hand over my face and hiss in pain.

Fucking broken nose.

“Is she ok?” Glitch doesn’t answer, and I start to worry.

“Yes. Everything seems to be calm this morning.” I frown.

“Why the pause then?” I stand and start pacing.

“King also had a moment.” Fuck.

“I’ll be home soon.” I hang up on her and stretch out my shoulders.

I am not in any shape to handle Lucas today.

“Family first,” I say, not expecting a response from anyone.

“So, you’re not the criminal mastermind Andrews is trying to portray you as?” I grind my molars.

Opening my eyes, I stare up at Officer Malachi Nassar. My sisters, gag, boyfriend.

“What makes you think that?” I raise an eyebrow at his cocky grin.

“Only wise men know and understand the value of family.” I laugh.

“I know Mafia leaders who would totally agree with you. Are they also good men?” Malachi opens his truck door.

“I said you weren’t a criminal mastermind. I never said a thing about you being a good man.” Touché.

“Where the fuck is my sister?” I hiss.

“In my bed. Naked, safe, and full of my cum.” I step into his face, ready to spend another night in this hellhole.

“We should talk ‘cause I plan on marrying your sister, and I can’t have us throwing punches at Sunday diners.” I knock him out of my way with my shoulder.

“Why not? We own a fighters club.” I slam the door shut in his face.

I let him get in the truck and get on the highway heading to the clubhouse before opening up the can of snakes Glitch gave me before he arrived.

“So, are you marrying Aspen before or after Soraya?” He curses and glances at me.

“How the fuck do you know about that?” I tap my head but don’t answer.

“If you break my sister’s heart again, I’ll fucking bury you.” He nods as he pulls up to the clubhouse.

“I’m handling it.” I get out and look at him before closing the door.

“You better because you do not want me to.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MALACHI

I GUESS LEAVING out the fact that Soraya was in my house was a good idea. That fucker is liable to burn it down.

I watch as Wolf swaggers back into his clubhouse and sigh to myself.

I'm no longer objective enough to keep my professional and work lifestyle separate. It's a fucking problem that I need to work out and fast. I slide the truck into park, turning off the engine.

I need a moment to think.

The front doors fly open, and I stiffen, looking around for trouble only to see the blonde shading behind a little boy. She's carrying a baby in her arms.

"DEACON! Slow down. If you bust that knee open again, I'm sealing it with crazy glue and duct tape." I chuckle at her words as the boy stops cold and spins to face her.

"That's not very hygienic, Auntie Hannah." He pushes up his glasses with the hand not holding the soccer ball.

"Yeah, well, I need to make a supply run. Your daddy keeps getting his nose broken, and I'm plum out." She switches the baby to her other shoulder and stares at me.

“HEY! If it ain’t dickless. How’s it hanging?” Her grin is infectious.

“Langauge,” I raise my eyebrow at the boy, but she waves off my concern.

“He hears worse from his mom. Aspen ain’t here.” She walks up to the truck, her eyes looking down at my crotch as if searching for the meaning of life.

These women are going to be the death of me.

“Oh, I was just dropping off Wolf. Just needed a moment before driving back to her.” She nods, biting her lip.

“You look like a man with the world on your shoulders. Maybe go home and talk it out with your girl. Make her brunch, fuck her senseless. Seems to be a cure-all.” She taps the car as if it’s a horse to get me going.

“Gods, who put you in charge of watching the kids? That alone must be some form of child abuse.” She smiles and nods.

“It’s good character building asshole. Ever heard of tough love?” I shake my head and start the truck back up.

“Hey, out of curiosity. What’s your road name? They all seem to have a meaning.” Her grin stretches from ear to ear.

“We haven’t been fully introduced, have we? Hannah “Shock” Garcia, pleased to meet you.” She throws her arm inside the window, and we shake.

“Malachi Nassar, pleasure. Not dickless, by the way. Ask Aspen.” She laughs as I start to pull away.

“Don’t worry, I will!” She calls out to me as I drive away.

I may not have loved my problem, but I felt a whole hell of a lot lighter than I did after talking to Wolf. Clarity can be funny sometimes.

When I get back to the house, a familiar bark greets me, and I rush to get inside. Foxy tackles me and starts licking my face.

“Down girl! I missed you too.” I push her away gently and sit up.

“I see Foxy beat me to it.” I glance behind me, and my jaw drops.

“That is neither asleep nor naked, but I approve.” She’s wearing one of my white button-down shirts.

Thanks to the sunlight coming in the window and my angle, I have the perfect view to confirm there’s nothing under it.

“I felt the need to cover up. This place seems to attract riffraff.” She shrugs, but I feel the blow in my chest.

Suddenly, what I need to do becomes crystal clear.

“Can your partner cover the clinic for a few days?” She crosses her arms and looks down at me.

“How many are we talking about?” I stand and pull out my phone.

I log into my work calendar to confirm my days off.

“Twelve, plus weekends. Two weeks?” She leans on the wall and nods.

“She shouldn’t have an issue. Why?” I press call on my phone and bring it up to my ear.

“Captain, it’s Nassar. I’ve got a family emergency that is going to require me to go out of town.” He coughs in my ear.

“Family?” His confusion is understandable.

“Have you seen the newspaper today, sir?” I can hear him rustling papers and a few taps on a keyboard.

“Oh, I see. I assume congratulations are not in order?” I really need to read the stupid article myself.

“No, sir. I have a few days off accumulated,” he cuts me off before I can finish.

“Nassar, take them. Handle your shit, and let me know when you’re back. Frankly, it’ll give Andrews time to cool off and Internal Affairs an opportunity to speak with him.” Oh shit.

“Thank you, Captain.” I hang up and look at Aspen.

“Well? Call your partner, and let’s pack.” I walk into my bedroom, leaving her stunned against the wall.

“Pack? Where the hell are we going?” I pull out my suitcase and toss it on the bed.

“I’ve met your family. It’s time you meet mine. Well, it’s the closest I have, anyway. I need answers, and he’ll have them. It’s a hunting cabin in Colorado. Pack warm clothes.” She looks skeptical for a moment, and I slow my movements.

“Azizam, we need to disconnect and just breathe for a few days. It’ll let shit here settle, and we’ll have free time to plan what to do without everyone else’s expectations weighing us down.”

“Okay,” I kiss her and go back to packing.

“But I’m picking the music!”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SPARROW

RENO, Nevada, to Cripple Creek, Colorado, is no easy road trip. Let the record show that if you can survive a sixteen-hour car ride with a man, he is definitely marriage material. The first day of driving, I didn't think we were going to make it.

Foxy whined for hours, his driving was utter shit, and the weather was horrible. By the time we made it to Salt Lake City, I was ready to blow the truck up. But then he pinned me against the shower wall and adjusted my attitude rather nicely.

“What are you smiling about?” I blink and look at him.

“Remembering the shower last night.” He grins and adjusts his junk very deliberately.

“That reminds me. I had a very interesting conversation with Hannah.” Wait what?

“When? How? Why?” He chuckles at the last one.

“After I dropped Wolf off. Someone in that crazy compound gave her kids to look after. I was concerned for their welfare, so I hung around to observe.” I laugh at his way of describing the events.

“So she cornered you and emasculated you?” He nods, laughing.

“YES! Why the fuck does she call me dickless?” I snort.

“I may have ranted about not getting laid.” He frowns.

“Excuse me?” I cover my face so he can’t see me flushing.

“Listen, it had been a long week, and you were not putting out! I believe it was Lacey who mentioned maybe you were a eunuch. It kind of caught on.” I peek out my fingers at him just as his chest starts to shake and laughter blows out of him.

Foxy starts barking, and Malachi pulls off the highway quickly to gather himself.

“Gods, Azizam. You women are worse than men.” I smile.

If he only knew.

“That explains why she was searching my crotch so damn hard.” He gets out of the truck and leaves me with my mouth open at that comment.

“She what?” I swing around in the front seat to speak to him through the now-open trunk.

Foxy jumps out to pee, and he stands watching her while he answers my question with his arms crossed to ward off the cold wind. It’s been lightly snowing for the last few miles.

“Mmm, walked right on over to me with a baby in her arms, checking my shit out. I’ve never felt so violated.” I roll my eyes and face forward when Foxy jumps back into the truck.

I crank the heat for him, and we get back on the road. The GPS says we’re only two hours away.

“Does he know that we’re coming?” I bite my lip, feeling nervous.

“Jared Savage does not own any communication devices.”
What the fuck?

“It’s almost the twenty-second century. He doesn’t have a cellphone?” He shakes his head.

“No phones, computers, televisions, radios, or technology of any kind.” He turns his face to me with dramatic eyes and whispers his next words.

“They’re listening.” His eyebrows go up and down.

“Stop fucking with me.” He laughs, shaking his head.

“I promise, I’m not. Jared is a recluse to the third degree. A naturalist and anti-technology to the point it’s a phobia. I honestly believe he keeps a truck for when the snow gets too deep, he can clear a path for the horses.” Wow.

“When was the last time you saw him?” I do the math in my head quickly.

We’ve been seeing each other for five months.

“Last year. I try to get out here twice yearly.” I nod and chew on a fingernail.

“Don’t worry, Azizam. He’ll love you just like I do. Just don’t try to sneak up on him. He’s old but can still throw down.” His face looks so happy to be here, and Foxy starts yelping from the back seat as he pulls off the road and onto a dirt road.

“Scoot over and pull in so I can close the gate.” He hops out, pulling a key from his jeans pockets.

A big silver chainlink fence with not one but three lockets on it slowly opens as I get behind the wheel. I quickly get past it and back in my seat.

“Ready?” I smile.

Nope, not even a little.

The truck climbs a steep hill, and then the road looks to drop out from under us. It's dark out, and the road has no lights to help us see where we're going. Malachi seems not to be worried like he's done this a hundred times, but I grip the door and armrest like a lifeline.

Foxy whimpers, and I look back at her.

"It's ok," she can sense my distress and is trying to get to me.

"There it is." I turn in time to see a beautiful three-story lodge cabin in front of us.

"It's beautiful." From what I can see from the headlights, I can see flickering lights inside and smoke rising from the chimney.

"Thank you. I helped the fool build it." No fucking way.

"You?" I look at his hands, which are well-manicured with not a callus in sight.

"Never judge a book by its cover. I know how to do all the many things." He smiles at me.

"That's because I taught you not to be a pussy." I gasp as the deep voice comes through the glass of the truck.

"He's behind me isn't he?" I nod at Malachi.

"Fucker," he turns and opens his door, but Jared is already letting Foxy out.

"Sit," I haven't gotten a good look at the man yet, so I climb out and walk around the back to catch him giving Foxy a treat.

"Good girl. You remember your training, don't you?" He pats her head, and when he looks up at me, I'm met with blue

eyes so light they're almost white.

"Aspen Hoss," I reach out my hand.

"Hoss? Malachi, you haven't married this woman yet?" I choke on air.

"Working on it, you old prick. Now stop making eyes at her." The man in front of me may be old enough to be my father, but he's fucking gorgeous.

Trimmed silver hair and beard, well-built muscles that still look sturdy, and a knowing grin that tells me he's trouble. I glance at Malachi and realize he learned that from this man.

