



SPIDER

ROYAL BASTARDS MC



International Bestselling Author

K.L. RAMSEY

SPIDER

(A HALLOWEEN NOVELLA-ROYAL
BASTARDS MC: HUNTSVILLE, AL CHAPTER
BOOK 12)

K.L. RAMSEY



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ROYAL BASTARDS CODE

PROTECT: *The club and your brothers come before anything else, and must be protected at all costs. **CLUB** is **FAMILY**.*

RESPECT: *Earn it & Give it. Respect club law. Respect the patch. Respect your brothers. Disrespect a member and there will be hell to pay.*

HONOR: *Being patched in is an honor, not a right. Your colors are sacred, not to be le alone, and **NEVER** let them touch the ground.*

OL' LADIES: *Never disrespect a member's or brother's Ol'Lady. **PERIOD**.*

CHURCH is **MANDATORY**.

LOYALTY: *Takes precedence over all, including well-being.*

HONESTY: *Never **LIE, CHEAT, or STEAL** from another member or the club.*

TERRITORY: *You are to respect your brother's property and follow their Chapter's club rules.*

TRUST: *Years to earn it...seconds to lose it.*

***NEVER RIDE OFF: Brothers do not abandon
their family.***

ROYAL BASTARDS MC SITES

[Royal Bastards MC Facebook Group](#)

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SPIDER

Spider sat in the beat-up old truck that he used when he was working undercover. He hated that heap of shit. God, what he wouldn't give to have his bike, but he couldn't give too much of his real-life away—not with the group of assholes that he was working with. They were the worst of the worst and there was no way that Spider would let any of his true identity out for them to see. He saved riding his bike for days when he knew that he was going to be alone or at least able to fly under the radar. But since the new chain of command was in town, taking over where Chains left off, that wasn't going to happen for a while now.

What he really wanted was a home-cooked meal and a hot shower—and God, he'd kill to be in his own bed for a night. Instead, he was stuck sleeping in his crappy old truck, waiting for orders from the new leader of the Ghosts. Hangman wasn't the most pleasant guy to be around, and Spider usually avoided him at all costs. But when the Ghost's new leader asked for him specifically, he had no choice but to say yes.

When he took this assignment, going undercover for the CIA to bring the Ghosts down from the inside, he knew that he was getting into bed with the devil. He just never knew that removing one devil led to a few others popping up in their stead. Since he had been working undercover, the Ghosts had lost four leaders. Hangman was just the next one up for the job, and Spider wondered what his new so-called boss would have him doing before the end of the night.

Spider caught the shadow moving outside his truck door, and before he could react, Hangman was standing outside his window, holding a gun to his head. “How about you tell me why you’re just sitting here?” Hangman asked. “You were supposed to meet me at the warehouse.”

“That’s not what I was told, boss,” Spider drawled. He was sure that he hadn’t gotten their meeting place mixed up, but he was dog tired and there was always the possibility of a screw-up. He prided himself on always having his head in the game and never fucking directions up. It was what had kept him alive this long, living in two very different worlds. He never felt fully present in his real life anymore. Hell, he had spent so much time undercover with the Ghosts, that he forgot that his other life even existed at all.

“I don’t give a fuck what you thought you were told,” Hangman spat. “Slide over, I’m driving,” he ordered, opening the driver’s side door to Spider’s ancient truck. He didn’t argue, sliding over the bench seat to the passenger side of the truck and buckling his seatbelt into place.

“Where are we going?” Spider asked.

“Back to the fucking warehouse, where you were supposed to be in the first place. We have a new shipment of women being delivered tonight and it’s time for you to earn your paycheck.” Shit—the last thing that his CIA operative told him was that the deal the Ghosts had made, to bring in more women to sell at auction, had been killed.

“You’re getting another shipment?” Spider asked, trying to keep up.

“Yeah, and I need you there to help with them. I know how much you love to babysit our new captives,” Hangman said. Spider fucking hated taking care of the new women that they’d kidnap and bring in for auction. They were all terrified and he had to play the part of the asshole who mistreated them. He hated every fucking second of it if he was being honest. The whole process made him sick, but it was also what kept him going, trying to bring down the Ghosts without getting caught.

“Yep,” Spider agreed, “I just hope that some of them are lookers this time. The last batch wasn’t really my taste.”

“I don’t pay you to fucking taste the merchandise,” Hangman growled. That was a good thing and the only way that Spider stayed under the radar. If they were expected to handle or “Taste” the merchandise, as Hangman said, he would be found out for being a mole because there was no way that he’d be able to bring himself to do that to one of those poor women.

“Got it,” Spider agreed. “No tasting the merchandise. So, how long will they be at the warehouse?” he asked. As long as Hangman had the cells full at the warehouse, Spider would be expected to stay and guard them. If he got lucky this time, they’d be there for more than a few days and he’d be able to get a message to his operative at the CIA. He’d love to finally bust the Ghosts for human trafficking and be able to move on to a new case. It had been over two years that he had been with the Ghosts, and he was beginning to get restless.

“A couple of days and then, I’m thinking of having you move them for me,” Hangman said.

“You want me to move them?” Spider asked. He had never been given such a responsibility before. Hangman usually used his upper guys to move the goods—men who had been with him before he was even a Ghost. He trusted those men and honestly, he had no reason to trust Spider. He shouldn’t trust him because if given the chance, Spider would have his asshole boss behind bars in seconds flat.

“Yeah, Butch is unavailable, and I need you to take the lead on this one,” Hangman said. Shit—Butch was his right-hand guy and if he was off doing another job while the CIA did their raid of the warehouse, they’d never catch all the top players. He’d be the one in charge of the merchandise which meant taking out Hangman would be for nothing. Sooner or later, Butch would take his place, and the cycle would continue. Spider wanted to ask Hangman why him, but that would do him no good. Questioning the boss was never a good idea and would probably end up with him dead in a ditch somewhere. That’s what happened the last time he questioned

his boss. He ended up having to stage his own death, letting his MC brothers think that he was dead for over a year, to be fully initiated into the Ghosts. He had to prove himself and becoming a literal ghost was the requirement.

“You good with that, Spider?” Hangman asked.

“Yeah, I’m good with it,” he lied.

“Great, now let’s haul ass over to the warehouse. I want to get there before the truck arrives. You’ll need to count and assess the girls while I pay the guy.” God, he hated this fucking job, but sooner or later, he’d get his break and bring down Hangman and the entire Ghost organization. He’d just have to be patient, which was not his strong suit.

“Sure, boss,” Spider agreed.

AMELIA

Amelia Goodwell wasn't sure how she had ended up in the back of a truckful of other women, being taken in the middle of the night, but here she was. The last thing she remembered was dancing the night away with her best friend, Sandy, at their favorite little nightclub in town. Her town was so quiet usually that the one nightspot on Main Street really drew a crowd on Friday nights. She and Sandy were supposed to stick together, but she never imagined that she should have her friend follow her to the ladies' room. But going alone was her biggest mistake ever and one that she wasn't sure that she'd live to regret.

She looked around the truck at the other women's faces, noting that she remembered some of them from the club, but didn't really remember any of their names. The one thing she was sure of was that Sandy wasn't in the back of the truck and that meant that her best friend would be involving the authorities to help track her down. It was the thought that she held onto that gave her hope as she spent countless hours bouncing around the back of the truckful of women.

"Where are they taking us?" the scared-looking woman sitting next to her asked. She had been crying for most of the ride—something that Amelia felt like doing herself, but she was practical when it came to things like that. She knew that crying would do her absolutely no good.

"I don't know," she admitted.

A woman sat up in the corner of the truck and moaned, grabbing her head. “I think someone put something in my drink,” she slurred. That much was very clear to Amelia. She felt like her skull was going to split open and every time she tried to focus, her stomach roiled in discomfort, and she felt about ready to puke. She had never personally been roofied before, but she was pretty sure that this was the way that it felt.

“Why would someone do this to us?” the woman next to her cried. She had no answer for her again, but she wished that she did. Amelia looked around the truck again and realized that all the women in there with her were of a certain age— young, and attractive. It crossed her mind that whoever took them was going to do something unspeakable with all of them, but how could that be? She had heard of things like this happening to other women but never imagined that it would happen to her. Things like this didn’t happen to women like her.

Amelia was a lowly personal assistant at a local law firm. Her life was quite boring compared to other women she knew. Hell, she spent most of her free nights at home, in her pajamas, watching some lame television show until she was tired enough to go to bed. She was the most boring twenty-two-year-old that she knew. The only time she really broke out of her shell was when she and Sandy would go to the club to let off some steam.

The truck stopped and the woman next to her whimpered. Amelia reached for her hand and held it in her own, trying to silently let her know that everything was going to be okay, even if she had a sick feeling that it wasn’t. The back doors of the truck swung open to reveal three big men, all mean-looking and pointing guns at the women.

“Let’s go, ladies,” one of the men shouted at them.

“Where are we?” someone from the back of the truck asked.

“You keep your fucking mouths shut, and no one will get hurt,” another man warned. Amelia didn’t quite believe that their silence would guarantee their safety, but she also knew

when to keep her mouth shut. It was a skill that she learned at an early age.

Her father wasn't the easiest man to get along with. He drank too much and when he did, he was mean. He liked to slap her mother around, and when she finally took off, leaving Amelia with her alcoholic father, he decided that she'd do in a pinch. She became a punching bag for her old man and took his punishment until she was old enough to high tail it out of there. That was when she learned that silence was golden, even if it didn't always stop her father from hitting her.

"Now, I'm going to say this one more time, ladies," the first man spat. "Let's go." She stood, knowing that he wasn't going to give her or any of the other women another chance to comply.

Another truck pulled up next to the men holding guns at the women, and two more men jumped out. The one driving looked to be the one in charge. He started barking orders as soon as he got out of the old truck. The second guy looked the women in the truck over and seemed a little bit green by the whole scene. If she wasn't mistaken, she noted a hint of pity in his dark eyes and that surprised the hell out of her. None of the other men looked at the women that way. They seemed to look straight through them, not really even seeing them. Maybe it was easier for the men that way. They wouldn't have to think of the women as human beings, but as objects that needed to be moved at any cost.

"Where are you taking us?" another woman asked as she stepped down from the truck. One of the guards backhanded her and she yelped, falling to the concrete ground.

"Anyone else have a question?" he asked the group. Of course, no one else spoke up. No one dared after the woman was helped up from the floor, holding her jaw, whimpering in pain. The other women were smart enough to keep their mouths shut.

"Good, let's move," another guard shouted. The women filed into a single line and walked into the warehouse silently.

Wherever they were going, Amelia was pretty sure that none of them were going to like their final destination.

They lined up the women in front of cages and she was sure that she had correctly guessed how much she was going to hate what came next. “In,” the third guard shouted. Some of the women cried and shook their heads, but Amelia knew that none of that would help save her from the inevitable. She was going to have to get into the disgusting cage behind her, just like all the others.

Amelia stepped into the cage and the guard with kind eyes looked in at her and nodded, as if actually thanking her for her compliance. She shrugged, “No use in fighting,” she whispered more to herself than to him. “You do have a gun.” She nodded to the semi-automatic he was holding, pointed in her direction.

“Smart girl,” the guy drawled, walking over to the next woman in line, and demanding her compliance. She didn’t give it as willingly as Amelia had. He forced her into the cage next to Amelia’s and she fell to the dirty concrete floor. He shouted at the woman that she needed to learn her place as she scooted across the floor to the back corner of the cage. Amelia wasn’t sure how they had all landed in this hell, but she was sure of one thing—it was going to get worse, and as much as she didn’t want to admit it, no one was going to come to their rescue. They were lost women now and no one would be looking for them.

SPIDER

Spider had to spend the rest of the day at the warehouse when all he wanted to do was go home, shower, and sleep in his own bed. The women that they had brought in were scared out of their minds, and rightfully so. He wished he had the intel that he needed to bring the Ghosts down, but that was going to take time and a hell of a lot of luck. For now, his job was to stick close to the warehouse, keep an eye on the women, and move them when Hangman gave the order. His new boss just wasn't going to like where he moved them to, because there was no way that he was going to deliver them to be sold at auction.

Spider stood over the warehouse, standing on the second level where Hangman's office was, watching the women in their cages down below. He hated this part of the fucking job. He wanted to call in a raid and have the whole damn operation torn down, giving these women a fighting chance to get back to their lives, but that wasn't how things worked in the CIA. No, his higher-ups would want him to wait until they had all the major players in town to order a raid. With Butch missing, he knew that shutting down the Ghosts would be pointless. He might be able to put Hangman behind bars, but Butch would eventually take over and his job wouldn't be over. In fact, the vicious cycle would just start all over again, just as it had before.

When he was a young agent, he thought that bringing down at least one of the key players in a trafficking ring was good enough, but he soon learned that wasn't true. He would

just have to go undercover time and time again, watching one kingpin fall only to be released by another. Some days, he really hated his job but then, they'd bring in another shipment of women and he'd remember why he did it. If he could save just a handful of those women, it would make it all worth it.

Most of the women were sleeping except for the one in the last cage—the one who was smart enough to comply without asking any questions. She was the one who did as she was told and even said that it wasn't worth fighting because the guards all had guns. He was right to call her a smart woman—she was, but he could also see the fight she still had left, staring back at him in her dark eyes. He knew that if given the chance, she'd fight like hell for her freedom, and he had to admit he admired her for it.

He watched her as she raised her hand, almost the way a kid in grade school would do to ask a question.

“What?” one of the guys on the floor growled at her.

“Um, I need to use the bathroom,” she loudly whispered. “I feel sick.” The guy sighed and looked up at Spider as if asking him what he should do.

“It's fine,” Spider shouted back. “I'll come down and take her to the bathroom so that you won't have to leave your post.” The last thing any of them needed was to clean up both a cell and the woman after she got sick. It was easier to just give in and take her to the bathroom than to deal with that shit.