"I don't know. Seems to me like I got a shot with her. Since you haven't sealed the deal." I chuckle at their banter but shiver when a gust of cold wind whips through the trees.

"It's colder than a polar bear's nuts out here. Come on, inside. The fires are on." We follow him inside the house, and the inside is just as grand as the outside.

Jared may be a recluse, but he did not skimp on appliances. It's masculine but modern, with lots of grays and creams. Stainless steel kitchen everything, and the floors are to die for.

"Come into the study, and we'll have a drink and catch up." Jared points at different areas of the house as we walk, naming them and telling us to make ourselves at home while here.

I'm taking in the decor of the study and the books that line the walls when Malachi catches my attention with a glass in his hand.

"Thanks," I whisper and bring the glass to my nose.

The warm, woodsy smell of whiskey fills my lungs.

“So what brings you up to see me? It’s not Christmas already, is it?” He laughs at himself but scratches his head like he seriously can’t remember.

“Soraya Turan announced our engagement two days ago.” Jared nods, drains the whiskey in his glass, and refills it before acknowledging what he heard.

“Oh. That.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MALACHI

“OH, that? Are you serious right now, old man?” I don’t think I’ve ever felt this furious.

I was hoping the whole way here that maybe Jared hadn’t known anything about the betrothal contract. It was the only explanation for him not preparing me for it. Instead, it seems he’s known all along and let me get ambushed.

“I was hoping since your parents were gone, they wouldn’t enforce it.” The fucker shrugs it off like no big deal making me see red.

“YOU THOUGHT WRONG!” I throw the glass I have, and it shatters in the fireplace.

“HEY! You listen here, you little shit. I will whoop your ass in front of your girl if you disrespect me or our home again. Get your shit together. Besides, I have had a plan if they ever came sniffing.” He walks over to his desk and starts rummaging around, cursing under his breath.

“Um, are you okay?” Aspen rubs my arm with big, round eyes staring at my face.

“I’m pissed. All he ever did was train me for Armageddon, but he couldn’t drop a hint that this may happen. It makes no sense to me.” I sigh and rub my temples.

“I had my reasons.” We turn to look at Jared, who is dropping a silk cloth over his shoulders and opening a book.

“What are you doing?” Aspen gasps, making me frown.

“I’m missing something here.” Jared places a pair of readers on the tip of his nose and flicks the pages of the now-open book.

“That’s a bible, Malachi.” Aspen is yanking on my arm like I should understand, but I shake my head.

Jared isn’t religious. Hell, he says the only reasons to go to church are for weddings and funerals. And then it hits me.

“Please tell me that your grand plan isn’t marrying us. It won’t even be fucking legal!” He calmly takes a piece of paper out of the Bible and places it on the counter next to us.

I snatch it up and curse.

“You got ordained?” Jared nods, still looking through the pages, and I grab Aspen’s hand.

“He’s clearly been up here alone too damn long. Come on, we’re leaving. FOXY!” I call out as I start leading us to the door.

“I will forge this paperwork and fill it with the state. Don’t test me, boy. The only way the Turan family will let you out of that contract is if you’re already married.” I turn slowly to face him and see a look of defeat on his face.

“I tried everything. Called in multiple favors. Hired the best attorneys. It’s ironclad. You marry her or Soraya. Either way, they get your money.” The mention of the cash brings back all my anger.

“I don’t want the fucking money. They can have it.” Foxy whimpers, not liking to see me upset.

“It’s a matter of pride to them. You are their ticket into the royal family. It’s about the prestige. The money is an afterthought. They have plenty of their own. Listen to me, Malachi. It doesn’t need to be today or to her if that is the problem.” I growl.

“Watch it!” I point at him, and he raises a hand in acknowledgment.

“My point is that the Turan family will not accept no as an answer. Let’s all get some sleep, and we can talk it out in the morning. You both must be tired.” I sigh and look over my shoulder at Aspen.

“You alright staying here for the night?” She looks at Jared for a long time before nodding.

“Fine,” I lead her to the third floor of the house, which is set up as a loft.

“Wow,” I groan.

“You really had a thing for this chick, huh?” Fucker hasn’t changed a damn thing.

I swear the area still smells like my teenage years. I’ve visited over the years but always stayed downstairs in a guest room. Had I known when I was trying to put as much distance between us that the posters of Zendaya were still tapped to the walls, I would have dragged Aspen to a hotel to avoid the embarrassment.

“I will not apologize for teenage Malachi.” She giggles as she starts snooping around in my childhood room.

She pulls open a dresser drawer and picks up an old magazine.

“Well, I see teenage Malachi knows what went in the sock drawer.” She turns slowly with a vintage Playboy in her hand.

“Should I be afraid of holding this?” Her nose turns up adorably, making her dimples pop even more.

“Probably,” I laugh as she drops it on the floor.

“Eww.” She frowns at me while whipping her hands on her pants.

I chuckle as I go to a closet and grab fresh linens.

“I’ll change the sheets just in case.” I wink at her as Foxy starts barking.

“I’ll take her out and grab our bags.” She whistles, and Foxy follows her down the stairs.

I go to stop her and switch jobs but then think better of it. I really don’t want her inspecting the bed too closely. Maybe we should go to a hotel room.

“In coming!” I duck like a grenade is coming at me just in time to avoid getting hit by a can of Lysol.

“ASSHOLE!”

Jared chuckles from downstairs, and I shake the can, ready to spray it on the mattress before remaking it. He may be a crazy old man.

But he’s mine.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SPARROW

“HURRY UP, Foxy girl. It’s cold as fuck. We don’t want our bits freezing.” She runs to the tree line and sniffs around for a good spot while I open the truck.

I take our bags out and close the door right when a reflection of light on the truck windows draws my attention. It isn’t big, maybe a cell phone or a small flashlight. I glance at the area it would have come from but see nothing in the darkness now.

“Hello?” I call out, but no one answers.

Foxy starts growling, and the hairs on the back of my neck raise.

Something is not right. I grip the handle of the bags harder and start backing up to the house. I whistle for Foxy to follow, but she’s in full attack mode.

I scan the tree line again, and I can feel something watching me but see nothing. The heel of my foot bumps up on something, and I fall backward, letting the bags go to brace myself.

I land on my ass hard but manage not to hit my head. I roll over and see the porch a few feet away. I get to my hands and knees, but then a voice stops my progress of standing.

“That’s far enough. You’re an inconvenience for my family, Miss Hoss. I’ll ask you nicely to follow me, or I’ll shoot the dog and drag you to my car.” The man’s voice is heavily accented and leaves no room for interpretation.

He means to do exactly what he said.

I turn slowly as I stand and put my hands up. Foxy barks at him, and I cringe when the pistol aimed at me turns to her.

“Silence her. Now.” I nod.

“Foxy, home.” She whines as she looks from me to the man.

“Foxy, go!” I hiss, and she slowly moves to the house.

“This way, please. Slowly, and don’t be foolish.” I swallow hard and move in the direction that he point in.

We walk into the trees and lose the natural light of the moon. I can barely see a few feet ahead of me, but soon, it opens up to a clearing where a black SUV is parked. As I approach the same man who was driving around, Soraya comes around the side and opens a door for me.

“Why are you doing this?” Armin Turan looks down at me in disgust.

I don’t have to ask him who he is, but this I need to know.

“Americans no longer value tradition or honor. I do. I will not tarnish my family name or leave my daughter without a husband.” He shoves me into the SUV and closes the door, which locks immediately.

The men get in the front, and then we’re moving away from the house. I curse at leaving my phone in Malachi’s car but pull my coat sleeve down to hide my watch. As long as it has power, Glitch can track it.

I click the button on the side to silence it just in case Malachi tries to call me. Hopefully, he's noticed I'm missing and is already searching for me. But my hopes of this being over quickly vanish when, a few minutes after leaving, we're in another field that has a helicopter waiting.

"If you would, Miss Hoss." Armin, ever the gentleman, offers me his hand.

I refuse it, walking past him and moving to the helicopter, ducking out of instinct to avoid the moving blades. I'm short enough not to have to, but something about decapitation makes it seem like a necessary step. I look around before climbing on board.

Once on board, I'm given a headset to wear, and as soon as we are off the ground, Armin's voice comes through to me loud and clear.

"Do not fear Miss Hoss. I'm just returning you to where you belong. Along with a firm message to Malachi." I meet his eyes.

"What is that?" A cruel smile spreads across his face.

"That he never had a choice to begin with. You were never an option." A shiver crawls up my spine.

"Those aren't very comforting words." I try to hold back the tears that are threatening to fall.

"You will remain safe while in my presence." I hear a crackle in my ears, followed by the white noise from the helicopter.

I turn away from the men around me and curl myself into the smallest ball I can. I let myself cry while they can't see me. My watch buzzes, and I chance a look quickly.

Six percent battery life is left.

The sobs come harder now. I've known men like this all my life growing up in the club. I can't trust a single word Armin has said to me. When we get to where we are going, I'm as good as dead. He won't hesitate to protect his daughter.

Of that, I'm one hundred percent certain it was true. The part about me being safe with him? Total bullshit.

It's up to me to find a way free of this or at least stay safe until the club finds me. I just hope Malachi has the good sense to contact them for help.

I pray his pride doesn't get me hurt. Or worse.

Killed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MALACHI

“GET DOWN HERE, boy! We got a problem.” The tone of Jared’s voice sets alarms off in my head.

I drop the pillowcase in my hand and run down the stairs.

Foxy is whimpering by the door in agitation, and Jared is loading a shotgun.

“Where’s Aspen?” I look around, and panic starts to fill me.

“That’s what we’re going to figure out.” He opens the door and barks an order at Foxy.

“Search,” she runs off and heads right into the trees.

“Found Foxy scratching at the door and your bags there.” He points at where they were dropped a few feet from the porch.

Foxy barks, and we take off running after her.

“How long since she came out here?” I think and curse.

“Ten minutes, maybe fifteen.” It’s long enough to have been taken for sure.

We get to the clearing that surrounds a pond Jared has on his property and slow down when we find Foxy sniffing the

ground. She barks, and Jared bends down to check what she found.

“Tire tracks.” Fuck!

I pull at my hair and reach into my jeans for my phone.

“Who are you calling?” I ignore him and start to call Aspen’s phone.

He smacks the thing out of my hands, and I curse.

“If she has a phone and they haven’t taken it, you could be exposing it. Don’t you track her?” I frown.

“NO! You crazy fuck. I trust her.” He grinds his teeth.

“What’s the point in having those things if you don’t use them for what they’re for.” I start to argue that phones aren’t the government’s way of tracking every human when a thought hits me.

“Wolf,” I hiss as I start looking through the Internet for the Morningstar MC information.

I find a number, but it’s to the original chapter in Paradise, Nevada. I hit dial and pray someone picks up at this hour.

“Someone better be dead.” A sleepy voice answers, and I clear my throat.

“This is Officer Malachi Nassar of the Reno Sheriff’s Office. I need to get in touch with Franklin Hoss. It’s an emergency.” There’s a beat of silence before he talks again.

“What kind of emergency are you talking about, officer? Has something happened involving my nephew?” Oh shit.