The guy nodded back up at Spider as he started down the metal steps to the warehouse floor below. He'd run the woman to the bathroom and then, hopefully, she'd be able to settle down and he could get some shut eye. He unlocked and opened her cage and she stood from her cot. “Let's go,” he ordered.

“Thank you,” she whispered, breezing past him. She was dressed as though she had spent the night before out at a club. Her dark eyeliner had smeared down her face, letting him know that she had been crying at some point in this ordeal and why wouldn't she? This had to be the worst thing that ever happened to her. She tugged at the short, tight, black leather

miniskirt that she wore, and he noted that her stockings were torn in a few different places. She had to be freezing in her tank top and short skirt, but Hangman didn't offer the women a change of clothes or even a warm blanket.

The woman walked in front of him as he barked directions at her as to where the bathroom was. The warehouse was an open room but once off the warehouse floor, the hallways became mazes, and he had trouble finding his way through them on his good days.

"I'd love to say that I'll be quick, but I'm afraid that this might take a minute," she said, not bothering to turn back to face him.

"Just hurry up," he grumbled. "If you take too long, the other guys will wonder what the hell is going on and come to find us."

"Does that happen often?" she asked. "You know—guys taking women to the bathroom and taking too long with them?" He knew what she was asking, and he wasn't about to give her an answer. If the women knew that the guards weren't allowed to touch them, they'd find some way to rebel knowing that there would be no ramifications.

"Just go to the bathroom and hurry the hell up," he ordered. She nodded and walked into the ladies' room. Hangman had the door removed, worried that the women would spend time hiding away back in the bathroom and Spider wouldn't blame them. It had to be hell knowing that they were going back to a cold, damp cage, and an unknown future. Most of the women knew that they were being trafficked, but some were so young, they had no clue as to what was about to happen to them.

Spider leaned against the wall and pulled his cellphone from his pocket, wanting to check his work emails. He knew that the internet was spotty in this part of the building, but it was the safest place to check-in. There were no prying eyes on him, and Hangman wasn't looking over his shoulder to make sure that he was doing what he was supposed to do.

“You about done in there?” he asked, realizing that he wasn’t going to be able to log into his work email account. He’d have to wait until he had a few minutes of privacy in his bunk to log in. He turned to find her standing next to him, holding what looked like a stump of wood in her hands.

“Yeah, I’m done,” she said. She swung the stump at his head, and he ducked.

“What the hell are you doing?” he breathed.

“Getting out of here,” she said.

“There’s no way out of here,” he shouted. “Even if you do manage to land a blow with that thing, you’ll never find your way out of here.”

“I’ll take my chances,” she said, swinging the plank of wood at his head again. This time, she followed it up with a jab to the stomach and when he doubled over, she hammered him in the jaw and then finished him off with a thrust to the skull. He saw stars and knew that he wasn’t going to be able to keep from passing out. He fell back against the wall and slumped to the floor, cursing himself for playing the fool as his world went dark. He could have called for help, but that would have only gotten the woman killed and that wasn’t something he could risk, even if she was being a total bitch.

The last thing he remembered seeing was the woman dropping the wood to the ground, pulling his gun from his hands, and taking off down the hallway. He tried to tell her that she didn’t have to do this—that he’d help her, but why would she believe him? She had no reason to and that was the very last thought he had before he passed out.

Spider woke when the cold water that Hangman poured on him felt like a literal slap in the damn face. “Wake the fuck up,” Hangman growled.

“What happened?” Spider asked, grabbing his head, and groaning at the pain he felt from just that simple gesture.

“You let my product escape,” Hangman shouted. “You were supposed to take her to the fucking bathroom and back to her cage. Instead, you let that woman best you, and now, she’s gone.”

Spider stood from the floor, still holding his throbbing head, and stared Hangman down. “She’s gone?” he asked. A part of him was happy that she was able to escape, but he knew that wasn’t what Hangman wanted from him. He expected him to grovel and beg him for another chance, and that was just what Spider was going to do.

“She’s gone,” Hangman repeated, “she left through the side door that someone left unlocked. You know anything about that?” he asked. Spider knew all about it since he was the one who had left the door unlocked. It was his way out in case of an emergency. He knew that shit could go sideways fast, and he needed an escape route, just in case.

“No idea why someone left the side door unlocked,” Spider lied. Hangman looked him over as though he could see straight through him, and he knew that he was going to have to do some fast talking to get out of this mess. “I’ll go after her, boss.”

“Damn straight you’ll go after her,” Hangman yelled, “and if you come back here without her, you’ll pay for your stupidity.” He wasn’t sure how Hangman planned on making him pay, but he had a pretty good idea that it would involve a whole lot of pain and unnecessary violence.

“Got it,” Spider said. “I’ll check in soon,” he assured. He didn’t have any plans to check back in with Hangman because there was no way that he’d be able to bring that woman back to the warehouse. He knew that either way, he was probably dead. Hangman wasn’t the kind of boss who gave second chances, not even if Spider was lucky enough to find the woman and bring her back. He fucked up and his new boss wasn’t going to let him live to regret it.

AMELIA

Amelia knew that her luck wouldn't last and that sooner or later, someone would find the guy she knocked out and come after her. The problem was that she had no idea where she was and had nothing except the dirty clothes on her back and her determination to try to find someone to help her.

"You look lost," a homeless man called to her from a bench by the street. She knew that he might be her only hope in gaining her freedom, but she also didn't like the way that he looked her body over. It was almost as though he could see straight through what little clothing she was wearing.

"I am lost," she called back to him, not daring to close the distance between them. "You wouldn't by chance have a cell phone that I could borrow to make a call, would you?" she asked.

"No," he breathed, "but if you can spare a few dollars, I'd be happy to show you out of this God-awful city. You don't look like you belong here."

"Can you tell me what city this is?" she asked.

"You really don't know where you are, do you?" he asked.

"No, as I've already said, I'm lost," she reminded. "What city is this?"

"You're in Birmingham," he said. "Where are you from?"

"Huntsville," she admitted. The drive felt like it took a little over an hour, and she was right. She just had no idea

which direction they were driving in or where they ended up.

“You’re a long way from Huntsville. Are you parked around here?” he asked.

She looked around, as if trying to actually spot her car, and laughed to herself. What the hell was wrong with her? Her car was back at the club where she had left it the night before. She wasn’t going to find it sitting on the street corner around Birmingham.

“Um, yeah,” she lied. “I think it’s parked on the next street over. Thanks for the help. I think I just got a little bit turned around. Have a good night,” she called to the man. He nodded at her from the bench, and she turned to leave. Amelia was going to have to find an open business—a restaurant or gas station, and she wasn’t sure that she’d get that lucky at this time of night. Hell, she wasn’t even sure what time it was. It was dark, but that was about all she had to go by since her kidnappers took her cellphone from her when they drugged and took her.

She walked as fast as she could over to the next street and looked back to make sure that no one was following her, breathing a sigh of relief when she saw the homeless guy still sitting on the bench. Amelia turned the corner and walked into what felt like a brick wall. She almost fell to the ground, but the brick wall wrapped his arms around her body and pulled her close. She looked up into the man’s eyes and realized that it was the same guy she had just knocked out back at the warehouse.

“Don’t scream,” he ordered.

“Why wouldn’t I scream?” she asked. “If you’re going to take me back to that place, I’ll scream my head off trying to stop you. I won’t go back willingly.” She had been compliant when they unloaded her and the other women, but she had a leg up this time. Amelia had taken the guy’s gun and there was no way that she’d allow him to take her back to that cage.

“Because I’m here to help you,” he whispered. The guy looked around as though he expected someone to be watching him and if she wasn’t mistaken, he looked a bit nervous about

their encounter on the street. “We can’t stay out here. Anyone could see us.”

“I’m not going with you,” she spat, tugging her arm from his hand. “I’ve got your gun if you’ve forgotten, and I know how to use it.” That was a total lie. As a personal assistant at a local law firm, she really didn’t have much cause to fire a weapon, but there was no way that she’d tell him that.

“I haven’t forgotten,” he grumbled. “In fact, it’s pretty embarrassing that I let you best me.”

“You let me best you?” she asked. “As I remember, you were laying on the floor passing out, quite helpless. You didn’t let me do anything.”

“Listen, we can fight about this all you want once we get out of here. But Hangman and the others already don’t trust me. They’ll be looking for both of us and if they find us, they’ll probably kill us both.”

“Probably?” she questioned. “I’m sure that they will kill me. I mean, I’m sure that they had something else in mind for me, but I turned out to be trouble, so they’ll want to cut their losses.” She looked him over as if to dare him to tell her that she was wrong, but he didn’t.

“You’re right,” he agreed with her, “they will kill you, but once they find out that I’m CIA, I’m as good as dead too.”

“Wait—you’re a CIA agent?” she asked.

“Yes, and that’s why I need you to trust me enough to get us both off this damn street. I need to call my boss and find out what he wants me to do next,” he said.

“You have to ask what you should do next with me?” she asked. She had a few suggestions—most of them involved him letting her go.

“Not exactly. I need to find out if your escaping ends my undercover work with the Ghosts or if I should chance going back in,” he admitted.

“I’m not going back into that place,” she insisted. There was no way that she was going to step foot in that hell hole

ever again. It didn't matter what the CIA told him to do with her. She just wanted to go home.

"Listen, I won't tell anyone what happened to me, but I just want to go home," she said.

"You can't do that," the guy insisted. "You really need to get looked at. You've been through quite a trauma. Then, I'll have to find you a safe place to lie low. The Ghosts know everything about you—including where you live and who you live with."

"I live alone," she said.

"Right, and they won't hesitate to come and take you back to the warehouse, knowing that there is no one to stop them from taking you again. But this time, they won't just let you sit in a cage with the rest of the women. They'll make an example out of you."

"An example out of me?" she repeated. Amelia could just imagine what he meant by that.

"Yeah, and you won't want that," he insisted.

"I'm sure that I won't," she agreed. "So, what next?" Amelia was putting her trust in a man who was holding her prisoner just an hour ago. Maybe trusting the bad guy, just because he insisted that he was a good guy, wasn't her best move, but what other choice did she have? None—she had no other choice and that just plain sucked.

"Next, we get out of here before Hangman sends some of his other guys after me. If they find us here, I won't be able to help you."

She looked him over and nodded. "I'd like to at least know your name," she insisted.

"It's Spider," he said, holding out his hand to her. She looked at it as if it offended her in some way, but decided to take his peace offering, shaking his hand.

"I'm Amelia," she said. "Don't make me regret trusting you, Spider," she almost whispered.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” he assured. He grabbed her hand into his own and tugged her along down a side street to where his old truck was waiting. “We’re going to take my truck out of town, and then, we’ll have to stop so that I can pull the tracker off and leave it for Hangman to find. I’m pretty sure that Hangman has put a tracker on this old thing.”

“Boy, he really doesn’t trust you, does he?” Amelia asked.

“Not one bit,” he agreed, “but that’s my problem. Right now, we need to get out of here. Hop in,” he said, holding the passenger side door open. She hesitated and then did as he ordered. What other choice did she have? None, but that wasn’t going to stop her from taking off as soon as she was clear of the present danger chasing her down. She’d find a way to escape from this guy and every other man after her who wanted to put her back in that awful cage, because she never planned on going back there again.

SPIDER

Spider knew that it was only a matter of time before Hangman sent some of his men after him and Amelia. If he found the two of them together, he'd kill them. First, he needed to find a safe place to stash Amelia, and then, he was going to have to contact his boss at the CIA and figure out what to do next.

After ditching the tracker that he found on his truck, he drove out of the city and headed to the only place he could think of to take her. "Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"Someplace safe," he said. He just hoped like hell that it was the truth. As far as he knew, Hangman and the other guys hadn't connected him to Savage Hell or the Royal Bastards.

"I'd like more information," she insisted. "I mean, I am trusting you, so maybe you could trust me and give me some straight answers," Amelia insisted. She was right, he owed her more than the bland answers he was giving her.

"Yeah, sorry," he sighed. "I'm taking you to a biker bar, just on the outskirts of town. It's called Savage Hell. My club, the Royal Bastards meet there, and I think that we can get some help while we're there."

"You're taking me to a biker bar?" she squeaked.

He couldn't help his smile. "Yes, and as bad as that sounds, the guys there are like my family and will help us out."

“They don’t work for the guys who took me?” she questioned.

“No,” he choked, “they might look a little rough around the edges, but—”

“Like you?” she interrupted.

“Yeah, like me. I know that I look a little bit scary, but I promise, I’m not a part of the men who took you,” he insisted.

“You’ll have to forgive me if I don’t by the whole CIA excuse,” she said. “I mean, I let you take me out of the city, but I’m not buying that you are a part of the CIA. Why would you let me, and those other women sit in our cages and not help us if you’re a part of the CIA? Shouldn’t you have tried to help us or call in some backup?”

“It’s not that simple,” Spider grumbled.

“Sure, it is,” she insisted. “If you’re really a good guy, you could have saved us all and put those horrible men in jail, but instead, you helped them. You held us at gunpoint and if I’m not mistaken, you were the one who put me into my cage.” She was right about that but telling her so wasn’t going to help his case very much.

“I’ve been undercover with the Ghosts for a long time now. I couldn’t risk blowing my cover by helping you and all those women.”

“Blow your cover?” she questioned. “You were worried about blowing your cover while human beings were suffering?”

“Don’t say it that way,” he said. “I’m doing this to take down trafficking rings like the Ghosts. I’m trying to stop another woman from ever being taken from her life and her family, but I can’t do that without some sacrifices,” he said. God, saying those words out loud really made him sound like an ass. He loved his job, but he hated watching the women suffer. It was the part of his work that gave him nightmares and the one part that he’d change if he could.

“You were willing to sacrifice me and those women to further your career,” she spat.

“You don’t know me,” he shouted back at her. “I’m not sacrificing anyone. I’m trying to bring down the major players in the trafficking ring so that women don’t have to suffer anymore.”

“I think that we’re just going to have to agree to disagree, Spider,” she muttered. “If that’s even your name.”

“It’s my biker’s name. My real name is Nick Delgado,” he said. He really never told anyone his real name—not even the guys at Savage Hell and he considered them his brothers.

“I’d say that it’s nice to meet you, Nick, but that would be a complete lie. I wish that I never laid eyes on you. Hell, I wish that I never went out to that night club. If I hadn’t, I’d be home right now, living my quiet life in my little apartment and not worried that I’m putting my trust in a con man.”

“I’m not a fucking con man,” he shouted. She clenched her fists, and he could tell that she was holding back, not saying what she wanted to say to him. “I’m sorry that I yelled, but I just need a little bit of trust. I just want to help you.” Amelia crossed her arms over her chest, and he could tell that he was just not getting through to her at all. The only way that she was going to believe him was if he proved himself to her, and the only way to do that was to keep her word and keep her safe.

“Trust has to be earned,” she said as if reading his thoughts.

“Right, and that’s why I’m going to get the guys from my club involved,” he said. “They’ll help us.”

“Oh, so now, we’re an us?” she asked.

“That’s not what I meant,” he grumbled. He had a feeling that no matter what he said, he’d never win her over. His only option was to quit trying and just get them to Savage Hell as quickly as possible. He was sure that once he was there, she’d see that his brothers were good guys, even if she didn’t want to admit it.

They got to the bar later that night, and he was sure that he'd never seen the parking lot so full. "This is the bar?" she asked as he parked his old truck in the back corner of the lot.

"Yep," he said, "listen, the guys can be a bit rough, but they are all good guys."

"Sure, they are probably saints," she grumbled unbuckling her seatbelt.

He couldn't help his chuckle. "Just stick by me and you'll be fine." She shot him a look and even had the nerve to roll her eyes at him before opening her door to get out of his truck.

Spider hopped out of the driver's seat and found Savage, his club's Prez, standing by the back door entrance, which usually meant trouble. He grabbed Amelia's hand, ignoring her protests about him man handling her, and made his way over to Savage. "What's up?" he asked, forgoing the pleasantries. Ryder, Demon, and Bowie pushed through the back door and Spider's stomach did a flip-flop. If this many guys were meeting him in the back alley, that meant trouble. Demon was the club's enforcer and the only witness from the Royal Bastards to see his supposed demise. The Ghosts made it look like he had died in a bike crash, and he hated doing that to his friend, but Demon witnessed the whole thing. He was the one who had reported back to the club that Spider was dead. He had no other option if he wanted the Ghosts to believe that he was one of them. He needed to prove himself to them and that meant that he'd have to lie to his brothers in his club. It sucked, but he had no other choice.

"Well, this can't be good," Spider mumbled to himself.

"It's not," Savage said. "The Ghosts have been here most of the night. I believe that they are looking for her, and well, since she's with you, I'm sure that they'll want to bring you in too. Your new boss, Hangman even showed up here himself."

"Fuck," Spider swore. "How the hell did they trace me back to you guys?"

“Through me,” Demon admitted. “If you remember, I was there when you died, and they know who I am. I guess they put two and two together and realized that you’re a Royal Bastard.”

“Wait—you’re dead?” Amelia asked him.

“Not the takeaway right now,” Spider grumbled. “The Ghosts have found us and if they know that I have you, they’ll kill us both.”

“I thought you said that they’d take me back to my cage,” she reminded.

“Shit—she’s one of the women that they traffic?” Ryder asked. Bowie crossed his arms over his massive chest and Spider knew that he’d need to start explaining quickly if he didn’t want the pounding of his life.

“She was brought into the warehouse this morning with a truckful of other women. I had no idea that we were getting another shipment. My CIA contacts didn’t warn me, probably because they had no clue. The new boss, Hangman, is shaking things up and trying to figure out who he can and can’t trust. I guess I failed the test because here I am.”

“How did you get her out of there?” Savage asked, nodding to Amelia.

“He didn’t get me out of that hell hole,” Amelia almost shouted at the big guy. She didn’t seem to be intimidated by anyone and the thought of her standing up to Savage made Spider feel some kind of pride that he had no right to feel. “I got myself out and he followed me.”

“I was told to take her to the bathroom and well, she got the best of me,” Spider admitted. “I’d love to say that I wasn’t beaten by a girl, but I was.”

“You were beaten by a woman,” she said. “I haven’t been a girl for a long time.” The guys all chuckled, and she smiled up at Spider as if she had won some sort of prize.

“Right,” he mumbled. “She got the jump on me and headed out through a side door that I had left open in case in

needed a quick escape from the Ghosts. Hangman found me and told me not to come back without her, or else.”

“We’re aware of what the Ghosts do to people who betray them,” Bowie agreed. “What’s the plan? You can’t go in there because Hangman left some of his guys here to keep an eye out for you and her.”

“I figured,” Spider admitted. “I was hoping that you guys would be willing to give us a hand, but if the Ghosts catch onto you helping me, they won’t hesitate to come after you and your families.”

“None of us give a fuck about that,” Savage said. “If you need our help, you’ve got it.”

“Yeah, we have a Halloween party going on right now, but after I run my Ol’ lady home, I can fly you guys anywhere you might like to go.” Spider hadn’t thought about flying Amelia anywhere, but maybe that might be for the best. If the Ghosts had tracked him down to the Royal Bastards, his cover would be blown. There would be no way that he’d be able to go back into the warehouse now. The best thing he could do was have Ryder fly them someplace safe and then, he’d check in with his contacts at the CIA to let them know what happened.

“We’ll take you up on your offer,” Spider agreed.

“Now wait a minute,” Amelia protested, “you can’t just expect me to get on a plane and disappear with you. I don’t even know you. Up until an hour ago, you were one of my kidnappers. I want to go home, and I think that I should call the authorities about what happened to me.”

Savage chuckled, “You do know that he’s the authorities, right?” he asked.

“She knows, but she’s convinced that I’m not being honest with her,” Spider said.

“Well, can you blame me?” Amelia asked. “I just want to go home.”

“You can’t do that,” Demon insisted. “The Ghosts know where you live, and you won’t be safe. Your best bet is to stick close to Spider and he’ll keep you safe.” Amelia looked Spider

over as if sizing him up and shook her head as if she found him wanting. He wondered if she ever would, but that would be a problem for another day. Right now, his only worry was how he'd keep her safe and keep both of them off of the Ghost's radar.

AMELIA

The last thing Amelia wanted to do was run away from her troubles, but the guys were right—she couldn't go home. She also didn't want to fly to the ends of the earth trying to hide from the men who took her. It would feel like she was still living in a cage, not having any control over what was happening to her or where she was being taken.

“Where are you planning on taking me?” she asked.

“Wherever Ryder wants to fly us,” Spider said.

“We have a few safe houses around the country. Honestly, we just need to get you out of town. How about we give you a few places and you can pick?” Savage asked.

“You'd do that?” she asked.

“Of course,” Bowie said. “We don't want to do anything to upset you, Amelia. You've already been through so much.”

“We just want to keep you safe,” Spider added. “Will you let me keep you safe?” he asked. She wasn't sure that she trusted him, but she needed him. She needed all their help if she was going to get out of town.

“Yes,” she breathed, “thank you.”

“Great, I can be back here in fifteen minutes. Will that give you guys enough time to be ready to leave?” Ryder asked.

“Um, I was hoping to be able to run back to my place to pack a bag or two,” Amelia admitted.

“Like we’ve said, the Ghosts will be waiting for you there,” Bowie reminded.

“I won’t have anything to wear or be able to change out of these disgusting clothes,” she said, looking down at her body. “I just want a shower and clean clothes.”

“I’ll make sure that you get both of those things,” Spider promised.

“You look to be about the same size as our wife,” Savage said. “Bowie, can you run home and ask Dallas to get Amelia some things together?”

“Sure, I’ll be back in fifteen minutes too,” Bowie promised. “You need some things too, Spider?” he asked.

“No, I keep a to go back in my truck, just in case things go sideways,” he said. “I’m good.” Bowie nodded and left through the back door of the bar. Amelia shivered when the cool night air hit her and Spider wrapped his arm around her, pulling her close.

“You cold?” he asked. She wasn’t wearing much in the way of clothes and the nights were getting chilly. She remembered being cold when she went to the club two nights ago. That seemed so long ago now, and it seemed silly to be complaining about something as trivial as being cold after everything that she had been through.

“I’ll be fine,” she lied. Amelia wasn’t sure if she’d ever be fine again, but she was trying to keep herself together. When she was alone, she’d break down, but not right now in front of everyone.

The guys had given her a few choices and she chose the one that would keep them closest to home, but still far enough that the Ghosts wouldn’t be able to track them. “Are you sure that Gatlinburg will be safe for us?” she asked Spider. He was sitting next to her on the private plane that Ryder was flying them to Tennessee on.

“I’m sure,” he promised. “One of our old club brothers, Repo, moved to Gatlinburg a few years ago. He’s a good guy and we can trust him. He’s arranged a house for us and will make sure that we have everything that we need while we are there.” That was the question hanging in the air between them—how long they’d be on the run. She was almost afraid to ask, but she needed to know.

“How long will we be away from home?” she asked.

He shrugged, “Don’t know, really. I’ve reached out to my boss at the CIA, but he’s just trying to figure out our next move. He’s planning on sending in a few new guys to go undercover with the Ghosts, but he can’t rush into that. If Hangman knows about me being undercover with the CIA, then he will be leery about taking on new guys right now. They will have to be inducted slowly and that could mean that we’ll be on the run for a while—a few months at least.”

“Months,” she squealed, “I thought that we’d be gone for a few days—maybe a week or two at most, but not months.”

“I’m sorry, but it’s better to be safe than sorry. I know Hangman and I can tell you that he won’t just let my betrayal go and he’ll assume that you’re with me and his wrath will include you now too. We need to stay away from home until the CIA can bring down the whole trafficking ring, then, we’ll be able to go back to our lives.” She nodded as if she understood, but nothing about this horrible situation was understandable. “I just hope that they can come up with a plan soon. Why can’t they just go in, rescue the women in there, and arrest all those horrible men?”

“It’s not that simple,” he said. “You see, Hangman is just the current guy in charge. If he’s taken out of play, then Butch will just take his place and the problem right now is that no one knows where Butch is.”

“So, if you cut off one head, another just grows in its place,” she said.

“Correct, and there’s not much we can do about it,” he said, “besides wait for all parties to show up at the warehouse, and then, we can collect them all in one raid.”

“That could take forever,” she grumbled.

“Patience is a virtue,” he reminded.

“You don’t know me well enough to understand this about me, but I’m not the most patient person. I guess my virtue could use a little bit of help,” she teased.

“Somehow, I doubt that,” he said. Spider reached across the arm rest, putting his hand over hers and she thought about pulling it free from his, but having him touching her that way felt right. He made her feel safe, even if she didn’t want to admit it, she was beginning to see that she could trust him. When he found her on the sidewalk, she thought for sure that he was going to drag her back to that awful warehouse to be tossed back into her cage. But then, he took her to his club and got some help, whisking her out of town to safety. He had kind of become her savior and she had enough experience with knights in shining armor to know how to steer clear of them.

“You don’t seem like the type of girl that has to worry about her virtue,” he said.

“Again, you don’t know me very well yet.”

“Well, we’ll have lots of time to change that,” he said. She wondered if he meant what he said—did he really want to get to know her better, or was he just being polite? There was only one way that she was going to find out and that was to start asking questions to get to know him, and her motto was that there was no time like the present.

“Do you have any family that you need to check in with? You know, let them know that you’re going out of town for work or anything like that?” she asked.

“Family?” Spider asked.

“You know—like a wife or girlfriend?” she asked. Yeah, she wasn’t good at being subtle, but she needed to know if he was attached before she made a complete fool of herself.

“Um, no,” he breathed. “I’m not involved with anyone. I make it a rule to not get involved with the women that I go out with. Hell, I guess I can’t even call it going out.”

“You mean, you don’t date?” she asked.

“No,” he said, “I haven’t dated since I was in high school.”

“That must get pretty lonely,” she breathed.

“It’s not like that,” he grumbled. “Listen, not that it’s any of your business, I usually pick up women at the bar and take them home for a night.” She held up her hand, essentially stopping him from telling her the rest.

“I can piece the rest of it together, thank you,” she said. She didn’t need to hear about him having sex with bar flies and then dumping them after one night. She had never had a one-night stand in her whole life.

“You understand, right?” he asked. “I mean, you said that you were at a club when the Ghosts picked you up.”

“Yeah, but I wasn’t at the club to pick up a guy and have a one-night stand,” she insisted. “I was there to have some fun, dance, and blow off some steam.”

“Have you ever had a one-night stand?” he asked as if reading her thoughts.

“Not that it’s any of your business,” she said, giving him back his words, “No, I have not.” He chuckled and pulled his hand from hers. “It’s not funny,” she insisted.

“I’m not laughing at you,” he said. “I just think that it’s funny how you said it—as if one-night stands are such an awful thing.”

“Well, not awful, but I don’t think that they’re for me,” she said. “I mean, I can’t separate feelings from sex, I guess. I mean, I haven’t been in love with every man that I’ve had sex with, but I’ve at least had feelings for each one of them.”

“For me, feelings make things mess. In my line of work, I can’t let my feelings get mixed into things. It’s what could get me killed. Hell, it’s what could get a lot of people killed. So, I keep things like feelings out of my relationships and just take what I need from the women willing to give it to me. If that makes me sound like an ass, so be it,” he said. “How about

you—any family that we should get word to that you're okay?"

"No," she said knowing that he was changing the subject. "Just a friend, who was at the club with me. Can someone let her know that I'm okay?" she asked.

"Sure, just get me her name and number and I'll have someone from the CIA call her," Spider said.