“You’re Bear,” I whisper, trying to remember his actual name.

“I’m sorry, Asher, correct?” He grunts in reply.

“It’s your niece, sir. She’s been taken.” I hear something fall and then a shout.

“Who are you to Aspen?” Shit.

Am I ever going to meet a member of her family normally?

“Her future husband.” Go big or go home, right?

Jared curses, and I roll my eyes. I cover the receiver and glare at him.

“I learned it from you,” I hiss, putting the phone back to my ear.

He nods with a grin on his face.

“Officer Nassar, I’m Abel Brooks, the Vice President of this chapter. I understand one of our members is missing. What can you tell me?” I hear him shout ‘church’ before I can answer his question.

“You’re on speaker,” Abel says, and I take a deep breath.

“Aspen and I took an unplanned vacation and drove to Colorado. We arrived about an hour ago, and she went to get our bags from my truck while I was getting our room ready. She took my K9 partner with her. Foxy came back to the house in distress, and Aspen was nowhere to be found. Foxy tracked her scent to a clearing that has fresh tire tracks where none should be.” Jared walks up to me with paper in his hand.

“Found it in the grass,” I take it from him, bring it closer to the light of my cellphone, and turn it over.

It’s a business card with a phone number and the initials AT on it.

“That’s not much to go on. Does she have any enemies that we should know about?” I hang my head.

“No. But I apparently do. I’m afraid this is all about me. We found a card with a phone number. I believe it belongs to Armin Turan.” Someone in that room listening to me whistles.

“How are you involved with him?” Abel’s tune has changed to one of accusation.

Jared raises an eyebrow at me. He must have heard that question.

“I’m technically engaged to his daughter.” Curses ring out, causing me to take the phone away from my ear.

“How quickly can you get back to Reno?” I think that was Asher’s voice talking.

“Sixteen hours, sir.” I clear my throat, knowing I’ll have to speed and drive straight through.

“Fuck that, I’ll send a helicopter for you,” Abel says at the same time Asher replies.

“I’ll meet you there.” The phone goes dead, and I look at Jared.

“I’ll go pack.” I nod as my phone buzzes with a text from an unknown number.

D B Smith Memorial Heliport, ninety-minute -
Abel

Thank you.

Don’t thank me until after you see Bear and Wolf.
Stay armed.

We jog back to the house, and I stay outside while Jared runs in to get his shit. I dial the number on the card and grind my teeth when it rings several times before he answers.

“Good evening, Malachi. You seem to have lost something valuable tonight. Would you like to know how to get it back?” The female voice shocks me.

“Soraya,” she laughs at my confusion, and my anger spikes.

“Did you think Father would allow you not to honor our contract?” She clicks her tongue as if she’s speaking to a naughty child.

“Where is she?” I hiss as Jared comes back out with a duffel bag in hand.

“Safe and will remain that way as long as you follow our directions. I’ll be in touch. See you soon.” I squeeze the cell phone so hard the screen starts to crack.

“FOXY!” I yell out, and she comes running from the woods, where she’s still searching for Aspen.

I bend down on one knee and rub her head.

“Will find her.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SPARROW

THE HELICOPTER RIDE made me queasy, and by the time we landed, I was on the verge of puking my guts up. Several men greet us at the airstrip, and they look more like a militia than security-like, their shirts claim.

The number of SUVs worries me since it's only three of us, but when Soraya climbs out of the last one in line, the math starts to make sense. She comes up to her father and kisses his cheek. She sneers at me and turns her back without a word.

I'm shoved to the back of one of the large vehicles, and I panic, thinking they're going to place me in the truck space. But when the tailgate opens, my word falls out from under me.

I'm quickly gagged, and tied up, then a sack is put over my head. All before being lifted and placed with the supplies to subdue me have been kept. The tailgate closes softly, but it's the loudest sound I've ever heard.

I can feel my pulse in my throat as the car starts to move, and that queasy feeling returns with a vengeance. I try to breathe through it, but I can't seem to get enough air through the fabric over my head.

I'm having a panic attack.

Logically, I know what's happening, but no matter how hard I concentrate, I can't calm myself down. The vehicle slows and comes to a stop. Doors open and close. I hear several clicking sounds and then a steady beeping.

What the fuck am I doing?

I scream around the gag and start shaking my head to get the sack off. I bump around and struggle until I'm up on my knees. They have my arms tied around my back and at my ankles. Once I'm off my side, I'm able to use the back of the seats to rub the sack off my head, and I shake my hair out of my eyes to look around.

I stop for a second to listen around me.

I sit on my ass and wiggle my body through my arms to get them back in front of me. I start working the knots of the rope on my ankles. As soon as my feet are free, I pull the gag out of my mouth and use my teeth on the next set of ropes.

I rub my wrist and frown in thought.

"That was too easy." I start looking for a trunk release when the beeping noise distracts me.

"Oh my God," my heart skips.

They were never worried about me getting out of the ropes because that's not my real prison. The SUV is.

I'm trapped inside with a bomb.

I find a latch, and the back seat falls forward. I crawl through and look out the windows. FUCK!

"No, no, no," I glance at my watch, and it's dead.

I'm afraid to open the doors, not knowing what will trigger the explosive device. I look around, hoping someone is

outside, but everything is quiet. I stare at the front doors of the clubhouse, praying someone comes outside and dreading it because I don't want to put anyone else in danger.

I bring my knees up to my chest. I have no choice but to wait. The beeping grows louder in the silence.

I never thought I'd wish to be deaf again so much.

Asher

"How long before he gets here?" I look from Wolf to Abel as I pace the room.

"As soon as the update completes, I'll track Xander." I roll my eyes at him.

He's been meaning to come up to Reno to install the latest version of his fucking AI.

"Done," she types into his computer as the lights flicker.

"System restored. Unknown vehicle detected in front yard." ARIA says too loudly.

"FUCK, she'll watch the whole neighborhood." Wolf groans.

"Adjusting volume, hang on. Xander just landed. They're fifteen minutes out." Abel frowns at his screen.

"What?" I come around to look at what he's seeing.

"We don't need to find Aspen." He zooms in on the window of a black SUV parked in the lot outside.

"What the fuck? Why wouldn't she come in?" I'm rushing for the front door before Wolf gets an answer.

Something doesn't feel right. She looks scared. I haven't seen that look on her face since she got her implants.

I pull open the front door and rush to the SUV. As soon as she sees me coming, she frantically starts banging on the window and screaming. I slow down as I see tears running down her face. I can't hear her well, so I bring my hands up and sign to her.

What's wrong? Why haven't you come inside?

She shakes her head and then signs back one word.

Bomb.

Wolf curses when he sees the same thing I do. I walk around the vehicle slowly, looking for the device while Wolf gets on the ground looking underneath it. Abel is on the phone when I come back around.

I place my hand on the window over hers.

Have you looked around inside?

She shakes her head.

"Anything?" I call out.

"Nothing under her. It has to be inside." Wolf crawls out and stands next to me.

"Bomb squad is on the way," Abel yells as he walks back to the clubhouse.

I need you to search for the bomb, little bird.

She nods and turns away from us.

"This thing is armored through the teeth. It's bulletproof glass, reinforced steel panels on the doors and undercarriage." I look at Wolf and nod.

“Turan would use the best. Blowing up from the inside makes logical sense. Also, it makes it difficult to disarm.” A tap on the window draws our attention.

Aspen holds a small black bag in her hands.

Open the zipper slowly.

She follows my directions, revealing a digital clock with red numbers flashing at us.

Forty-five minutes.

A commotion makes us look back at the clubhouse. Abel has everyone leaving, and I nod at him. While he evacuates everyone to safety, I can concentrate on the Aspen.

“Spark,” Wolf answers his phone and curses.

“Is he breathing? Okay, we have a situation here. We found Aspen. No, don’t come here. Go to your house. I’ll explain later.” He hangs up and looks at me.

“He found Xander knocked out. No sign of Malachi.” He shakes his head as he makes a call.

“Glitch, please tell me you’re tracking the cop.” I ignore him and focus on Aspen.

I need you to lift it out carefully.

She shakes her head.

I know you’re scared, but I need you to trust me.

It’s been years since I worked with explosives. I hope my memory doesn’t fail me now. Otherwise, we’re all in trouble.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MALACHI

“NICE FLYING,” Jared says to Xander.

They’d been talking the whole flight as I sat and stewed in silence. My worry for Aspen has had Foxy whimpering the entire flight. Her head hasn’t moved from my lap once.

We’re grabbing our things when a black SUV pulls up.

“That would be our ride.” Xander smiles as he starts walking up to the vehicle.

Foxy growls, and I pull my weapon, pointing it at the blacked-out windows.

The window goes down slowly, and Armin’s face fills the frame.

“Hello, Jared. It has been a long time.” He snorts next to me.

“Not long enough.” He growls, lifting his own gun at Armin.

“How about we put the guns away, gentlemen? We wouldn’t want to delay our appointment after all.” This man truly is crazy.

“Where is Aspen?” I step forward and stop when Xander hits the floor.

I glance at Jared and see a barrel pushing into the back of his head.

Foxy starts barking.

“Foxy, quiet.” She whimpers and lays down next to Xander.

“I detest being late. Shall we?” He raises his window, and the guy holding the gun on Jared nods and towards the SUV.

I drop my gun and walk to the door.

He takes our weapons and pushes us into the back seat. I shake my head at Jared when he flexes his arms, ready to strangle Armin with his bare hands. I share the urge, but then we’ll never find Aspen.

“Foxy, stay,” I order when she tries to follow me.

“Don’t fret so, Malachi. The woman is safe. For the next hour or so. As long as you do the right thing, she’ll stay that way.” I frown.

“What does that mean?” He turns in his seat and smiles.

“I delivered her to her family along with a small present to keep them busy while you marry my Soraya. As long as you say ‘I do’ before six this evening, then she will live.” I snap, and this time, Jared stops me from doing exactly what he tried moments ago.

“You crazy fucking son of a bitch. I am not marrying her!” I scream, struggling against Jared’s hold on me.

“Pitty. She seemed like a lovely young lady. Sad that her family will watch her blow up.” He turns to face the front, and my body goes cold.

I glance at the man who's the closest thing to a family I have left feeling like a child needing him to fix this like I did then. It's the same feeling coursing through me after my parents died. He's been my rock and savior my whole life, and just like he did then, he shows no fear.

"We'll get through this kid." I blink and nod.

He's never let me down, and he won't start now.

We sped through the city until we come to a stop outside a large estate with a mansion sitting at the end of a rounded driveway. A few arm guards walk to the SUV and open the doors while the rest scan the area.

A limo with Iranian flags and government plates is also in the driveway. I get shoved and stumble into Jared. I feel his hand take my cell phone from my pocket and frown.

"They'll search you first." He whispers as we're forced into the mansion.

"You have five minutes to change," Armin says as we are separated.

Jared is led into a room on the main floor while I'm taken upstairs to a bedroom where a suit is led out on the bed.

"Change," the guard growls at me.

I pull my clothes off quickly and grab the suit. I put it on as I glare at the clock on the dresser.

Twenty minutes left. I swallow and move faster.

Aspen's life depends on it.

“I found him!” Glitch yells from where she set up outside the clubhouse.

The Bomb Squad arrived, and they’ve been working with Uncle Asher and Aspen.

“Where?” I move closer but keep my eyes on the SUV my sister is trapped in.

Hannah is talking to the EMTs on standby, and Spark is pacing the line setup to keep the public back. A news crew arrived a few minutes ago and is setting up to broadcast.

“Mayor Mansion.” I practically break my neck to look at her.

“WHAT?” That’s only five minutes from us.

“I’m hacking into his security.” I nod and look up to see the SUV light up green.

They’re using a special device that scans the area for wires connected to the bomb. The green areas are safe, but the red ones still have a connection to the trigger. Red lights up the windows, door handles, and the hood, from what I can see.

A thought accords to me as the guy starts to move away.

“WAIT! Check the roof.” I call out and move away from Glitch.

Everyone stops and looks at me like I’m nuts.

“Moon roof. Is that live?” The sun with the device looks around for something to climb up on.

Spark grabs the dude and lifts him onto his shoulder.

“Jesus, man!” He exclaims, almost drooping his equipment.

“SCAN IT,” I growl

“Moon roof is clear.” I smile at Uncle Asher.

“Break it!” No one moves at first, and then a fireman comes over with an axe.

Uncle Asher signs to Aspen to take cover, and then the fireman slams the axe into the moon roof. It’s sticking inside the glass instead of shattering, and he struggles to pull it back out.

I come over and grab on, and we both pull until we fly backward. I shake off the fall and look to see the glass came with us. The black bag with the bomb in it comes up through the moon roof and then Aspen’s head.

“Who wants this?” Her voice is hoarse from crying.

“I’ll take it.” A member of the squad dressed in a marshmallow suit carefully takes the bag from my sister and then turns to a robot that has been waiting on the sidelines.

It’s supposed to contain a detonation.

I’m so busy watching the bomb go into the robot that when I’m tackled to the ground, I scream like a bitch.

“I ain’t heard that sound since you were a teenager.” Uncle Asher laughs as I hold a sobbing Aspen in my lap.

“Shh, I got you sissy.” I rub her back and glare at my uncle.

The Malachi’s dog comes up to us and bumps her hip with a whimper. She turns her attention to the animal.

“That spider was as big as your head asshole.” He chuckles at the memory.

“We need to find Malachi.” Aspen wipes her face on a blanket that a fireman must have given her.

“Come on, let’s go get your man.” I stand with her in my arms.

“You know where he is?” I set her down and wait before letting her go to make sure she’s steady on her feet.

“Mmm, at the Mayor’s Mansion.” I tuck her hair behind her ear.

“That makes no sense.” I check my watch.

“It does when you want to get married after hours.” I tap the display.

Five thirty-five pm.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SPARROW

WOLF STAYS BEHIND to speak to the police with Glitch. Uncle Asher, Spark, and Hannah are with me on our way to the mansion. I'm tying my hair up in a messy bun with a tie Hannah just gave me when we pull up to the Mayor's gates.

Spark lowers his window and presses the buzzer.

"We're sorry. The Mayor is hosting a private event tonight." The woman on the speaker sounds nervous.

"We're with the band, lady," Spark says into the speaker but gets nothing back.

"Fuck. I really liked this truck." He backs up and then looks at us in the back seat.

"Brace," he slams into the gate and drags it up the driveway, making a loud racket.

Security comes running towards us with guns drawn. Hannah pushes my head down before the first set of bullets fly. I grab Foxy and drag her down with me. I curse and reach under the seat where I know Spark keeps extra weapons. I pass one to Hannah and grab one for myself.

"Clear, let's move!" Spark calls, and we rush to get out of the truck.

"Foxy, stay," I yell as we run for the front doors.

The front door opens, and a lady in a business suit is crying and shaking so badly I don't know how she's standing. She tries to talk, but nothing she's saying is making sense. Hannah slaps her and then grabs her shoulders.

"Calm down. Nice deep breath. We can't help if we can't understand you." I glare at her.

How was she a nurse?

"They're forcing the Mayor to marry them. They have his family upstairs at gunpoint." Hannah nods and pushes out the door.

"Where?" She points at a hallway.

"Leave, call the police once you are off the property and safe." She nods and runs off to a parking lot full of cars.

"I got the family. Hannah, you're with me." Uncle Asher leads her up the stairs.

"Stay behind me, Sparrow." Like hell, I will.

"No, I got this." I check my weapon and walk ahead of him.

We creep down the hall and get to a set of double doors. I lean into it to listen, and I hear Malachi choking out marriage vows.

Oh fuck no.

I try the handle, but the doors are locked.

I look up at Spark, and he nods before moving me. He lifts his foot and slams it into the handle. The door breaks, and shouting starts immediately. A gunshot comes from upstairs, and braking comes from my left. It's a burst of sound

overload, but my mind focuses on the only thing that matters to me at the moment.

The man standing with a pen in his hand.

“You’re too late. He’s mine.” I look at the smug look on Soraya’s face and smile.

“Not if you’re dead.” I point the gun at her head and fire.

BANG!

Malachi

I repeat the words the Mayor says with a single thought in my mind.

I’m sorry, Azizam.

No one here is willingly doing any of this shit. The Mayor’s family is upstairs along with Jared, and if the paperwork isn’t signed in the next few minutes, they’re all going to die.

Rage boils in me so hot I can barely talk.

I struggle with every word I say and beat myself up for not letting Jared marry us last night. What a difference twenty-four hours can make. I stop talking when I hear gunshots.

“Please,” the Mayor whimpers, and I nod.

“I do,” I choke out.

“By the power of entrusted in me by the state of Nevada. I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride.” He rushes the words.

“Fuck no.” I hiss as the woman gets closer to me.

“Manners,” Armin says behind me.

“Fuck you and manners.” I look right at him so he knows I’m done playing his games.

“Please sign here, then the witnesses.” The Mayor hands me a pen.

I look at it, and I’m bending to sign my name when the door bust open, scaring the shit out of me.

It hits and knocks the single guard in the room with Armin out, leaving him unprotected from the gun Spark is holding at his head. Sparrow walks ahead of him, looking at my hand.

She’s safe.

My chest fills with sorrow. As if she can read my mind, Soraya steps between us.

“You’re too late. He’s mine.” I can hear the triumph in her voice.

“Not if you’re dead.” Aspen raises a gun and fires.

BANG!

Soraya drops in front of me. The pen falls from my hand as the Mayor runs from the room. We stare at each other, and when I reach for her, she falls into my arms.

“I’m so sorry,” I whisper into her ear, and she shakes her head.

“NO! What have you done!” Armin screams.

He’s being held by Spark and struggles to get to his daughter, who is dead on the floor.

Foxy appears at the door, and I grin.

“Come here, girl,” she starts to enter the room and stops looking at the guard that was knocked out.

Everything happens in slow motion. The guard raises his gun and points it at Aspen. I turn her so my body protects her, and a growl pierces the room.

“NO!” Spark screams as a shot rings out.

I brace for the bullet, but nothing happens.

“Stupid dog,” the guard says, turning my world red.

I don’t even think, taking the gun out of Aspen’s hands and turning before emptying the clip into his body. Sirens are the first thing that comes to me when I snap out of my rage.

The second is the sound of Aspen sobbing.

“Put your hands up!” I drop the gun and do as I’m told.

“Malachi?” I look at Andrews.

“What the fuck is going on?” He looks around in confusion, and then he sees Aspen working on Foxy.

“FUCK!” I drop to my knees at her side.

“Officer down.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MALACHI

Three days later

“ARE YOU READY FOR THIS?” Jared pats my back as I look at all the press standing outside the police station.

I sigh and shake my head.

“No, why do we need to do this?” I glance at Aspen.

She’s standing talking to Hannah and her godmother, Charli, who is in public relations. She arraigned this press conference to answer about the involvement of the club at the mayor’s mansion.

The press has dubbed it the Sundown Massacre. The police have ruled it a home invasion, which is accurate. The Mayor is talking to them now, and we’re next.

I thanked the Mayor for leaving my family drama out of the press, but as of this morning, the reports have been putting the pieces together, no thanks to Armin and his engagement announcement.

“Nassar,” I turn to my Captain.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” I shake his hand one more time.

“I’m sure. It won’t be the same without Foxy.” My voice hiccups as the words leave my mouth.

He nods in understanding.

“Enjoy your retirement. You’ve earned it.” He slaps my shoulder and goes back into his office.

“We’re up,” Charli says, and I take Aspen’s hand.

We walk out together, and Charli gives them a speech we prepared. I clutch Aspen’s hand in mine while we stand there listening. We opted out of questions, but of course, the crowd of hungry vultures start spitting them out.

“Is it true that you were fired for your involvement with the MorningStar MC?”

“Was this all about your engagement to the late Miss Turan?”

“Did you kill her to marry your mistress?”

That one makes me snap my head at the direst who slung it like the grenade he knew it would be. I bit my lip because I would not give him the satisfaction of an answer, but he grinned at my demeanor.

“Thank you for your time.” Charli ushers back inside.

“Good job not reacting to that asshole.” I snort.

“Oh, he did. Just not verbally.” Aspen says.

I twist my neck, trying to loosen the knots of tension I feel. I look around the station one more time and commit it to memory. If need be, the next time I walk in here, it’ll be as a civilian.

“Bittersweet, huh?” I smile down at Aspen.

“It is. But I’m ready to start our new life.” I kiss her softly, and flashes break the moment.

“Fucking pricks.” I move us through the station to the back docks, where I’ve parked my truck.

We say our goodbyes to Hannah as she gets on her Harley, speeding away before we get into our truck. The drive over to the clubhouse is quiet. When we get there, the environment is the complete opposite.

“CHAOS!” Charli yells for her husband, and I chuckle, understanding how he got his road name.

A banner is hanging from one corner of the ceiling, and the man in question is up on a ladder, looking guilty as hell.

“You’re early.” I ignore him and tilt my head to read the banner.

HAPPY RETIREMENT

Well, shit. This is for me? I look at Aspen, who is holding her mouth to hide her laughter.

“Did you know about this?” She shakes her head.

“Go away, come back in two hours.” Chaos waves at the door.

“Malachi?” I turn at the sound of my name.

“Hi,” I look at the woman who broke down the first time I came here.

“Milly, right?” I looked from Aspen to her to make sure I got the name right.

“Yes. Do you have a moment? I’d really like to explain what happened last time.” I shake my head, and her face falls.

“No, sorry. Of course, I have all the time in the world now. I just mean you don’t have to.” She sighs in relief and nods.

“I know, but it helps. Please.” I look at Aspen, who shrugs.

“Ok, on one condition.” Both women look at me weirdly, and I chuckle.

“It’s been a long fucking week. Can we do this over a beer?” They laugh at me.

“That I can help you with.” Darius comes up behind his wife with his son in his arms.

She takes the baby who’s fussing and reaching for her.

“How about I feed him while you guys get that drink? Meet you at the bar in a few.” She walks off, undoing her shirt.

“Oh, she’s nursing. Guess no beer for her.” Darius grins.