"Thank you," Amelia breathed. "I appreciate you doing that for me. Honestly, I appreciate everything that you've done for me, Spider. I know that I didn't seem grateful at first, but I am. Thank you."

"Anytime," Spider said, "thanks for trusting me. I know that it couldn't have been easy with everything that you've been through."

"I know that I should be more upset about being abducted and thrown into a cage, but I got lucky. I was able to get out of there before anything bad happened to me," she said.

"I don't know," he breathed, "I think that being taken and put into a cage isn't so lucky."

"Well, I got out of there before they could sell me off to some disgusting pig at auction. Those other women that we left behind might not be so lucky. I don't know, I just don't feel like a victim. I feel like I want to fight for those other women before they become victims."

"I promise to do everything that I can to help make sure that those women aren't sold off at auction," he said.

"How will you do that from Gatlinburg?" she asked. "I have my sources," he said. "You'll just have to trust me."

"I'm working on it," she teased. "I'm working on it." She was starting to realize that Spider wasn't the man she thought he was. He was sweet and even gentle with her, trying to make her feel safe and secure when all she should feel was afraid. She had a feeling that getting to know Spider was going to be more of a fun adventure than she thought it might be, and she was looking forward to every second alone with him.

SPIDER

Spider was worried that moving them around so much might give them away, but he had no choice, really. After about a week at the place Repo had set up for them, he called to warn Spider that he had to get Amelia out of there. They had intel that the Ghosts were close to catching up with them and that was the very last thing that they needed.

They had moved a total of five times, to five different states, in the past six months, and he could tell that it was beginning to take a toll on Amelia. He had found a little house in Massachusetts just before the weather changed and now, it was getting warmer. They had to drive through a major snowstorm just to get to the house, but he got them there. The only problem he had now was trying to keep his distance from the sexy little minx who was trying to get him into her bed at every turn. He wasn't sure that he'd be able to keep turning her down and jumping into bed with her wasn't something that he could allow to happen. He couldn't let his feelings for her get in the way of keeping her safe. It was what could end up getting them both killed and keeping his eyes on his assignment might be the only way to keep Amelia safe.

She had shown up for breakfast half-naked every morning for the past five months, trying to get his attention. She got it all right, but there was no way that he was going to give into his need for her. He told her as much, not that it helped matters at all. In fact, it only seemed to ramp up her efforts.

Tonight, it was her turn to make dinner and when he walked into the dark kitchen to find the candles lit on the table,

the wine chilling in a bucket, and the table set to perfection, he knew that he was going to have to put up his walls to keep her at arm's length.

“What’s all this?” he asked.

She turned to look the table over and smiled at him. “Um, it’s dinner,” she said. “Are you hungry?” she tugged the apron that she was wearing over her head to reveal the skimpiest pair of shorts and a t-shirt that was about two sizes too small for her. He was hungry all right, just not for dinner.

“What are you wearing?” he asked.

“Oh, this is one of the outfits that Dallas sent with me. I have to do laundry, and this is about all I had left that was clean.” She was lying. They had just done laundry the other night together, but he wasn’t about to call her on it. How could he be mad at her when she looked so good? He couldn’t.

“How about we sit down to eat, and you can fill me in on what Savage said about how things are back at home?” she asked. He had made the excuse that he had to call Savage, earlier in the day, when she had practically crawled onto his lap, begging him to give her a neck massage. He knew that she could probably feel the erection that he was sporting and with the way that she slid around on his lap, he was sure that she was doing her best to make things worse. He had to come up with an excuse to get her off his lap and run to his bedroom to jack off before he came in his damn pants. And now, he was going to have to come up with a lie about what Savage had said. It was a good thing that he was quick on his feet after working undercover for so many years.

“He really didn’t have much to report,” Spider lied. “No new news.”

“How is everything back home? I never thought that I’d miss Huntsville, but I do,” she said. Amelia sat down next to him and pulled her long legs up onto the chair. Dear Lord, she even painted her toes a cute shade of pink. This woman was going to be the end of his resolve to stay single.

She seemed to notice the way that he was looking at her and when she ran her hands down her bare legs, he nearly swallowed his tongue. He wanted to be her hands. Hell, he wanted to get his hands on her body more than he wanted his next breath, but Spider knew that he couldn't let that happen.

"You're looking at me funny," she leaned over the table to whisper.

Spider cleared his throat, "Sorry," he said. "I guess I just have a lot on my mind." That was the first truth that he'd given her since walking into the kitchen. He did have a lot on his mind—mostly involving getting her naked and underneath him.

Amelia smiled as if she could read his mind and slid off her chair and onto his lap. "I've had a lot on my mind too," she said, wrapping her arms around his neck. No, no, no—he couldn't do this but when he banded his arms around her waist, he knew that he was a goner.

Spider didn't ask permission, sealing his mouth over hers and when he finally broke their kiss, they were both panting with need. He wanted to put her on the table and strip her bare, but he needed to keep his head straight. If he did what he wanted, and took her on the kitchen table, he'd never be able to keep her safe. She deserved that from him—to be kept safe from the trouble that he helped to put her in.

"We can't do this," he whispered.

"Can't do what?" she asked. She knew exactly what he was referring to.

"We can't have sex, honey," he said. She pouted at him, and he wanted to lean in and suck her sexy bottom lip into his mouth, but he knew that would only end up with him giving into her.

"Don't look at me that way," he breathed. "You and I can't happen."

"Give me one good reason why not," she demanded, her adorable bottom lip still sticking out.

“I’ve already told you why we can’t be together. I don’t date and I don’t do relationships. I have one-night stands. I fuck and leave. You’re not the kind of girl that I can do that with,” he said.

“I’d be up for trying things your way,” she said.

“No,” he breathed, “we won’t be trying things my way. For one thing, I can’t leave after we fuck. We’re stuck here together and if we get into bed together, we won’t be able to leave if things go south.”

“Why do things have to go south?” she asked. “I mean, you haven’t even given me a chance and you’re already sick of me and considering what will happen if we have sex.”

“Because I know how things will end. There’s a reason why I don’t have relationships, Amelia. My lifestyle won’t allow for me to be with a woman long-term. My job is dangerous.”

She barked out her laugh, “No kidding,” she said. “I mean, here we are in a safe house, running from the Ghosts, and you’re explaining to me how dangerous your job is. I’m well aware, but it doesn’t mean that I don’t still want you. We’ve been stuck together for months now, Spider. Can you blame me for wanting this; for wanting you?”

He couldn’t blame her at all because he felt the same way, but the difference was, he wasn’t willing to act on his feelings. Spider couldn’t compromise her safety and if he let his guard down and took what he wanted from her; if he let himself feel things for her that he never felt for any other woman in his life, it wouldn’t end well. Of that, he was certain.

“I’m sorry,” he said. He helped Amelia from his lap and stood. “I just can’t. I’m going to take a bath and then I’m going to get some sleep. Goodnight, Amelia,” he said. He walked out of the kitchen, feeling her eyes on him the whole time, but he didn’t dare turn around. He couldn’t take the hurt that he knew he’d find in her eyes looking back at him. That would break him, and he couldn’t let that happen.

AMELIA

“Don’t be a chicken,” she said to her reflection. “Just march into that bathroom and tell him what you want.” She nodded at herself, tightened the belt of her robe around her waist, and walked over to the master bathroom door. Amelia took a deep breath and turned the doorknob, surprised that he hadn’t locked the door to keep her out. He was pretty adamant about her keeping her distance from her.

He looked up at her from the tub, where he sat soaking, and she instantly regretted just walking in on him. “What the hell, Amelia?” he asked.

“Um, in my head, this sounded like a good idea,” she said.

“Walking in on me in the tub sounded like a good idea?” he asked.

“Yes, in my head it did,” she repeated. “It’s just that you shut me down every time I bring up the possibility of there being an us,” she said.

“That’s because there is no us,” he insisted. “I thought that I was pretty clear about that.”

“You don’t want me?” she almost whispered to herself, fidgeting with the belt of her robe.

“That’s not the issue, not at all,” he grumbled, covering his private parts with his big hands. “I told you that I can’t get involved with anyone—not now, not ever. You’re not the type of girl that I usually play with.”

“Play with,” she repeated. “I don’t want to just play with you, Spider.”

“Exactly,” he said. “I don’t do relationships and you aren’t a one-night stand kind of girl. We’ve already been over this.” She thought about telling him that she could be that kind of girl, but she also knew that he was right. She had never had a one-night stand in her whole life. “My job is just too dangerous,” he said. “I couldn’t get involved with a woman knowing that I might not make it home to her. It wouldn’t be fair to you, Amelia.” Every time he said her name like that, it made her girl parts hum to life. All she could think about was him giving into what she wanted from him. She wanted to hear him whisper his name while on top of her, but she had a feeling that might not ever happen unless she took matters into her own hands.

“I think that you’re just not keeping an open mind,” she said as she untied her robe.

“What the fuck does that mean?” he asked. He watched her hands as they finished untying the belt to her robe and when she let it slide down her body, she heard his breath hitch.

“Don’t do this,” he ordered. She climbed into the tub and, balancing as she lowered herself over his body, straddling his lap. When she was fully seated, she could feel his erection poking against her ass and she couldn’t help the moan that escaped her parted lips. She shamelessly rubbed herself on him and he grabbed her hips stopping her.

“Amelia,” he hissed.

“Spider,” she whispered, “I want you, and I can feel how much you want me. Stop making excuses and just take what you want,” she begged. She knew that sooner or later he was going to have to give in to her but having him reject her now would hurt like hell.

Amelia leaned down to kiss him, letting her breasts rub against his hairy chest and, God, just that little bit of friction nearly sent her over the edge. “Fuck,” he growled against her lips. For just a second, she thought that he was going to turn her away, but he didn’t. Instead, Spider pulled her against his

body and crushed his lips to hers, taking everything that she was offering her and giving her back so much more.

“You taste good,” she whispered against his lips.

“You do too, honey,” he breathed.

“Tell me that you’re going to go through with this, Spider. I couldn’t take your rejection now—please,” she begged.

“I’m not going to reject you, baby,” he assured. “I couldn’t now, even if I wanted to. I want you too, Amelia.” Hearing him say that gave her the courage to make her next move. She lifted her hips and reached down between their bodies to grab his cock with both of her hands. She stroked him, loving the way that he hissed out his breath, thrusting into her hands.

“Don’t tease me, baby,” he ordered.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” she breathed. She helped guide his cock to her pussy, lowering herself back down onto his lap, letting him fill her completely as she did.

“You feel so fucking good,” he growled. He grabbed her hips with his big hands and helped her to slide up and down his cock, their bodies slushing water out of the tub and onto the tile floor below.

Spider sat up and sucked one of her taut nipples into his warm mouth and she moaned out his name, begging him for more. “Ride me, honey,” he begged. “Ride me hard.” She nodded, sure that she wouldn’t be able to form words right now. “You’re so fucking perfect.” No one had talked to her like Spider did. No one told her how perfect she was before and when she looked into his brown eyes, she could tell that he meant every word that he whispered to her.

He pulled her down to kiss her, letting her nipples brush against his chest hair once more and that little bit of friction was all she needed. Amelia cried out his name as she rode out her orgasm. And when he lost himself in her, he whispered her name like a prayer.

Amelia collapsed against him, resting her cheek against his collarbone. “You know, you’re pretty perfect too, Spider,” she breathed.

“I’m not, but you’ll figure that out soon enough, honey,” he mumbled into her hair. “I just hope that you don’t regret what we just did together.”

“That’s not possible,” she whispered. It wasn’t either. She had wanted Spider since their second night together. He was so gentle and patient with her, Amelia was sure that he’d be that way with her in bed too, and she was right. Well, it was in the tub, but she wasn’t about to split hairs. She finally got what she wanted, and she didn’t plan on giving Spider up any time soon—even if she had to push her way into his life.

Amelia spent the rest of the night moving her limited things into his room while Spider protested. She explained to him that there was no going back now that they had made love, but he still gave her some push back. He wasn’t going to accept her in his life easily, but she didn’t care. He admitted that he wanted her and that was all she needed to know.

He was lying in bed, listing the reasons, again, as to why they shouldn’t be together when she stripped bare and climbed into bed with him. She snuggled against him, and Spider instantly shut up, wrapping his arm around her, and tugging her against his body.

“You were saying?” she asked around a yawn.

“Never mind,” he grumbled. Amelia giggled and wiggled her ass in his big hand. “You’re a tease,” he said.

“You have no idea,” she breathed. He rolled her under his big body and pressed her body into the mattress. His weight felt right on top of her. She felt so safe with him but telling him that would start the whole argument about her seeing him as her savior, and that was the last thing she wanted to do. In fact, she didn’t want to do any talking whatsoever.

“You know, in the tub, you took me by surprise and things moved quickly,” Spider said.

“Oh?” she questioned.

“But now, I get to take my time with you,” he said.

“Well, then, it’s a good thing that I’m not tired,” she teased. “Take as much time as you’d like, Spider,” she said, wrapping her arms around his shoulders. He dipped his head to kiss her, and she wrapped her legs around his waist.

He looked down at her, pushing her long hair back from her face, making her feel the same butterflies that she always felt when he looked at her that way. “I’m so afraid that I’m going to hurt you,” he whispered.

“Then, don’t hurt me,” she breathed.

“I never planned on having feelings for you, but I do,” he admitted. That was the first time Spider had let his walls down and admitted that to her. She liked this side of him. Spider was vulnerable and she realized that she could hurt him just as much as he could hurt her.

“How about we just take this thing one day at a time?” she asked. “I have feelings for you too, Spider. I have for months now. I have the same power to hurt you as you have to hurt me, but I won’t let that happen. That’s what people in love do—they protect each other. You’ve protected me this whole time, how about you let me protect you for a while?”

“That’s not your job,” he said.

“I want it to be my job,” she insisted.

“Wait—did you say that you love me?” he asked. Amelia thought back over her words and when she got to the part about what people in love do, she smiled at him and nodded.