“Nope, come on.” We follow him to the bar, and all the while, I feel eyes on me.

Chaos is looking at me hard.

“Oh, stop that, Uncle Toby! He already knows.” Hannah pushes him back at the ladder and hands him the banner to finish hanging.

“We’ve all been worried about you guys. My wife is concerned that your first impression of us wasn’t, well, appropriate.” Aspen snorts, drawing both of our attention.

“Name one time this club has ever made a good impression.” Darius sits back and crosses his arms.

Slowly, a smile spreads across his face, but his eyes turn sad.

“Not in our lifetime. Maybe in Grandpa’s.” She laughs louder.

“Not with Abel as his VP.” They burst out in laughter.

Their amusement is contagious, causing me to chuckle at their response more than anything else. Darius stands and rounds the bar to grab a few beers. He cracks them open and passed them out.

We talk about the last few days, and then Darius’ face turns serious.

“How’s Foxy?” My heart skips at her name.

“She’ll pull through,” Aspen says confidently, although she tightens her hold on my thigh.

I swallow but nod.

“She hasn’t woken, but her vitals are strong.” Aspen pats my knee.

I’ve been preparing for the worst. We already knew she wouldn’t be able to be my partner anymore, and that broke my heart. I handed in my retirement paperwork the very next day.

“She saved your life.” She whispers again.

Guilty fills me.

“She’s always saving me and you her. I don’t know what I’d do without either of you.” She kisses me.

“There’s my happy boy. Come to Daddy.” Darius takes Cole from Milly.

“Careful, he hasn’t,” Milly starts to warn her husband, who’s got a smiling baby damn near upside down laughing, but she’s too late.

Cole lets out a massive burb and vomits all over Darius’s face.

“Really, little man?” He grabs a dish rag and cleans his face.

“You go clean up.” Milly pushes them both away and sits with us.

“I’ll make this quick. I don’t want to make either of us uncomfortable.” I nod and wait for her to start.

“How much of our story do you know?” She bites her lip and looks at Aspen.

“Only what I’ve seen on the news and overheard her. Basically nothing.” She blows out a long breath.

“Listen, you do not have to rehash your trauma on my account. I do not take anything that happened personally. So please know none of this is necessary.” Aspen kisses my cheek, but Milly shakes her head.

“Thank you. I appreciate that. However, you need to understand why King reacted the way he did.” I hold up my hand and stop her.

“Then he can explain if and when he’s ready.” Milly looks over my shoulder and frowns.

I turn to see the man in question looking sheepish.

“I’m ready.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

SHOCK

I SNEAK out of the party early and head home. I'm still getting used to my new routine. Not working should sound relaxing, but for a workaholic, it's hell.

I pull up outside my little bungalow and frown.

There are multiple packages on the porch. I shake my head as I approach, wondering if I have a new mailman. I haven't ordered anything in weeks.

I've been spending most of my time at the clubhouse. It's been days since I came home.

I bend down and scoop up as many as I can before juggling them in my arms and unlocking the door. I toss them on my couch and turn to grab the rest, along with the mail hanging out of the little box by the door. I kick the door closed and turn on the hallway light.

I take off my boots and go to my bedroom. I strip and take a shower before coming back out to see what the fuck all that stuff was. The face mask I put on cracks when I smile at my mother's handwriting.

At least three of these are from her.

The rest have no return addresses on them. I pull off the tape and look inside the first box. It's a bottle of perfume.

More importantly, it's a used one.

“What the fuck?” I place it on my coffee table and rip one the next one.

A half-burned candle is inside, and my hands start to shake.

I put the box down slowly and looked around my house. That candle was on my counter the last time I was home. I walk into the kitchen and see it's gone, but a vase of white roses is sitting where it was.

I run to my room and grab my gun. I slowly come back out to the counter and get closer to the flowers. I see a note and carefully pull it out to read.

I miss the way you smell.

I gasp and drop the card.

That perfume was one I also owned and wore on special occasions. Someone has been in my house. Rummaging through my shit because that bottle was buried in the back of my makeup drawer.

I pick up my cell phone and call Glitch.

“Where are you?” I roll my eyes.

“Home, and I got here to a bunch of little surprises.” I walk over to the last box and tear it open.

“Lacey, someone was in here messing with my shit. They packed them up like little presents and left them outside with the mail. They left me flowers with a creepy note, too.” I pull the tissue paper out of the box and curse when I see a pair of my panties in this box.

“Why the fuck are you still there? SPARK!” Shit.

“Lacey, you bitch. I’m fine.” I take all the boxes and throw them in my trash.

“No, you are not. You got someone following you around town, and now they broke into your house.” I go back to my room and pull on a pair of sweatpants.

“We don’t know if it’s the same person.” I cringe after I say it.

“Oh, that’s fucking better. Multiple stalkers.” I nod, dropping my rope to the floor.

“Yeah, that argument sounded better in my head. Do not send the calvary. I’m getting dressed and heading back to the clubhouse.” I pull a shirt over my head and get the face mask all over it.

“Fuck, I gotta go. See you soon.” I hang up and throw the phone on my bed.

I wash my face, grab a clean tee, and pull on socks. When I sit on the bed to put on my shoes, something on my pillows catches my eye. I shift, and it falls under the blankets.

I stand, grab my cell phone, and pull the blankets back.

A scream rips out of me as I stumble out of my room. Someone grabs me from behind, and I struggle against them until Spark’s voice calms me.

“Jesus, Hannah,” I stop and turn my face into his chest.

“Sorry, sorry,” I say as I calm down.

“You left your fucking front door unlocked and wonder why people are in your house fucking with shit.” He shakes his head at me, and I stomp his foot.

“FUCK!” I push past him.

“That’s for being a dick.” I go to my fridge, take out a beer, and chug it.

He limps, following me into the kitchen.

“Why the fuck were you screaming?” I open another beer and repeat the process from before.

“Check my bed.” He frowns and disappears before I hear him curse.

I nod to myself.

“That’s some fucked up shit. It’s used.” He shakes like he has something gross on his body.

“A used sex doll in my bed with a photo of me on the hard? Yeah, sick isn’t the terminology I’d use. Psychotic is more like it.” I slam the empty bottle down and go for another.

“Stop, or you won’t be able to drive.” I sigh and nod.

“Pack your shit. You’re not staying here anymore.” I know it’s for my safety, but it prickles all the same.

“You telling me what to do, Issac?” I tilt my head at him, looking for a fight.

“Hannah, you are not invincible. You’re coming to the clubhouse.” I nod.

“Yes, VP.” I smile at him sweetly.

“Fuck, you’re going to be a pain in my ass, aren’t you?” I wink and go pack a bag.

I may be argumentative and stubborn, but I’m not generally stupid. Independence aside, I know when I’m over my head. A thought comes to me as I walk out to Spark.

I toss my bag at him, and he groans when it hits his stomach.

“My uncle still here?” He nods.

“I think I’m overdue for a visit to New Orleans.” I smile when I think of all the trouble I can get into with the triples.

“Oh, Seer would just love that.” I chuckle.

“He’ll never see me coming.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SPARROW

Three weeks later

I SNEAK around Malachi's house and push his bedroom window open. I climb in and smile when I hear the shower going. I didn't want to disturb Foxy, who was finally home and sleeping in the living room.

I'm barely in the house when his voice stops me.

"Breaking and entering is a crime, Miss Hoss." I smile at him and finish climbing inside.

"Good thing I'm here to get handcuffed then." I hold out my wrist for him.

He's got one hand holding up his towel and his gun in the other.

"Are you looking for punishment, Azizam?" I nod enthusiastically.

He places the gun on his dresser and drops the towel.

"You need to work on your skills. You didn't even duck under the bathroom window." I shrug.

"I wanted to get caught, remember?" I take my jacket off, and he hisses.

“I was trying on rehearsal dresses, and this one didn’t make the cut. Felt to, virginal.” I spin slowly, and he catches me in his arms.

I let my hand land on his chest and drag it down to his belly button.

“You aren’t supposed to be here tonight.” I slowly drop to my knees.

“We aren’t supposed to spend the night together before the wedding. Nowhere does it say I can’t suck your cock.” I take him into my mouth, and he moans loudly.

“I’m pretty sure it’s implied. FUCK.” I hum around him.

“You are so fucking beautiful, Mrs. Nassar.” I smile with him still in my mouth.

It’s a technically really. After the whole mayor’s mansion debacle, we let Jared marry us. When the club found out, they protested. We agreed to a redo only if and when Foxy was well enough to be the ring bearer.

So tomorrow is just a big old party to celebrate. Hannah was the one who insisted we’d slept in different houses tonight. When she caught me sneaking out, she laughed and called me a hussy.

I reminded her how long it took me to get his dick to begin with, and she promptly drove me over here herself.

I suck hard and roll his balls in my hand.

“So damn good,” He grabs a fist full of my hair and starts rocking his hips to get further into my mouth.

I was suddenly ripped away and thrown on the bed. Malachi growls as he falls on top of me, kissing the shit out of me.

“Punishment time,” he hisses as his hand runs up my thigh and stops when he finds me bare.

“No panties under this tiny white dress?” I shake my head.

“You really did want to get spanked tonight.” He flips me over and slaps my ass hard.

I gasp and grab the bedsheets, arching my back and spreading my legs nice and wide.

“What a fucking view.” I shift my hips, taunting him.

Another slap stops my movements, allowing him to surprise me with a quick lick of his tongue. I much back into it, but he’s gone quicker than I can move.

I moan in disappointment.

“That’s not what you came here for wife.” The fuck I didn’t.

I came for everything and anything he’d give me, including his tongue. He slams inside me and then holds me tightly to his hips, so I can’t move. His fingers find my clit, and he circles it slowly.

“Here’s your punishment. You’re going to cum twice before I move. I want to feel you quivering around me.” I shake my head, but I’m already halfway to my first one.

“But only when I say.” FUCK!

“Cruel,” I hiss as my thighs start to shake.

“You are a criminal that needs to learn her lesson.” He chuckles at my pain.

“Please,” I beg way too quickly.

His fingers slow, and I cry out. The slap he gives me echoes in the room. My orgasm breaks, and I shake.

“Fuck,” Malachi starts pumping through my clamping muscles, extending my pleasure.

He hisses and cums falling on my back.

“What the hell was that?” He laughs as he drags us both down on our sides.

“I don’t know, but can we do it again?” He kisses my neck.

“Anything you want, Azizam.” I hum as he runs his nose up and down my cheek.

“You should break in more often.” I snort.

“I only came in that way so Foxy wouldn’t wake up.” I feel him nod behind me as the zipper of my dress goes down.

He slowly peels it off me and covers us with a blanket.

We’re dosing off when a whimper draws our eyes open to the foot of the bed. Foxy wags her tail at us, and I chuckle. She’s been breaking all the rules lately. I guess she’s earned it after all she’s suffered.

“Come here, girl,” Malachi pats the bed, and she jumps up, albeit slowly favoring her left side, and promptly lays across the bottom of the bed.

“I’m the world’s luckiest man.” Malachi sighs, cuddling me closer.

“Oh? Why’s that?” I look over my shoulder at him.

“I get to sleep with the two most beautiful creatures on this planet, and they both love me enough to risk their own lives to save mine. I’ll never take that for granted.” He kisses me slowly.

“Damn right, and you better never forget it.” I smile into the kiss.

“Never.”

EPILOGUE

IT'S LIKE DEJAVU.

I stand outside her club and look up at the sign. The only difference is tonight it's pouring rain. It's almost as if the universe knows the mood I've been stuck in since she left.

When I woke up in Germany without my leg, she was like my avenging angel. Asking all the questions, I couldn't. Helping to arrange my care in the States. She stuck by me until I finally pushed her away.

All because I felt unworthy.

She was a Queen even then, and I was nowhere near the level of matching her. I'm ready now, and hopefully, I'm not too late. I've been waiting for them to open, but there still aren't any lights on.

I frown and walk around the back into the alley and see the back door propped open. Maybe they're running late. Although, if memory serves, this place was a hot spot last time we were here.

"Excuse me?" The man smoking a cigarette next to the door jumps.

"Sorry, I was just wondering when you would be open?" The guy stomps out the smoke and walks into the street light

so I can see him.

“Bruno?” I ask, and he nods.

“The Pearly Gates closed down two months ago.” He whispers, making me frown.

“Why?” I glance around, seeing all the other clubs in the downtown LA area thriving.

“Gianna,” He choked, and I stepped closer to him.

“WHAT?” I growl, and he shakes his head.

“She’s gone missing.” I stumble back and throw my hand out to catch myself on the brick wall.

“You’re him, aren’t you? Her King.” I nod and hold my chest.

“Then we have time. Come, I will show you.” I follow him into the empty club and straight to her office.

When the door opens, my senses are overwhelmed with her. Pictures, smells, memories. Bruno goes to sit at her desk but stops at the look on my face.

“Apologies,” He steps out of my way, and I sit in her chair.

“I’ve been paying the girls from a slush fund, but it’s almost dry. I stopped all the deliveries and placed our accounts on hold. She owns the building, and taxes are paid until next year. I didn’t know what else to do.” Bruno succumbs to the tears he’s been holding back.

I look at the papers on her desk.

Bruno collects himself and points at a pile of open envelopes stacked neatly in a basket. I pick one up, open it, and read the single line written on it.

Your time is up.

- SB

I pull out my phone, snap a photo, and text it to Abel.

“Bruno, do we have the supplies needed to reopen?” I look around and know in my bones Gianna would be furious that her business was suffering.

Not for the money but for her girls. They depended on a safe place to work and have families to feed.

“For a week at least. I can get the supplies coming back in.” I nod.

“Call the girls and tell them we’re opening tomorrow night.” My phone rings as he leaves to do as I ordered.

“IB, Ignacio Baez?” He yawns through the phone.

“That’s what I thought too. He’s got my girl Cannibal.” He whistles.

“That asshole kidnapped a mafia princess?” I look at a photo of us on her desk.

“He took my Queen. I want her back.” I hear tapping on his end.

“On it, Prez.” I snort at the way that sounds.

“Weird, huh?” Abel laughs at me.

“Good. Get fucking use to it.” I smile, agreeing wholeheartedly with his statement.

“I’m staying in LA. Someone needs to oversee her business in her absence. Send a few members my way as backup. And Cannibal?” I hear him stop typing.

“Yeah?” He sounds a bit worried, and I appreciate his concern.

“Thank you from both of us. I’m not sure if Dad ever had a chance to tell you.” I listen to him snuffle and then curse.

“Fuck you, Lucas. Go find your girl.” He hangs up on me, and I chuckle at his reaction.

I’ll find her and bring her home or die trying.

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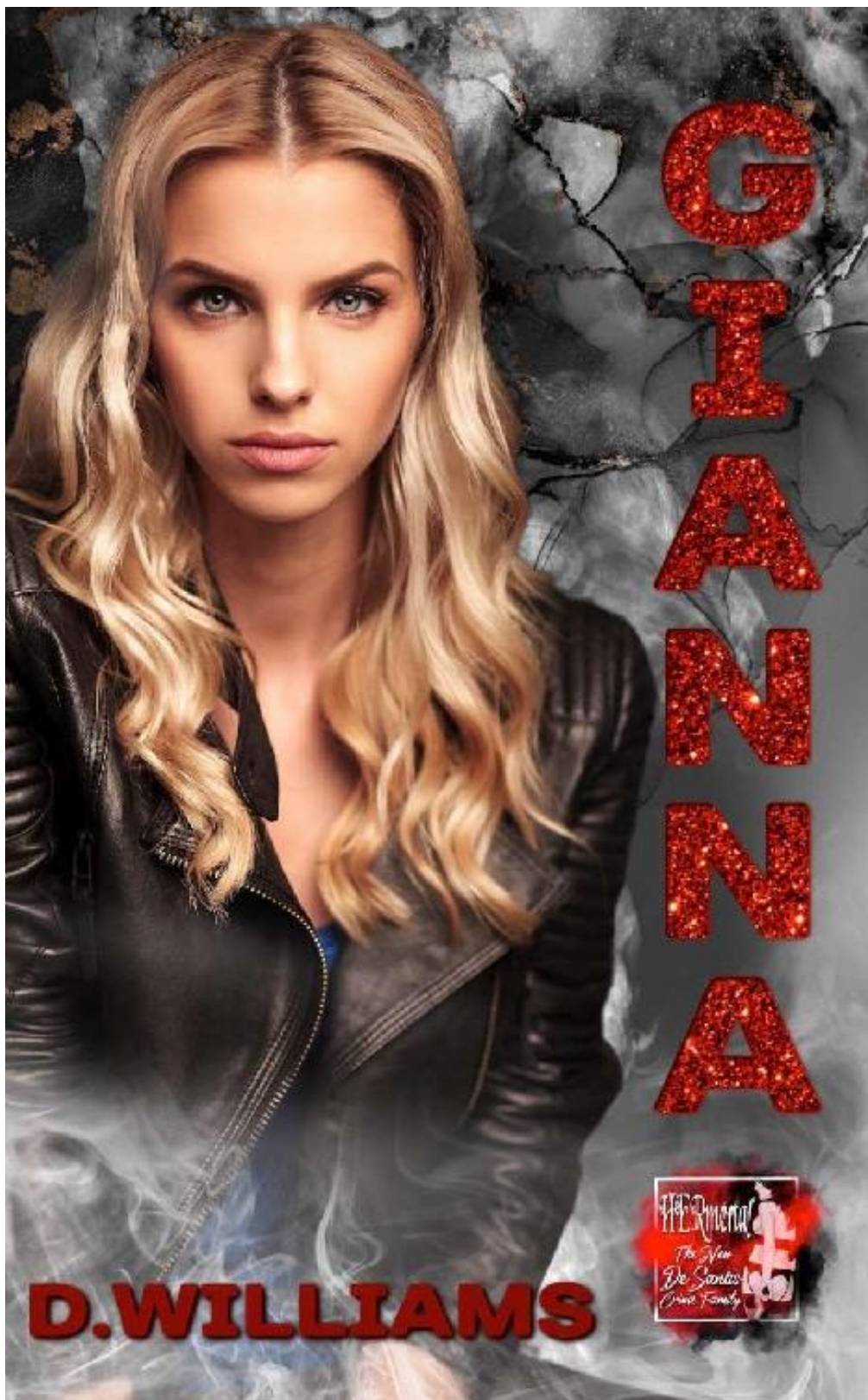
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GIANNA

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The Mental
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***CURIOUS OF HOW KING MET
GIANNA??***

GIANNA: HERMERTA: THE NEW DESANTIS
CRIME FAMILY BOOK 11

Please enjoy the first part of King and Gianna's story
It's an interconnected storyline.

NEWS BULLETIN

We interrupt your normally scheduled programming to bring you shocking, unbelievable news. Less than an hour ago, in what could only be called an orchestrated country-wide assassination plot, over thirty men believed to be a part of the alleged DeSantis Crime Family were executed in various manners across six states.

Head of the mob family, Guiseppe DeSantis, and his retired father Aldo, still considered the Don, were two of six executed in New York this morning. Four of the other sons, Salvatore, believed to be head of Miami, Marco of LA, Davide of New Orleans, and Enzo of New Mexico, have all been confirmed dead in the respective cities they resided along with the other members of their organization who were also murdered. The only one not found is his brother Romeo of Chicago. He is, at this time, presumed dead like the others.

The DeSantis family has long been a part of numerous federal investigations for racketeering, trafficking, drug smuggling, and weapons trafficking, amongst other more serious offenses. The consensus amongst law enforcement in reference to this

unforeseen tragedy is... You die by the sword you live by. I guess that sums it up.

We will be covering this developing story as it unfolds. I am sure there will be more to come.

This has been a special news report. I'm Lana Gordo. Thank you for watching.

Prologue

Do you remember where you were when your life changed?

How about what you were doing? I do, vividly.

I thought school was my way out of The Family. A way to escape the impossible expectations that I could never meet, no matter how hard I tried.

I was the biggest disappointment to my father and the bane of my mother's existence. So when the opportunity to go away to culinary school in France came around, I jumped on it.

Until I got the call.

My father was dead, my mother disappeared, and I was to return immediately.

Home.

The ultimate four-letter word that is more of a curse to me, when it should have made me feel sheltered and loved.

Like the good little soldier I was, I followed the order, and I left school. I didn't know then what a blessing that really was for me.

I do now.

One year ago

“Gianna Dragna?” I stop stirring the pot and look up at the doorway the voice came from.

I’ll never get over the way the Italian people talk down to foreigners. They really do feel like Americans are beneath them. It doesn’t matter that I can trace my roots to Italy.

“Yes?” I wipe my hands clean, then excuse myself from the kitchens we are working in today.

“You have an important call in the office.” She briskly walks away from me as if she has more important things to attend to than delivering messages.

“Thank you,” I sigh and turn to go the opposite way, wondering who on Earth would be calling me.

I speak to my father once a week. On Sunday at four pm sharp, pacific standard time. The fact that it’s midnight for me doesn’t matter. What Vincenzo Dragna wants, he gets.

“Ciao, I was told I have a call?” I ask the elderly security when I enter the office of InTavola.

If this wasn’t one of the finest culinary institutes in the world and Italian, my father would have never agreed I could attend. The fact that he paid off the school to fast-track me, so I was only away eighteen months versus three years, still pisses me off. He’s robbing me of so much I could learn.

“You will not need to cook once you are married.” I roll my eyes, remembering his reasoning.

“You may take it here. My condolences.” She leaves the room, and I stand there in shock.

Condolences?

I lift the receiver and push the flashing button.

“Hello?” How anyone heard the whisper of sound that left my mouth, I don’t know.

“Gianna, it’s mother.” I nod like an idiot and then clear my throat.

“Is everything alright?” It’s barely dawn in Los Angeles.

“Your father is dead. Pack your bags and return home.” The phone slips from my hand, hitting the desk before tumbling to the floor.

“No.”

Chapter One

“What are you doing here, boss? Shouldn’t you be out celebrating your birthday?” I smile at Blossom.