“I guess I did,” she said. “Is that okay?”

He didn’t take much time to think about it. “Yeah, I think it is,” he breathed. “Because, if I’m not mistaken, I love you back.”

“Well, I hope that you’re not mistaken then because I like the idea of you loving me, Spider,” she whispered. He leaned in to kiss her, pressing her against the mattress with his full weight and all she could think about was how much she wanted him to take his time with her.

“So, all night?” she asked when he broke the kiss.

“All night,” he agreed, kissing his way down her body. “Sleep is overrated anyway.” Amelia had a feeling that she’d never want to sleep again with the promises that Spider was making her with every little kiss and bite mark that he left on her body. She was finally getting what she wanted from him and having her way with Spider was turning out to be more fun than she had ever imagined.

SPIDER

They had moved twice in the past two months, and every time they moved, Amelia ended up in his bed. He almost felt as though he was holding his breath, waiting for her to change her mind about him and move back into her own room, but it never happened. And every night that they spent together, Spider fell more and more in love with her.

Amelia walked out of the bathroom looking a little pale. “You okay?” he asked. She hadn’t been acting herself since their quick trip into town to pick up some groceries.

“Um, no,” she said.

“Has something happened?” he asked. “Did you see someone in town that you knew or something?” he asked. They were in Tennessee, and he worried that moving so close to home might not be the best idea, but he had been called into work and there was no way that he was leaving Amelia too far out of reach when he had to go into the office.

“No,” she said, “I didn’t see anyone, but something has happened,” she admitted. Amelia held up a white stick and he looked it over. Once it hit him that she was holding up a pregnancy test with a plus sign on it, he wasn’t sure what to do.

“You’re pregnant?” he asked.

“We’re pregnant,” she corrected, “because I didn’t do this to myself. I missed two periods and well, I didn’t pay much attention to them because we were moving houses and all that

stuff. I guess it just didn't register that I could be pregnant until today when we passed the aisle of feminine products at the grocery store. I panicked and picked up a few tests and took them as soon as we got back here."

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked.

She shrugged, "I didn't want to worry you until there was something to worry about," she said.

"I could have been there worrying by your side," he said. "Are you okay?" She nodded, but her tears gave away that she was lying. "Oh, honey," he breathed, "don't cry."

"I didn't plan on this happening," she said. "I just never thought about not taking my pill or anything like that. I'm such an idiot," she sobbed.

"You are not, and I could have thought of a condom, but I didn't," he said. "I'm the idiot."

"I guess we're just two dummies," she cried into his check. "How will we be able to raise a baby?"

"We'll manage," he assured.

She stood back from him, wiping her eyes. "You want to have this baby with me?" she asked.

"Yep, and I want us to be a family," he said. He was being honest too. He had never given much thought to being a father or even having a family, but the thought of Amelia and him raising this baby together felt right.

"You do?" she squeaked.

"Yes," he said, "I do. I mean, the thought of having this baby scares the hell out of me, but I think that I'm ready. I want to try to be a good dad to him or her."

"I think you'll be a great dad," she assured. He had his doubts, but he was happy to hear that she thought so much of him.

"And you'll be a fantastic mother," he said. She wrapped her arms around him, sobbing into his chest again. "Did I say something wrong?" he asked.

“No, you said everything right. I just can’t stop crying,” she sobbed.

“How about I run you a bath and you can have a good cry while I make us some dinner?” he asked. “Then, we can talk some more about the baby, if you’re up for it.”

“Thank you, Spider,” she whispered.

“You never have to thank me, honey,” he said. He loved taking care of her. It had started out as a job and had now become an act of love. He had fallen in love with her and there was no way that he was going to ever let the Ghosts or anyone else touch her or his kid again. She was his to protect and now, that held doubly true.

Spider woke early that morning, his phone buzzing like crazy on the nightstand next to him. The number was listed as “Private,” and he knew that it had to be work. The CIA’s calls always came in that way because they were usually made from a burner phone so that it couldn’t be traced. The last thing he wanted to do was to answer a call from his boss at the CIA, but he knew that it had to be important if he was calling this early in the morning. What he hadn’t expected was to hear Hangman’s voice on the other end of the call.

After his initial shock wore off, Spider got down to the matter at hand and asked Hangman what he wanted. His answer was simple—he wanted him. Hangman made him an offer that he was having trouble refusing—his life for Amelia’s. He told Spider to meet him in the back ally at Savage Hell and to come alone. If he didn’t, Hangman promised to find Amelia and make her death slow and painful. Spider believed him too. Once he turned himself over to the Ghosts, Amelia would be free to live her life, free from danger, and that was what he wanted for her. She was going to have his baby and living on the run was no life for a newborn or a new mother. He hated accepting Hangman’s offer, but he knew that it was the only way for him to give Amelia the life

that she deserved. She and his child would be able to move on, without him, and find a new life together.

He told Hangman that he'd be there tonight at six and ended the call. Now, all he had to do was find a way to leave the house without breaking down and telling Amelia about his deal with the devil, because he was sure that she'd try to stop him, and he couldn't let that happen. She couldn't keep living on the run, not with a baby on the way.

Spider knew that it was only a matter of time before the Ghosts caught up to him and Amelia. He couldn't let that happen and giving himself up was the only way to keep her safe. He just needed to come up with a good excuse to leave the safehouse and make Amelia stay there. She'd be safe at the house until he could arrange for Savage to pick her up. Once he was out of her life, she'd be safe again. Leaving her was going to be the hardest thing he'd ever done, but he had to. If not for her, then for the sake of the child that they had created together. His kid was going to grow up without a father, and that was something that he hated, but there was no other way. Besides, he grew up without a dad and he had turned out okay. The one thing he was certain of was that Amelia was going to be the best mom on the planet and his kid was going to grow up surrounded by love.

"Hey, I have to run into the office," he lied, finding Amelia in the kitchen.

"Why?" she asked, tossing her towel to the counter. He could tell by the way that she looked straight through him that she wasn't buying his lie.

"They have a lead on the Ghosts, and I have to identify a few guys. I'm the only one who's ever seen Butch, and they want him in the building before going in. Plus, they have some intel that they need me to look over."

"And none of this can wait?" she asked.

"Um, no," he said. "If you were still sitting in a cage, would you want me to wait?" He wasn't playing fairly, but he had no other way to get out of there without her demanding to go with him.

“No, I wouldn’t want you to wait. You of all people know what kind of hell I was put through.” Amelia sighed and he felt like he was holding his breath waiting for her to give him her blessing to leave. “How long will you be gone?” she asked. “Can you be home for dinner? I’m making your favorite pasta.”

“Yes,” he lied, “I’ll be home for dinner.” He pulled her into his arms and kissed her, trying not to give away the fact that he was probably kissing her for the very last time, but he was. He knew that returning from the fool’s errand probably wasn’t going to happen. He held her in his arms for just a few extra seconds and kissed her just a little bit longer, hoping that her face would be the only thing on his mind during his last minutes on Earth, because that was the only way that this was all going to end. Hangman was going to kill him and there was no way he’d back down now. Not when he had the opportunity to save both Amelia and their unborn child.

“Love you,” he said, releasing her from his grip.

“Love you too,” she breathed. “Be safe.” He nodded and grabbed his keys and wallet from the kitchen counter, not bothering to look back at Amelia. One last look at her would be his undoing and he needed to keep up his nerve to walk out of the house and leave her behind—no matter how much it broke his damn heart.

Spider knew that if he was going to turn himself over to the Ghosts, he was going to have to involve Savage. He needed some backup for Amelia. He wanted to make sure that she was okay after he was gone and that she and the baby would be taken care of. He couldn’t think of anyone better than Savage to make sure that happened for his girl.

He pulled his cell phone from his jacket and punched in Savage’s number. He could hear the music in the background after Savage answered and Spider knew that he had caught him at the bar. “Hey, man,” Spider said.

“You two okay?” Savage asked.

“We are,” Spider said, “at least, for now we are. Listen, Hangman has made me an offer and I’m taking it. He’s agreed to let Amelia go if I agree to turn myself in, and well, it’s an offer that I can’t refuse.”

“Why can’t you refuse his offer?” Savage growled, “Just tell him no.”

“It’s not that easy,” Spider admitted, “Amelia’s pregnant and she can’t keep living on the run. We’ve been in five different safe houses in five states over the last six months. She needs to be able to settle down and get ready for the baby and I can give her that.”

“All you have to do is forfeit your life and let your kid grow up without a father, right?” Savage asked.

“Well, when you put it that way, it sounds like a bad decision, but I know that I’m doing right by Amelia and my kid. She needs to be able to live life without looking over her shoulder and worrying about the Ghosts coming for her and the baby. She deserves a fresh start. Hell, I’m partially responsible for the Ghosts coming for her. If she wasn’t with me, they might have left her alone from the start.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it,” Savage barked. “You saved her life after she escaped that warehouse. If the Ghosts had found her, they would have made an example out of her. You got her to safety and kept her safe for half a year now. I think you’re feeling guilty and honestly, you have no reason to feel that way. Don’t do this, Spider,” Savage begged. “There has to be another way to stop the Ghosts from coming after you and Amelia.”

“I’ve thought about it for two weeks now since Hangman made me the offer, and I can’t come up with another way to stop this nightmare. I can’t go back undercover and the new guys that the CIA has sent it have made no leeway with bringing them down. They can’t find Butch, and he’s a key player in the Ghosts. If they can’t bring down both him and Hangman, the Ghosts will never topple.”

“You’re making a mistake,” Savage shouted.

“I know that I am, but I have no other choice. I need you to promise me that you’ll make sure that Amelia and my kid are good, you know, once I’m gone. I don’t think that Hangman will let me live past our meeting and I don’t want to leave Amelia all alone. She doesn’t have any family.”

“Even more reason why you shouldn’t do this, Spider,” Savage growled.

“Noted,” he sighed, “just promise me that you’ll take care of them for me, man. I’d say that I’ll owe you one, but I don’t think that I’ll be around to pay you back.” He chuckled to himself, although nothing about this conversation was funny in the least.

“You know that I’ll take care of her and your kid, man,” Savage agreed. “I just wish you’d listen to reason. At least take some backup.”

“Can’t,” Spider insisted, “if I don’t show up alone, he’ll go after Amelia. I won’t let that happen.”

“I understand,” Savage said, “I don’t like it, but if I was in your shoes, I’d do the same thing. Just promise that you’ll at least try not to get yourself killed.”

“I can’t make any promises, but I will do everything within my power to stay alive. I just have to give my kid and Amelia a fighting chance. Thanks for the assist, Savage.”

“Not a problem,” Savage said. “Try to be safe, man.” Spider nodded, knowing that he’d not be able to speak past the lump in his throat, and ended the call. He knew that Hangman planned on making an example out of him and killing him was the only way to do that. He hated that he was going to leave Amelia without even a goodbye, but he had no other choice.

Spider pulled up to the back of Savage Hell, where he had agreed to meet Hangman. He had a lot of nerve demanding to meet Spider there, but he also knew that the guys wouldn’t make a move without Spider’s okay, and he wasn’t about to risk the deal he had made with Hangman.

He parked his truck and two guys from the Ghosts flanked him in the alley. “Hey guys,” he casually said as if he was meeting up with a few of the guys from his club. “I thought that I was meeting with Hangman.” Honestly, he didn’t expect Hangman to actually show his face around Savage Hell.

“You’ll see him soon enough,” the guy that they called Chainsaw said. He wasn’t sure how this was going to work, but being hit on the head by the big guy who joined them wasn’t what he had in mind. He wasn’t sure how many of the Ghosts had shown up to meet him, but he had a sick feeling that he was about to find out. He fell to the pavement and looked up at the sky as his world went dark. The only thing he heard was the laughter of the Ghosts as they dragged his body across the parking lot, and the last thought he had was how much he was going to miss Amelia and seeing their kid grow up.

Spider watched as Hangman paced around the chair that he was bound to. Every time he stopped behind him, Spider felt as though he was holding his breath until he made his way back around to face him again. Staying conscious was beginning to be a challenge for Spider, but he knew that he had to if he was going to get out of there alive.

“You thought that you had us all fooled, didn’t you? But you didn’t,” Hangman taunted. “Just tell me who you were working for.” Spider knew that he wanted him to admit that he was working undercover in the Ghosts. Hangman would want him to give up who he worked for, but that was never going to happen.

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about, boss,” Spider drawled. “I work for you.”

Hangman shook his head at him and crossed his arms over his chest. “If that’s the way that you want to playthings, I’m up for a game.” He pulled the walkie-talkie from his pocket and gave the order, “Bring her in,” and Spider felt his stomach

drop. He knew that his woman was safe back at the house, where he left her to go meet with Hangman. It was the only way that he knew to keep her safe—turning himself into the Ghosts. But they still had a warehouse full of women that they could torture to get him to talk, and Hangman seemed to know it judging by the smug look on his face.

Two guys, that Spider had never seen before, entered the room each holding an arm to the woman between them. She looked scared out of her mind and rightly so. “She’s new. We brought her and a truckload of other women in yesterday. I guess that pisses you off given the fact that you were here to bring us down. Let’s see how long you can hold out while you watch us have a little bit of fun with her.” Hangman walked across the room and tugged the collar of the woman’s shirt until it ripped right down the center of her body, exposing her breasts. The two men holding her looked her over as though they had never seen a woman before,

and he wanted to tell them to stop looking at her that way. But there was no way that he’d be able to do that without giving up his true identity.

“Please,” the woman begged, and he could barely look at her. Spider wanted to give in and give her what she wanted, but he also knew that doing so would blow any undercover agents currently working for the Ghosts.

“Butch, grab my phone and bring it in here,” Hangman ordered over the walkie-talkie. “I want to take some pictures.” That was just the intel that Spider needed—Butch was back. He was the second in command of the Ghosts and if he was there, the CIA could move in and topple the whole organization. They could be done, but Spider had no way of letting his contact at the CIA know that.