I call her our ‘Dance Mom’ here at my club, The Pearly Gates. She’s dressed in her usual outfit tonight, which consists of pasties and a g-string, but to keep it classy and go with our theme, she’s got a single strand of pearls nuzzled between her double F’s.

“There’s nowhere else I’d rather be? Besides, I’m debuting my new act at midnight.” I wink at her as I make my way to my office.

“So, you’re here to play, not work?” I stop and pivot to look at her.

When was the last time I didn’t work? I stifle the sigh that wants to escape and nod.

“Good. I want you to share your first legal drink with me.” She points at me with a stern look, and I chuckle.

“Yes, Mom.” I open my door and close it quickly before she talks me into something else.

I rest the back of my head on the back of the door and blow out a deep breath. No twenty-year-old has the right to feel this tired. I’ve been running myself ragged between the clubs and the recon on the Yakuza.

I was given an impossible task. Find the traitor that killed our fathers. My brand twitches as a reminder to get my ass to work. I step away from the door and go around to sit at my desk.

I turn on my computer and frown at the stack of messages and mail sitting next to my phone.

Has it been that long since I came into my office?

I start opening the mail as the computer comes to life and sorting what bills need to be paid. I’m lost in thought when the email system I use dings with new messages. I glance up at my screen and crack a genuine smile.

“About fucking time,” I mutter as I open the email from my source inside the enemy camp.

I wish this were just a Happy Birthday letter, but there’s trouble coming your way tonight. Don’t let your guard down. Your VIP section is going to be interesting tonight.

-J

“Fuck,” I slump back in my chair and look at the ceiling.

Why must my life be so damn complicated?

A knock at my door has me straightening out and clearing my throat.

“Yes,” I call out as I close the email on my screen.

“Bruno, how is the family?” I ask my head of security as he walks into the office and closes the door.

“Blossom said you’re performing tonight?” The disapproving look on his face surprises me, and I cross my arms over my chest.

“And?” If he has a problem with it, tough shit.

“Gianna,” he starts, but I raise my eyebrow at him.

“Sorry, Miss Dragna. Do you think that is wise? I can’t protect you if you’re on the stage.” Ah, this conversation again.

Bruno is twice my age and size. He’s very protective and has proclaimed himself my new father figure, but I constantly need to remind him he’s on my payroll. I didn’t hire him to protect me, just my girls.

“I protect myself. I don’t want to remind you again, Bruno. I’ll be fine. No one will even know it’s me.” I have done several fire acts on stage before, all masked, and no one has a damn clue it’s me.

He nods at me but doesn’t leave.

“Anything else?” I look away to read an invoice from our liquor supplier, and a small box is pushed into my line of sight.

“From the girls. Happy Birthday.” He turns and leaves me sitting, staring at the box that was clearly made by his kids.

I lift the lid slowly. I haven’t been given a physical gift in so long that I forgot to say thank you to him.

Inside the box is a stretch beaded bracelet with my name on it. I smile when I see they spelled it wrong, but it makes it so much more special and precious to me. I wrap it around my wrist with a smile.

“Happy Birthday, Gianna.” I whisper to the empty office.

The phone on my desk rings, and I groan. A boss’ job is never done. I spend the next few hours paying bills, answering my messages, and taking random calls from party promoters. When I glance up at the clock, I realize it’s almost midnight, and I need to get myself ready for my act.

“Showtime.” I take my outfit and disappear into my private bathroom.

Once I’m dressed and my mask firmly in place, I look at the cameras to make sure the coast is clear. I don’t want anyone to see me coming out of my office. After the show, I have a change of clothes in the locker room so I can walk out as myself again without anyone knowing I was ever on the stage.

I walk up the stairs and nearly trip.

I stand at the edge of the stairwell and just stare at him for a moment. He is by far the most handsome man I’ve ever seen. He’s engrossed in a conversation with another man and Blossom, so I inch my way around him before I’m noticed.

I hurry and make my way to the DJ booth. I tap his shoulder, and when he sees me, his eyes widen.

“You ready?” I yell over the music near his ear, and he nods.

“Are you?” He smiles at me, and I shake my head.

Not even in the slightest. I’ve been practicing this sword act for weeks. But tonight, it’ll be a whole lot more dangerous. Twirling swords, I can do with my eyes closed.

Dancing with them on fire? That’s a whole different ballgame.

Read the rest here

One lifetime would never be enough.

Eternally Bound

D Williams

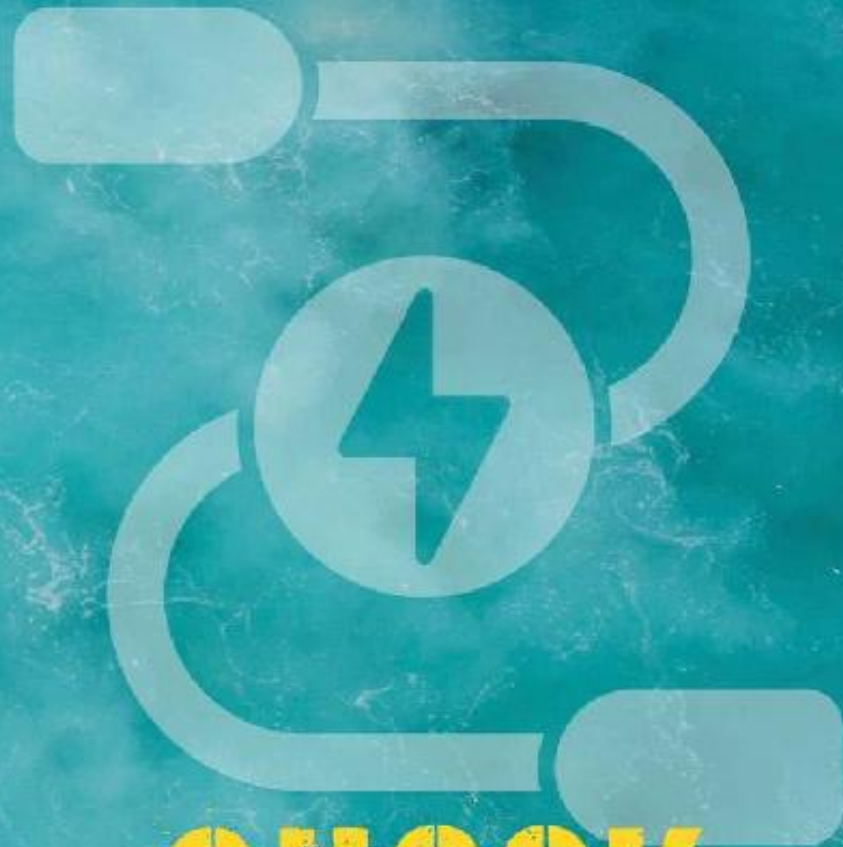


ETERNALLY BOUND, BOOK ONE IN THE ETERNAL LOVE SERIES

Spring break in Europe was supposed to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience with my four best friends. It turns out fate had other ideas. When a fun night out turns dangerous, it lands me in the one place I never expected to be...In bed with a stranger who swears he's my husband. That's not even the most problematic part. I'm not sure he's even human.

Eternal Love comes at a steep price. I'm just not sure if I'm willing to pay for it.

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SHOCK

A MORNINGSTAR MC NOVEL, RENO CHAPTER BOOK SEVEN

D WILLIAMS

SHOCK: A MORNINGSTAR MC NOVEL RENO CHAPTER BOOK 7

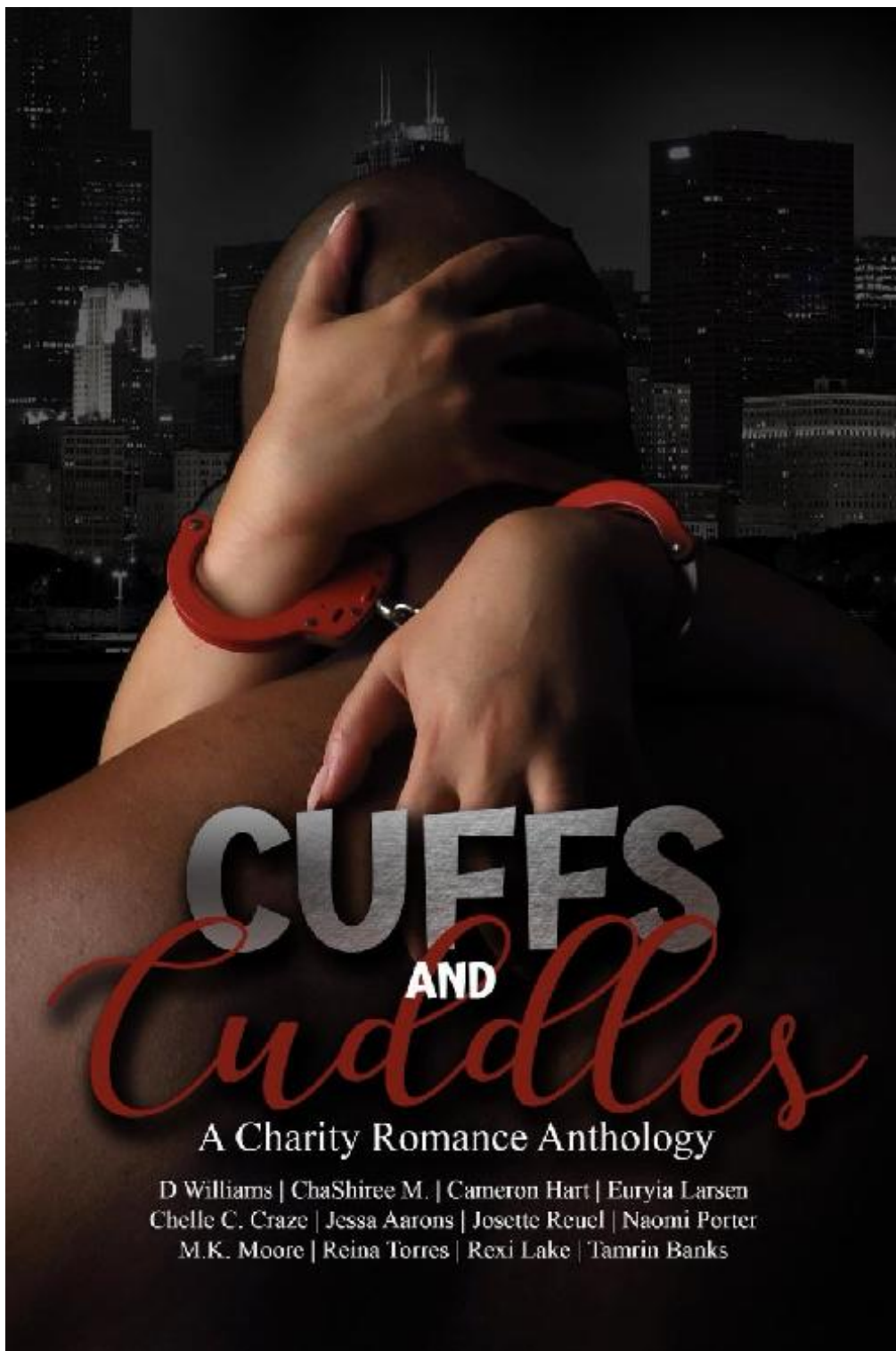
My personality is a direct contrast to my appearance. On the outside, I look like a sweet, innocent woman who wants the perfect nuclear family.