Butch pushed his way through the door, practically knocking the guy to the left over, and smiled at Spider. “Good to see you again,” he drawled.

“Gee, I don’t think that you really mean it,” Spider grumbled. Butch laughed and handed Hangman his cell phone. “Anything else, man?” Butch asked.

“Nope, just keep an eye out for anyone coming or going. I need to know if you see anything out of the ordinary,” Hangman insisted.

“Will do, boss,” Butch agreed, leaving the room after giving Spider a mock salute. God, he hated that guy.

“Let’s get started,” Hangman said. He held up his phone and hit record, making sure that Spider had a full view of his screen. “I think that I’ll send this one to her family.” The woman cried out, begging Hangman to stop, and when he got in her face and kissed her, the guard on the right pulled her into his body and pulled his gun.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Hangman shouted.

“I can’t let you hurt her,” the man said. “I’m CIA and you’re under arrest.” Hangman looked the guy over and burst out in fits of laughter, even doubling over while holding his side.

“I’m under arrest?” he asked.

“Afraid so,” the guy said. He nodded to the other guard, and he pulled his gun from his hip holster. The two new guys were playing on his team and Spider wanted to jump up from his seat and high-five them both.

“This was all a setup?” Hangman asked. “You work with him?” he asked, pointing to Spider.

“Never met him before, but yeah, we do,” the second guard admitted. “Now, how about you untie him so that we can get on with this.” If they hadn’t called in back up, Spider knew that the three of them would be powerless against Hangman’s men.

Hangman slowly crossed the room and pulled his walkie-talkie from his jacket. “Raid,” he shouted into the radio, holding it close to his mouth. He knew that he might be forfeiting his life, but he didn’t seem to care. He pulled out a knife and Spider held his breath as he sliced through his ropes, cutting him free.

“You’ll never get out of here alive,” he said to the men, “but, we will.” He hoisted Spider up from the chair and he

couldn't help his moan. If he wasn't mistaken, the goons that knocked him out and shoved him into the van that brought him to the warehouse broke his arm. "Let's go," Hangman ordered. He wanted to put up a fight, but he had no fight left. He did as he was told, slowing back out of the room until Hangman stopped in the doorway. Spider peeked behind him to find Savage's massive shadow standing in the door frame.

"Hey man," Savage said, "I know you said that you didn't want any backup, but I'm not one to follow the rules. Especially when they come from an asshole." He had to admit—he was so damn thankful that Savage was a rule breaker. In fact, he fucking loved him for it.

"I'm not mad at all, actually," Spider said. He turned and grabbed Hangman's gun from him. "You two need to go find Butch. If he gets out of here, he'll disappear, and this shit will never end." The two undercover agents nodded at him and started out of the room.

"You'll need these," one of them said, handing Spider a pair of handcuffs.

"Thanks, man," Spider said. "As much as I'd like to do the honors, I'm afraid that my arm might be broken. Can you handle this, Savage?" he asked.

"I've got him," Savage promised. "I brought the guys with me and they're rounding up the other Ghost members."

"You brought all the guys?" Spider asked.

"Well, you did say that going up against the Ghosts would take a massive effort, so I brought one with me," Savage said. Spider smiled and shook his head at his club's Prez.

"I can always count on you, can't I?" Spider asked.

"Always," Savage said, "now, go get your girl and beg her to forgive you for being an ass." Yeah, that was going to take a lot of begging, but he was so damn happy that he'd have the chance to let her give him hell for as long as she wanted. He was going home to his woman and their unborn kid, and that made him feel like one lucky bastard.

AMELIA

Amelia was suspicious that Spider wasn't being honest with her when he said that he had to go into the office, but when he didn't come home for dinner, her suspicions were confirmed. And when Savage called to tell her what happened and to go easy on Spider, she wasn't sure if she wanted to kill him or hug him when she finally saw him.

"Hey," he said from the bedroom door.

"You run off to turn yourself into the Ghosts and all you have to say to me is, 'Hey?'," she asked.

"I take it that someone filled you in on what went down tonight then," he almost whispered.

"Yeah, Savage called to let me know what happened and he said that I should go easy on you." That was the last thing she wanted to do. She had questions and she was pissed, but she was so relieved to see that he was okay, well, besides a few cuts and bruises and— "Is that a cast on your arm?" she asked.

He held up his arm and winced. "Yeah, it's broken," he said.

"You look like shit," she said, standing from the bed. She looked him over and he stood there and let her.

"I'm aware," he said. "I'd say that you should see the other guy, but he doesn't have a scratch on him."

Amelia crossed her arms over her chest and didn't make a move toward him. "Why did you do it?" she asked. "Why did

you lie to me and risk your life?”

“It’s my job,” he simply said.

“Don’t give me that bullshit,” she shouted. “You went off and risked your life for your job? I don’t believe that for one minute.”

“That’s because it’s only partially true. The other part is that I did it to keep you and our baby safe. I was given the chance to save you both and I took it.” She figured as much, but she still needed him to see that they were a team and should have talked his decision over. Instead, he lied to her and went off on his own to do something stupid—something that could have gotten him killed.

“You could have been killed,” she whispered.

“I know, and that’s the part that I really hated. I didn’t want to leave you and our kid. Hell, I want to watch him or her grow up, but I also knew that this is no kind of life for you or the baby, so I did what I thought I had to do,” Spider said.

“Without running it past me,” she added.

“Without running it past you. It killed me not to talk to you about this, but I know what you would have said,” he insisted. He probably did, but that didn’t give him the right to go off on his own and make decisions for them as a family.

“Do you see us as a family, Spider?” Amelia asked.

“Of course, I do,” he said. “I love you and I want to help raise our baby.” She could hear the panic in his voice. He knew what was on the line here and that made what she was about to do a little bit easier.

“I love you too, Spider, but I can’t be with a man who doesn’t include me in his life or the decisions that can change my life. You took off, knowing that it might be the last time that we’d see each other, promising me that you’d be home for dinner. You could be dead right now, and I’d blame myself for not stopping you, but why would I? You didn’t tell me what you were going to do, so why would I have stopped you?”

“You wouldn’t have stopped me,” he whispered.

“You didn’t give me the chance to stop you. Instead, you made the decision to exclude me from what you were about to do and take away all my choices,” she said.

“Shit, honey,” Spider growled, running his hand through his overly long, dark hair. “When you put it like that, you make me sound like the bad guy. I’m not.”

“I don’t think that you’re a bad guy, Spider,” she agreed. “I think that you’re just not the kind of guy who can be part of a partnership that would force you to ask the other person’s opinion. I need that,” she said. “I need to be included in all your decisions that will affect me and this baby,” she said cupping her tummy.

“What are you saying?” he asked.

“I’m saying that I need you to leave. Savage told me that you brought down the Ghosts and got all the major players, and for that, I’m grateful because now, I can go home,” she said.

“We can both go home,” Spider said. “Please, Amelia,” he begged, “we can work this out. I want to be a family. I want you to marry me.”

She shook her head, dropping her hands to her side. “I can’t marry you,” she whispered, “and, I don’t think that we can work this out,” she said. “I need you to leave. I’ll contact you once I get back to Huntsville. I won’t keep you from our baby. You can come to my appointments, and we can work out a schedule once he or she is born, but I can’t be with you anymore, Spider,” she said.

She made the mistake of looking him in the eyes and the anguish she saw staring back at her was almost too much to bear. “I’m sorry, Amelia,” he whispered before turning to leave. She sat back down on the edge of the bed, worried that she had just made the biggest mistake of her life. She listened for the front door to close and when she heard his truck start in the driveway, she lay back on the bed, sobbing. Amelia had just let the only man she had ever loved walk out of her life and at that moment, she knew that she had made a huge mistake she might never be able to correct.

A week had passed, and all Amelia seemed capable of doing was crying. The guys from Savage Hell kept checking in on her, making sure that she was settled and didn't need anything, and she knew that they were there because Spider asked them to be. They were probably reporting back to him and after a week of them dropping by and calling, she decided to put an end to their house calls.

She got dressed, which was no easy feat given her expanding waistline and lack of clothing. She was going to have to get a few new things, but that was going to be a problem for another day. Right now, she needed to get down to Savage Hell because Savage had spilled the beans and told her that it was Spider's weekend to work the bar. She was going to tell him that if he wanted updates on her and the baby, he could stop by and ask her himself. Hell, she wanted to march into that bar and tell him that she was an idiot and had changed her mind about them not being together, but she was sure that wasn't going to go over well. He seemed pretty hurt when she last saw him and that was on her. Instead of being rational and listening to his side of things, she kicked him to the curb.

Being back in Huntsville had brought back all kinds of bad memories about what had happened to her. Spider made her feel safe and most of all, loved. She needed him in her life if she was going to get through the next few months, even if it was just as friends. His buddies stopping by to check on her was nice, but they weren't him. She needed Spider and if she had to go to Savage Hell to beg him to be part of her life again, she'd do it.

Amelia walked into the bar and quickly found Spider at the bar, serving beers to the guys and a few pretty women who were hanging around, trying to get his attention. Jealousy roiled in her belly as she stood in the corner of the bar watching them all smile at him. Of course, he smiled back at them, but she could tell that it was just for show. His smile

didn't reach his eyes. In fact, the only thing she could see in his dark eyes was sadness, and that was all her fault.

She walked across the room and sat on a stool at the end of the bar. She could tell as soon as Spider saw her. He made a beeline for her and towered over her. "You can't be here," he insisted.

"Why, am I messing up your chances with the pretty blond at the end of the bar? I'd say that I'm sorry, but I'm not," she sassed.

"No, you can't be here because you can't drink. You're pregnant," he reminded.

"I don't need you to remind me. I spent the entire morning throwing up and the rest of the evening trying to find pants that still fit me to come here. I've been reduced to sweatpants," she said, nodding down to her legs. "I've never worn sweatpants out to a bar in my life."

He smiled at her and for just a second, she could see the man she loved. "Why are you here, Amelia?" he asked.

"Well, I was hoping to get a beer," she teased.

"Not happening," he growled.

"Okay, then, I was hoping to talk to the hot bartender on duty tonight," she quickly amended.

"Let me guess, one of the guys told you that I had bartender duty this weekend and you've come to tell me off for sending them over to check on you," he said.

"Not exactly," she said. "I came here tonight to tell you that if you'd like to check on me, you can do so yourself. You know where I live, right?" she asked. "I mean, you are in the CIA still, right?"

"Yes, and I do know where you live," he admitted.

"Then, why have you sent the guys over to check on me and not made the trip yourself?" she asked.

"You told me that you don't want to be with me anymore, Amelia. I was giving you space," he said.

“While I appreciate that, you should know that my hormones are crazy and will be until this kid pops out of me,” she said.

“Noted,” he said.

“And sometimes, I say things that I don’t really mean. Sometimes, I fly off the handle and forget that there are two sides to every story, and I didn’t let you tell me yours. I just assumed that I knew all the details and kicked you out of my life. For that, I am sorry,” she said.

“You’re sorry that you kicked me out of your life or that you didn’t hear my side of things?” he asked.

She smiled at him, “Both,” she admitted.

“Well, you had my side of the story right, so there isn’t much to tell. I fucked up and forgot that we’re a couple now. I mean, we were a couple before I screwed everything up. I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you what I was doing, but I knew that you’d try to stop me.”

“Damn right, I would have stopped you. I love you, Spider. I want us to be a family and that wouldn’t have happened if you went and did something stupid and got yourself killed.”

“You love me?” he asked. “Even after everything that’s happened?”

“Yeah, I guess I just can’t help myself. Maybe it’s the hormones, but I love you—still,” she whispered the last part.

“Thank fuck, because I love you too, honey. God, I’ve been going out of my mind not talking to you or being able to see you these past few days,” he admitted.

“Same,” she breathed. He took her hands into his own and having him touch her again felt right. God, she had missed everything about him. “I was wondering if your offer to marry me was still good because I’d really love to marry you, Spider.” He let go of her hands and rounded the bar, pulling her from the barstool. “I’d marry you any time, any place,” he promised.

“Well, I’ll need to get some new clothes first,” she said. “I don’t want to wear sweatpants to my own wedding.”

“I don’t care what you wear, as long as you promise to be my wife, honey,” he whispered into her ear.

“I promise, Spider,” she whispered back. He sealed his lips over hers and for the first time in a week, she felt like she was safe again—and loved. So very loved. They might have had to walk through hell to get to this point, but they had done it together and now, she had found her haven in one sexy biker with a heart of gold. What more could a girl want? The answer was simple—nothing.

The End

I hope you loved Spider and Amelia’s story! Now, buckle up and get ready for another Royal Bastard! Blade’s Christmas Ride (A Christmas Novella Royal Bastards MC: Huntsville Chapter Book 13) is coming soon from K.L. Ramsey!

BLADE

Blade walked into Savage Hell with his sister by his side. He knew that he was going to have to keep a fucking leash on Wrenlee, but that wouldn't be anything new. His sister was never one to behave and bringing her to a bar full of horny bikers might not have been his finest decision, but he really had no choice. He needed to get some help with his little sister, and he knew that his brothers would give him a hand.

They walked hand in hand to the bar and he could feel the eyes of every guy in the room staring them down. Most of them were probably thinking that he'd picked up a woman, and he'd let them go on believing that too because there was no way that he'd let anyone approach her, even if she was smiling and flirting with most of the guys at the bar.

"Who's the girl?" Savage asked, looking his sister over. As the club's Prez, Savage made it his business to know every member's business.

Blade leaned in to whisper, "She's my sister," he said.

"Why are you whispering?" Savage loudly whispered back.

"Because I don't want anyone to know that she's my little sister. I'd love to get in and out of here without ever dude in the place hitting on Wren."

"Ah, got you," Savage said. He turned to his sister and flashed his best smile. "Hi, Wren," Savage said. "I'm Savage."

“Oh—you’re the one who my brother needs to talk to,” she shouted over the bar. Blade groaned and rolled his eyes, causing Savage to laugh. At this point, every guy in the place now knew that the woman standing next to him was his sister and Savage found her funny. She’d have bikers lining up around the corner to ask her out if he wasn’t careful.

“How about we go back to my office before your brother pops a vein in his neck?” Savage asked. “He seems a bit worried about you, Wren.”

She sighed, “All he ever does is worry about me,” she grumbled. “I just want to live my life.”

“Maybe if you stopped making the wrong fucking decisions, I could leave you alone to live your life, but you don’t seem able to do that, Wren,” Blade growled.

“Okay, let’s table this fight until we get back to my office,” Savage ordered. They followed the big guy back down the dark hallway to his private office. He quickly unlocked the door and held it open for the two of them.

“Oh, my girlfriend, Trixie is coming to meet me here. Can someone tell her where I am?” she asked Savage.

“What the fuck, Wren?” Blade shouted. “You invited Trixie to come here for this? We’re here to ask for help to get your ass out of trouble, not to meet up with friends, drink and have a good time.”

“You wouldn’t know how to have a good time if it hit you in the face, Blade,” Wren hissed. “For your information, Trixie is the one who needs help, not me.”

“Wait, you called me at the break of dawn, crying and telling me that you were in trouble and needed help,” Blade reminded. Hearing his phone ring at five in the morning wasn’t the most pleasant way to wake up. Hearing his little sister crying and saying that she was in trouble, yet again, surely wasn’t the way that he wanted to start his fucking day.

“Well, I told you what you needed to hear to help me. I knew that you wouldn’t help Trixie. I mean, you’ve made it very clear that you hate her.” His sister was wrong—dead

wrong. He didn't hate one single thing about her oldest childhood best friend. In fact, he fucking loved everything about Trixie, not that he'd ever tell his little sister that.

Wren and Trixie were inseparable growing up. They liked to tell people that they were sisters, which totally fucking confused the hell out of Blade when he started looking at Trixie as more than a kid sister. Hell, she was his fucking walking wet dream.

“Why does your friend need help?” Savage asked, sitting behind his big desk. “And why did you tell Blade that you needed his help?”

Wren sunk into the chair in front of his desk and smiled. “Well, Blade already thinks the worst of me, so it was easy to get him to believe that I was the one who needed his help, so I lies,” she said.

“Great,” Blade grumbled. “I'm sorry to have wasted your time, man,” he said to Savage. “Let's go, Wren.” There was no point staying if she didn't need help, but Wren seemed to have other plans.

“I'm not leaving until I find someone to help Trixie. She's my best friend. You've known her practically her whole life, Blade. Would you so easily turn your back on her?” Wren asked. That wasn't a fair question. She knew him well enough to know that he would end up helping Trixie. Wren was right—he'd known her his whole life and there would be no way that he'd leave her to face trouble on her own.

“What did she do?” Blade asked.

Wren barked out her laugh, “Trixie didn't do anything,” she insisted. “We went out two nights ago, to one of the local clubs that we like to go to. We were dancing and this guy approached us and asked Trixie to dance. She told him that she was already dancing with me, and he called us both a few names, saying that we weren't worth his time. He left us alone for the rest of the night, but when we left, we found some of those nasty things that he called us spray painted on Trixie's car.”

“How did he know which car was hers?” Savage asked.

“I have no clue,” Wren said. “Neither of us went out to the car the whole time we were there. We stayed in the club the whole time.” Savage shot Blade a look and he could almost read the guy’s mind.

“Which club was it?” Savage asked. “I have lots of friends in this area and call try to call in a favor to get the video footage. We need to make sure that it’s the same guy and not a coincidence.”

“It was the Palms Night Club,” she said. “We usually go there and have no issues, but this time was another story. It wasn’t just her car that was vandalized,” she said. “I went back to her place with her for the night. She was going to take me home, but the whole thing really shook her up, so I agreed to spend the night with her at her apartment. When we got there, her front door was open and the same words the guy called us were written in red spray paint on her walls, furniture, just about everything.”

“Do you remember the guy’s name?” Blaze asked, sitting down on the chair next to Wren.

“It was Bruce.” They all turned to find Trixie standing in the doorway and Wren stood up and crossed the room to hug her.

“I was so worried about you. Why didn’t you call me?” Wren asked.

“Because I didn’t want you to be involved in this mess any more than you had to be. I mean, it’s only a week until Christmas and here I am, ruining everyone’s day,” Trixie insisted. She was always worrying about everyone but herself. She practically took care of Wren while they were growing up. If it wasn’t for Trixie, his sister would have ended up in a lot more trouble than she had while growing up.

“Still, you can’t go and disappear on me like that again, got it?” Wren asked. Trixie nodded and Wren ushered her into the room, making introductions between her and Savage.

“Why did you disappear?” Savage asked.

“I already said that I didn’t want to bring trouble to Wren,” she repeated. “This guy seems to be obsessed with me, and I didn’t want her involved.”

“Where did you go?” Wren asked.

“I went back home and stayed with my parents, but he showed up there too. I was hoping to stay with them through Christmas, but I just couldn’t stick around once he showed up at their house.” They had all grown up about half an hour from Huntsville in a little town called Athens.

“You didn’t run far then,” Blade said.

“No,” she breathed, “I didn’t. Again, it’s almost Christmas and I was hoping to celebrate with my family.”

“Wait—I thought that we were going to celebrate together,” Wren said.

“I was going to call you in a day or two, after I was sure that I was safe, and ask you to come home.” Wren wrinkled her nose and shook her head. He knew that his sister wasn’t about to go home to Athens. She hadn’t been home since her fiancée died in that bad truck accident; he had a few years back. She and Lee were high school sweethearts and his death devastated Wren. After his funeral, she moved from Athens to Huntsville, saying that she wanted to be closer to Blade, but he knew that it was just Wren’s way of running from her problems.

“I figured that would be your reaction,” Trixie said. “That’s why I didn’t call you.”

“You could have at least warned me that you were going home. I stopped by your place last night and was worried when I didn’t find you at home,” she said.

“I hate asking you all for help so close to the holidays, but I have nowhere else to turn,” Trixie said.

“You should have turned to us first,” Blade said. “I don’t have plans for Christmas. I can help,” he said. Yeah, he knew what he was getting himself into. Blade was in for a whole lot of nights standing under the cold spray of a shower, but not helping Trixie wasn’t an option. He was going to find out who

was stalking her, and then, he was going to do his absolute best to keep her safe. Keeping his hands off her was going to take a fucking Christmas miracle, but he was at least going to try.

TRIXIE

Trixie Hammer wasn't about to turn down the help that Blade was offering, but how was she going to hang out for the holiday with the guy she had a crush on since she was a kid? She couldn't think of a time when she didn't have a thing for Blade, but she lived by the promise she made to his younger sister, and her best friend, that no boy would ever come between the two of them. Trixie had a sinking feeling that falling into bed with Blade would end their lifelong friendship because she wasn't looking for anything long-term. She'd eventually have to walk away from him and Wren and that would break her heart. Wren had been by her side through thick and thin. When Wren's fiancée died suddenly, Trixie practically moved into Wren's apartment with her. That was just how it was between the two of them, except for now. If she let Wren be a part of her life now, she'd end up in just as much trouble as Trixie had found herself in.

She hadn't been completely truthful with Wren when she told him that she didn't know the guy who had asked her to dance at the club. She knew Bruce Trent very well. He had been stalking her for almost six months now, not that she shared that bit with Wren or her sexy brother.

Trixie had met Bruce at a work mixer that she was forced to attend. She told her boss that she had to get home to feed her cat, but he knew that she didn't have one. He called her bluff and dragged her out to a local pub and bought her way too many mixed drinks. When Bruce asked her to dance that night, she said yes. That was her first mistake. She should

have turned him down then too, but she had her beer goggles on, and honestly, he was pretty cute. The problem was, he wasn't Blade, and that had her saying goodnight to him, even after he all but begged her to come back to his place with him. She knew better than to follow a guy home after just one dance; Trixie just had no idea that Bruce would follow her back to her place and try to force him way into her apartment. That was the first time she had called the cops on the guy. It wasn't the last time though, and now she had dragged her best friend into her mess. Sooner or later, she'd have to come clean and tell Wren the truth, but there was no way that she'd be able to admit to being a complete fool in front of Blade.

"I hate to ask you to have to babysit me over Christmas, Blade," she said.

"It really isn't a big deal. You can come to my place. I've got great security and an extra bedroom." She wasn't sure if she pouted when he mentioned an extra bedroom or not. Honestly, she was hoping that he had a little one-bedroom place where she'd have to share his bed with him, but that would be just tempting fate.

"Plus, I'll be able to check in on you if you're over at Blade's place," Wren said. Trixie had to admit—seeing her best friend more often would be nice. As it was, they were only hanging out a few times a month now, usually going to clubs and dancing. That wasn't really her scene anymore, even though Wren seemed to love their nights out, Trixie was more of a homebody.

"I'd like that," she said to her friend. Wren took her hand and smiled.

"It's settled then," Wren said. "You'll go with my brother, and he'll take you back to your place to grab a few things. Then, you'll go home with him, and he'll keep you safe."

The big guy sitting behind the desk, whom they called Savage, laughed. "You always this bossy?" he asked Wren.

"No," Wren defended.

"Yes," Blade countered.

Trixie rolled her eyes. “They’ve been like this for as long as I can remember,” she admitted. “I can’t tell you how many ties I had to break over the years. And for the record, yes, Wren has always been this bossy.”

“You know, you don’t have to be on his side just because he’s keeping you safe,” Wren grumbled.

“I know, I’m just being honest. And I honestly love your bossy ass,” Trixie said, pulling her in for a quick hug.

“I love you too,” Wren said. As an only child, Wren was the closest thing that Trixie ever had to a sister. The only problem with them being sisters would mean that Blade would be her brother and she had enough impure thoughts about him to make that impossible. No, she’d be fine with Wren being her best friend because at least then, she could fantasize about Blade and the number of beds he had in his house.

“I can tell you that we won’t be stopping by your place, Trixie,” Blade said. “In fact, we aren’t making any stops. I need to make sure that this Bruce guy didn’t follow you here and is waiting for your next move. If he knows where you live, and knows where your parents live now, he won’t stop trying to find you.”

“Oh,” Trixie breathed. “You make it sound like I’m going to be trapped at your place.”

“You are,” Savage said, “you will need to stay there until we can figure out what this guy wants and if he’s a threat. I’ll do some digging into who he is.”

“All right,” Trixie stuttered. If Savage researched the guy hard enough, he might find that she actually had met Bruce before the other night. Wren would find out that she had lied to her and that would be a disaster.

“I don’t want to put you out,” she said to Savage.

“Not at all. Blade is one of our brothers and we help each other out all the time. You seem to be family to him and Wren, so that makes you my family too.” Trixie wasn’t expecting him to say that. It was sweet that he wanted to help her, but it

also meant that she'd have to come clean with Wren sooner than later.

"That's very sweet of you, Savage," Trixie said.

"We better get going," Blade grumbled. "I'm sure that Savage has to get back to the bar. I'll drop you off at your place, Sis," he said.

"Um, I was thinking about sticking around here and having a beer or two," Wren said. Trixie could tell that her friend was egging on her brother, and from the way the vein in Blade's neck seemed to pop out, it was working. Even Savage seemed to be able to tell that Wren was getting under Blade's skin.

"Man, I don't envy you," Savage teased.

"Thanks," Blade grumbled. He turned to Wren and grabbed her hand. "You are not staying here with these guys. They'll eat you alive."

"Well, that doesn't sound half bad to me," Wren teased.

"Good fucking Lord," Blade mumbled to himself. "We're leaving." He pulled Wren along with him and she turned back to smile at Savage.

"Good meeting you, Savage," Wren said.

"You too, Wren," Savage said.

"Thank you again for your help," Trixie said.

"No problem," Savage said, "I'll be in touch with Blade as soon as I have some information about your stalker." Yeah, she was going to have to come clean with Wren much sooner than she wanted to, but her friend deserved to hear about her bad decisions from her and not some guy who ran a biker bar.

Blade's Christmas Ride (A Christmas Novella Royal Bastards MC Book 13) Coming in December 2023!

Universal Link-> <https://books2read.com/u/bQeqdd>

What's releasing next from K.L.? Here's a sneak peek! Be the first to get your hands on Riding Hard (Dirty Riders MC Book 1) coming October 2023!

OWEN

Owen Blaine wasn't about to let the sexy red head in the corner go home with anyone else except him. She was the hottest woman he'd seen in a damn long time and the way the other guys seemed to be circling her just plain pissed him off. Even his older brother, Maverick was eyeing her and if he let his brother get to her first, there would be no doubt that Mav would be the one she'd be leaving with tonight. He couldn't let that happen. The last time he and his brother were involved with the same woman, they both ended up heartbroken, not that Mav ever let on that he was.

"Who's the hot chick in the corner?" Maverick asked.

"No idea," Owen admitted. She hadn't ever been into the Dirty Riders club before. He would have remembered her if she had. "She's not that hot," he lied, trying to throw his brother off her scent. From the hungry look in his eyes, Mav wasn't buying what he was selling.

"You're a fucking liar," Mav accused. "I saw the way that you looked at her. Hell, every guy in this fucking place is looking at her. You going to do something about it or is she up for grabs?"

"Up for grabs," Owen repeated. "Jesus, Mav, you're an asshole, aren't you?"

His brother threw back his head and laughed at what Owen had said and he blew out his breath. It could have gone either way with his brother. Either he'd say something that would have Mav pounding on his face or he'd just laugh. Owen was

glad that his brother thought that he was being funny because he didn't have time for stitches tonight.