WRONG.

I may look like a blow-up doll that men droll over, but I can break every bone in your body in alphabetical order. And that's my problem. I'm too smart for my own good, with a temper shorter than any measurement known to man.

I don't deal well with authority or stupidity, and it's been getting me in trouble all my life. Most recently, it cost me my job. But more importantly, it has my club worried when I become the target of a mysterious biker who's been stalking me.

When women who match my description keep ending up missing, well, let's say I'm going to put an end to it. One way or another, this serial killer is going to get a SHOCK.



CUFFS AND *Cuddles*

A Charity Romance Anthology

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GRAB THIS CHARITY ANTHOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE OF DADDY, IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK!

Downtown Chicago is a fucking disaster. It's summer, and that means the city is full to bursting with tourists, but even more annoying, college kids here, too, are out at one of a dozen music festivals held every year.

It also means underage kids trying to gain access to my private club, Jax in a Box, the premiere BDSM venue in the Midwest. I, along with my two best friends, started the chain twenty years ago. My club here in Chicago opened first, followed by Maximus's in New York and then Drake's in Los Angeles soon after.

Three clubs in less than five years and still going strong.

There's a two-year waitlist for new members, and the vetting process is intense. We don't just let any rich asshole join. No, a federal background check, psych evaluation, drug, and STD screening are all mandatory during the application process. Once you're in, medical testing is required every six months, drug tests are random, and if you fail, we have a no-tolerance rule.

Banned for life at all three clubs.

Between that, the NDA, and half a million-dollar membership fee, we have kept our clubs safe for all members.

I sit and sip my bourbon as I watch the dungeon below from my office. All the clubs have a similar design. We call them the nest. A three-sixty glass wall around the main play area where we can see every angle of the round room below.

My club was built in an old hotel which we converted. The ballroom is now the main dungeon. The lobby or offices and greeting area. The gym is our changing room and lockers. The second floor was turned into private suites for specialized play, leaving the third floor as my private office and play area.

We hold open houses once a month where nonmembers can come to take classes, watch demos, and get a feel for the club. Our main goal was to try to take the taboo out of the lifestyle. Over the years, we've had a few issues with the locals trying to shut us down, but our reputation is solid.

And so is our legal team, thanks to Maximus.

I sit swirling my drink as the open house rages on below me and sigh. It's been a long time since I indulged myself in the club. Life just got in the way most nights.

How pathetic that I'm surrounded by sex and haven't had any in years. Too many to count or admit to, honestly. My desire died with my young wife. I've had a few one-night stands over the years, but I've always kept it to oral.

I fucking miss pussy. The smell, feel, and taste.

But whenever I've tried with another woman, nothing. I can't keep a hard-on, and it's infuriating. After a while, I just stopped trying. The only time I'm able to climax is in my sleep, and I can never fucking remember the dreams.

My phone buzzes on my desk, and I frown at the display.

Cook County Detention Center

“This is Jaxon Pierce,” I answer on the third ring.

“Mr. Pierce, this is Sergeant Jones of the twentieth police district. Are you acquainted with a young woman by the name of Haley Summer?” I sit up straighter at the sound of my stepdaughter’s name.

A panic I’ve never felt before rushes through my veins, and I drop the glass of liquor I’ve been holding.

“Is she alright?” Why is she even in Chicago?

My parents haven’t called me to say a word about her visiting. Questions fill my mind so quickly that I miss what the officer says.

“I’m sorry. Can you repeat that?” I hear him chuckle, and his amusement turns my panic into rage.

How dare he laugh if there is something wrong with Haley?

“Ms. Summer was arrested tonight in Grant Park. She’s in our drunk tank.” What?

“There must be some kind of mistake. She’s not even twenty-one yet.” I do the math in my head to make sure I haven’t missed more years than I thought.

No, nineteen until October.

“Yeah, well, I’ve found teenagers find a way, sir. Regardless, she needs a ride home.” I stand, patting my pockets for my keys.

“Of course. May I ask, what was she arrested for?” I see my keys on the other side of my desk and snatch them as I grab my suit jacket.

“Indecent exposure.” I stop and blink a few times.


“WHAT!”

Order here

D. WILLIAMS



THE RETURN OF
AVALON

THE KNIGHTS OF CAMELOT  BOOK 1

THE RETURN OF AVALON

CHAPTER ONE

The pub was extra crowded tonight. I could barely move, but as long as I could still lift my arm to my mouth, then I was good to go. The music was so loud I could feel the vibration running from my heels traveling up my spine.

I bounced lightly in place to the beat of the band I didn't recognize, but the tune was lively and the perfect way to celebrate.

I came to Scotland from what was left of America to study Biochemistry and Botany. I'd loved it so much that I never returned. Not that there was much to go home to.

I looked around and realized that most of the village must be here tonight. I feel the pit of my stomach sink, and it's not from all the alcohol I've consumed.

Humankind is dying, and all the scientists in the world haven't been able to stop it. Tonight, all around what is left of the planet Earth, we gather to celebrate life.

The life of the last child born. He's the next big thing to celebrity and the closest thing to royalty in a century.

Twenty-one years today was, the last baby born. Women who conceive are cherished and revered. However, something

terrible has happened to our reproductive health, and no child has served since.

“Get out of your head Gwyn! Here drink this.” I take the shot glass filled with a yellow liquid and raise a toast.

“Slàinte Mhait,” I shout over the music before letting the sweet liquor go down my throat.

“Those are fucking dangerous.” I slam the shot glass on the table and then grip it for support.

The room spins, and I giggle.

“That’s better. No more working tonight. We aren’t going to solve the issues of the world tonight.” I nod at my best friend and coworker, Emily.

She’s been the closest thing to family I’ve had since losing my parents ten years ago. The waiter passes us a tray of more lemon drops, and I reach for my third. I raise it in the air, and we all down them together.

Thunder shakes the pub, and the lights flicker. The band stops playing, and the mood in the pub turns somber. Nothing like Mother Nature to remind you that celebrating life means to also remember death. I sigh and look at Emily.

“Shite, best be heading out, everyone. A mist is rolling in.” Her voice rang clear through the silence that fell around us.

I glance out the pub windows and see the heavy fog that frequently shrouds the highlands. It’s the perfect environment for the moss I’ve been studying in the lab.

I have a hypothesis I am currently testing. I came to Scotland with a purpose. Find the missing piece that has stopped our reproduction and fast because, at the rate we are going, humans will be extinct in sixty years.

What we scientists call Critical Level.

The point of no return. If we don't start having babies again, we are all doomed. We have studied all avenues and exhausted all medical resources. There is something missing in our bodies that is making our wombs inhabitable. Fetuses grow up to week twelve and then stop. Now we have less than ten pregnancies logged a month worldwide.

A once overpopulated planet of over eight billion is now down to a few million. What we didn't destroy in the nuclear war of 2110 has dwindled with what is now known as the Great Barren. Seemed fitting since we lack available farming zones and children.

We are down to thirteen habitable locations. The great cities average around nine hundred thousand people. The numbers are as depressing as the rainy weather I'm looking at coming our way. I shake my head and try to clear the haze from the alcohol so I can walk home.

"LAST CALL!" The bartender yells out, but everyone is slowly exiting, trying to avoid the downpour, for that is sure to start any moment.

"Fuck. I can barely see straight." I mumble as I pull my hood over my long red curls.

My hair loves the humidity so much that it'll swell up to ten times its normal size once the mist hits it. I've lost track of Emily but wave goodbye to my other coworkers as I stumble down the rocky drive toward my tiny cottage.

It's a cute little thing nestled into some overgrown ash trees, but it's close enough to the shore that I can still study the moss that grows by the shoreline.

As I get to my front door, I find a note stuck to it. I pull it down and read my own handwriting back to myself.

Take your drunk ass to collect new samples, or you'll regret it in the morning.

“Sober me has an attitude problem.” I chuckle as I grab the rain boots on my porch and slip my feet into them.

I grab the kit with sample jars, gloves, and various tools, then turn it back into the mist. I walk on the pavers carefully that lead to the ocean behind my cottage. It's a steep, narrow path, but I manage without falling on my ass.

A flash of light blinds me for a moment, and I frown while protecting my face.

“What the fuck?” I squint into the dark, rainy night and see lights up ahead.

I turn on the spot, trying to figure out if I have walked in the wrong direction. There should only be darkness and water in front of me. I dig into my kit and take out my torch. I push the button, and a bright light illuminates the beach a few feet.

I take a step forward without watching my step, and this time the slick paver gets the better of me. I roll down the rest of the path and land hard on my ass in the wet sand.

My kit is gone, and I watch, laughing as the torch rolls away from me. My tailbone protests and I let myself fall backwards to catch my breath.

“Good one, Gwyn. Now crawl your ass over to the rocks and get your sample so we can go home.” I get on my stomach and freeze.

The lights are brighter and getting bigger, heading my way. I scramble to the torch and turn it off, staying low to the sand.

“Fuck the samples.” I start to back away, regretting that last shot.

“I’m hallucinating. There are not six lights hovering above the ocean. Aliens aren’t real. We’d know by now.” I find myself crawling closer instead of away.

“Curiosity is going to kill you, Gwyn,” I whisper to myself as I reach the very edge of the lapping water.

It’s ice cold and helps sober me up some. But not as much as the tall humanoid being standing two feet from my face in the water.

My eyes run up shapely legs and a torso clothed in a rubber-like dark material. It’s completely dry even as it stands in knee-high water with rain coming down.

I swallow hard as I meet a masked face with just a pair of glowing eyes peering down at me. I try to back away, but it has me in its clutches quicker than I can scream.

“Don’t eat me!” I try to cover my face, but a hand stops me.

Huh, five fingers in a black glove. It moves a few steps and places me on my feet in the sand. Those five fingers move slowly to remove the gloves. When the hands are revealed, they look human enough.

I sigh in relief.

“Oh my god! I’m so sorry. I didn’t know there were any exercises going on out here tonight. I had a few drinks at the pub, and boy, do I feel foolish now.” I laugh at my rambling while the hands I watch move to the mask and remove it as well.

My mouth drops open when the most gorgeous man I've ever seen comes into focus. Black hair, blue eyes, chiseled jaw, sharp nose, high cheekbones, pointed ears... Wait, what?

My hand reaches out to move his hair, and screaming starts in a language I've never heard before. He silences them with just a hand gesture.

I'm shaking now, and it's not from the cold. He nods at me, and I push his hair away, and for a single second, my skin touches the point of his ear. His body lights up with iridescent blue tattoos, and I stumble back.

"Not human," I mumble before I start to fall backward.

His arms trap me to his chest, and I try to escape. When the hand on the small of my back meets skin from me trashing around and hitting his chest, I gasp. The tattoos grow brighter, and his eyes turn silver.

"Fuck off, Spock! I don't want to be beamed up." I push on his chest harder, and I feel a growl rumble from his chest before a single word of perfect English falls from his lips.

"SLEEP."

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