“Thanks, man,” Maverick said. “So, you gonna go over there and talk to her, or am I? After the deal with both of us dating Amy, I don't want to have to deal with any of that shit again. You followed her around like a fucking puppy.”

“Did not,” Owen shouted over the music. “You're an asshole and I'm going over there and talking to her.”

“All right then,” Mav said. “When you strike out, let me know so that I can beat these other fuckers to her.”

“I'm not going to strike out,” Owen insisted. Sure, he probably would, but he was trying to stay positive, even if his brother was most likely going to win the girl. It's how things usually went when they wanted the same girl. Hell, they even fought over girls back in high school, not that any of them ever paid attention to Owen once Maverick or his twin, Steel, walked into the room. His older twin brothers always got the girls, and he was getting sick of playing second fiddle to them both.

When they weren't fighting over a woman, things were usually pretty good between them. It had been just the three of them for so long, that Owen had forgotten how life was when their parents were still around. His dad left when he was just a little kid and for a long time, it was just him, Mav, Steel, and their mom. She got cancer when he was a junior in high school and died before he graduated, but Maverick and Steel were there to watch him walk across the stage. They even got him a cake and threw him a little party—just the three of them, to celebrate. Maverick and Steel had become his only family and the three of them had learned how to get along in life together.

Steel joined the Navy at about the same time as Owen had joined the Army. He was a medic and had served two deployments so far. He knew that them both taking off on Maverick wasn't fair, but he insisted that they follow their own paths. Maverick stayed in town, opening his own bike shop, just like he had always dreamed of doing, and whenever Owen and Steel could get home for a visit, they did. The one thing

Owen was sure of—if he needed one of his older brothers, they'd be there for him, no questions asked.

He knew that Mav was right—if he didn't go over and ask the pretty woman out, one of the other guys would, and then, he'd miss out on his chance with her. Owen walked across the bar to where she sat and stared her down. He was willing her to turn around and notice him, but she just kept her eyes on the beer that she had been nursing. He cleared his throat twice before she turned to look over her shoulder at him.

“Can I help you?” she asked. God, he hoped so.

“Um, I saw you sitting here alone and thought that you would let me buy you a drink,” he said.

The woman held up her beer and shook her head. “I already have one,” she said. “I'm good.” She was blowing him off and sure, that was like a kick in the nuts—especially when he looked over to find his older brother laughing at him. There was no way that he was going to give Maverick his chance with her. Not without a fight.

Owen sat down on the barstool next to her and she sighed, picked up her beer and purse from the bar top, and slid down one stool. Ouch—that hurt, but he wasn't about to let it deter him. Even with Mav's laughter playing like a record skipping on a record player behind him, he felt some crazy determination to get to know this woman.

“My name's Owen,” he said.

“Well, Owen, I'd say that it's nice to meet you, but that would be a lie. I thought that you'd take the hint to get lost when I turned your drink offer down,” she said.

“I was just trying to be friendly,” he breathed. “Won't happen again.” The woman nodded and chugged down the last half of her beer. She pulled a ten from her purse and tossed it onto the bar, thanking the bartender, Spade, for the beer and even smiling at the guy. What the fuck?

Owen watched as the pretty woman walked back to the bathroom and disappeared through the door. “You fucking struck out, didn't you?” Maverick taunted. He sat down on the

stool that the pretty little red head had just vacated and smiled over at him. “You can buy me a beer if it will make you feel better,” Maverick teased.

“You can go fuck yourself,” Owen said under his breath, just loud enough that he knew his brother heard him. His laughter rang out through the bar, garnering them more attention than Owen was hoping for.

“Can you shut the fuck up?” Owen grumbled. “I don’t need every guy in here knowing that I struck out with her.”

“Agreed,” Maverick said, sobering, “I don’t need the competition when I ask her out. Not that any of these assholes are my competition or anything.” Maverick mean mugged a few of the guys who were hanging back by the ladies’ room door, waiting for the pretty red head to come out.

“Looks like you’re going to have some competition whether you think they are or not,” Owen taunted.

“Yeah, I’m going to have to knock some skulls together,” he said. Maverick stood just as a woman’s scream rang out from the ladies’ room. “What the fuck?” he asked. Owen was about to ask the same thing, but his brother beat him to it. He had a sick feeling that the sexy red head was in trouble because he hadn’t seen any women go back there in a while. Hell, there weren’t a lot of women at the bar tonight. That’s why the guys were salivating over the hot red head.

He followed close behind Maverick as they made their way through the crowd of guys who were trying to get a glimpse of what was going on. Mav pushed his way through the ladies’ room door, not bothering to knock, to find the sexy red head on the floor, blood trickling down from her forehead.

“Don’t move her,” Owen ordered. His Army medic training was kicking in and it helped that he rode for the local ambulance services on weekends to earn some extra cash. “Call 911,” he shouted back to Spade.

“On it,” Spade shouted.

“Give me your jacket,” Owen ordered. Maverick immediately removed his leather jacket and handed it over to

him. “Thanks,” he murmured as he balled it up and put it under the woman’s head.

“Who would have done this?” Maverick asked. Owen looked around the room to find the guys watching them and shook his head.

“I’m not sure,” Owen said. “I didn’t see anyone follow her in.” He had been watching too. He didn’t take his eyes off the door after the sexy red head disappeared into the bathroom. He looked around the small room and noticed that the bathroom window was open and was big enough to possibly fit a person through it—a smaller person, not one of the hulking guys standing around them.

“Her purse is missing,” Owen said, looking around. “She picked it up, paid her bar tab, and then walked back here to the bathroom. Did someone knock her out just to rob her?”

“Don’t know, but I think that we should look around outside, just in case someone used that window to escape,” Mav said, as if reading Owen’s earlier thoughts.

“Agreed. I’ll stay here with her, and you take a couple of guys you can trust to look around outside,” Owen ordered. When it came to things like this, Maverick usually let him take lead. It was his military training that had gotten them both out of a good deal of scrapes. Owen was used to calling the shots when the odds were against him and from the way things looked for the pretty red head, she’d need someone to call the shots until she could get back on her feet. He might be crazy for thinking about doing it, but he was going to stick by her until she told him to get lost again. It was the least he could do for the pretty woman who blew him off at the bar and if it won him brownie points, he’d take them.

TILLY

Matilda Newton wasn't sure how she had ended up at a biker bar, surrounded by big, bearded, tattooed men who didn't want to seem to take no for an answer. She was determined to try to put her bad day behind her and find a way out of the mess she had gotten herself into. She just never imagined that the little dive bar she picked to hide away, and think, would be a biker bar.

She sat in the corner hoping that everyone would leave her alone, but being one of the only single women in the place garnered her some unwanted attention that she couldn't seem to shake. When she had to spell it out for the hot biker that she wasn't interested in him buying her a beer, he seemed a bit hurt. That wasn't Tilly's intention, but she had already politely turned him down once. She just wanted to be left alone until she could figure out what to do with the hard drive that she had swiped off her boss's desk. Apparently, it was important enough to Nate that he called her about twenty-five times since she had left the office, threatening to come after her if she didn't give it back to him. His threats grew darker and more menacing and the messages longer as time passed, and she worried that he'd make good on every one of them if she didn't give the drive back to him.

She knew that Nate was doing something illegal, and now, she was sure of it. Tilly was also sure that the information that she'd need to bring him down was on the hard drive that he kept under lock and key in his desk. He was foolish enough to leave the key on the desk when he ran to lunch and Tilly

snooped, against her better judgment. Now, she had her boss and who knew who else was chasing after her and the one thing she was sure of was she couldn't go home. She was sure that if she did, she'd find Nate waiting for her there and he'd be ready to make good on his threats.

Her only hope at getting out of there was going to be to pay her tab, tell the biker sitting next to her to fuck off, and regroup in the bathroom. Then, she'd be able to figure out where to go next and who she could trust. Honestly, she had no one to turn to, and that made her feel desperate and alone. She almost wanted to take the biker up on his offer of a drink and then, ask him to take her someplace safe, but that would give him the wrong idea. She needed a safe place to land that didn't involve his bed for the night because she was sure that would be what he wanted in return for helping her out.

She spent about five minutes in the mirror, trying to talk herself into going home with the sexy biker when a shadow in the corner caught her eye. It was a man—at least she thought it was. He had a slight build, and she was sure that he had gotten in through the window somehow.

“I don't want to hurt you,” he breathed as he stepped out of the shadows. “I just want the drive,” he said.

“Nate,” she breathed. “How did you get in here? How did you know that I was here?”

“I knew that sooner or later, you'd get up to no good and do some snooping, so I put a tracker on your car. I saw you sitting at the bar drinking and assumed that at some point, you'd need to use the ladies' room, so I climbed in through the window.”

“You've been tracking me?” she spat. She knew that he was a weasel, but she had no idea that he's stoop to such lows.

“Yes, and now, all I want is the hard drive,” he said, stepping toward her with his hand out.

“I don't have it. I ditched it someplace for safe keeping on my way here,” she lied.

His smile was mean, “You do know that I can trace your path here, right? You didn’t make any stops, which means it’s on you or in that purse you’re clutching for dear life.” He nodded to her purse, and she hugged it to her chest.

“You can’t take this,” she said. “It has sentimental value,” she lied. She had just purchased it on a whim about two weeks ago.

“Again, with the lies,” he tisked. “You really are the worst liar, Tilly. Just give me the fucking drive and this can all be over.”

“If you come one step closer, I’ll scream. There are a lot of big, bad ass bikers out there and I’m sure that they’ll come in her to my rescue. One even asked to buy me a drink, so I’m sure that you won’t be able to just leave here unscathed.” She wasn’t sure of anything, but she was hoping that was what would end up happening. Hell, for all she knew, the sexy-assin biker had given up on her and left while she was in the bathroom.

“Go ahead and scream, Tilly,” he said. “I’ll have what I want from you and be out of here before they can even find your body.” He took another step in her direction, pulling a gun from his jacket pocket. Tilly couldn’t help the screech that escaped her lips. She let it out with all her might and when he realized what had happened, Nate hit her in the temple with the butt of the gun, knocking her to the ground. The last thing Tilly remembered as her world went dark was Nate taking her purse out of her hands as he laughed at her.

“Should have just given me the fucking hard drive, Tilly,” he breathed on his way out of the bathroom window. Nate disappeared into the night as she closed her eyes, giving into the darkness.

Tilly woke up to two men arguing about who was going to get to keep her and she knew that had to be wrong. Why would anyone be arguing about who was going to get to keep her?

She opened her eyes and groaned as they adjusted to the light. Her head was throbbing, and she was sure that had everything to do with her boss hitting her with the handle of his gun. It could have been worse—he could have used the gun correctly and shot her. She was thankful that wasn't the case.

“Where am I?” she asked blinking up at the two men who were standing over her.

“Take it easy—you're in the hospital.” She looked up at the man standing over her and recognized him from the bar.

“You were the guy I turned down at the bar,” she whispered. Her voice sounded hoarse, and she tried to sit up. “Can I get some water?” The guy standing on the other side of her laughed and helped her take a sip of the water cup that was sitting on the table next to him.

“I'm not the guy you turned down,” he said. “You turned down my little brother there though, so I'd say that your memory is working just fine.” She hadn't turned the big, grizzly-looking guy down, but she would have. He was bigger than his brother and covered in tattoos. He wasn't bad looking at all, but just not her type. She liked the guys she went out with a little cleaner cut. In fact, the one she turned down was her type, not that she'd admit that to either of them.

“Can you please tell me where I am?” she asked again.

“You're in the hospital, and I'm Owen Blaine. That's my brother, Maverick. You were knocked out in the ladies' room at the bar we were at. I think someone stole your purse too.” Yeah, she remembered exactly who took her purse, but that wasn't something she was going to share with either of them. She'd save that for the police, as soon as she was up to going to the station to file a report.

“Well, I appreciate you getting me to the hospital, but I think that I can take it from here,” she said, sitting up. She immediately had to lie back down. She felt nauseous and dizzy. “The room is spinning.”

“You have a concussion and can't get up,” Owen warned. “You'll need to stay here over night,” he added.

“I can’t do that,” she said. “He’ll find me here and finish what he started.” The thought of Nate finding her in the hospital and actually using the gun he had to kill her, scared the hell out of her.

“Who will?” Maverick asked.

“My boss,” she almost whispered, “he did this to me. He had a gun.”

“Why would your boss want to hurt you?” Owen asked.

“That is a long story, and my head is killing me,” she whispered. The less they knew, the better. She was going to have to figure out how to handle Nate on her own because dragging strangers into her mess wouldn’t be fair to either of them.

“I’ll stay with you tonight,” Owen offered. “That way, you can get some rest and not have to worry about your boss getting in here.”

“You don’t have to do that,” she insisted.

“Well, I wasn’t asking, I was letting you know that I’ll be right here for the night. Then, when you get discharged, you’re coming home with me,” he said.

“Oh, I can’t do that,” she breathed. “I don’t even know you.”

“Sure you do—I’m the guy from the bar who you turned down. You can’t go back to your place. I’m betting your boss knows where you live,” he said.

“Good point,” she said.

“He’s right, you can’t go back to your place. So, you need to decide—are you going home with Owen or me?” Maverick asked, puffing out his chest, making her giggle. Tilly groaned and grabbed her head. “Sorry, didn’t mean to make it worse,” he said.

“You didn’t,” she said, “they say laughter is the best medicine. Listen, you guys can’t just take me in. I don’t want to be anyone’s problem and if you get involved in this, you’ll be in over your heads, just like I am.”

“How about you let us decide what we will and won’t be involved in? We want to help you out,” Owen said.

“Well, I will need a place to lay low for a bit, until I can figure out what to do about Nate,” she said.

“Nate?” Maverick asked.

“Yeah, he’s my boss—the one who knocked me out,” she said. The thought of going back to her place scared the hell out of her and Nate didn’t know either of the big bikers standing by her bedside. If she went home with one of them, she’d be able to take her time to figure out her next move.

Riding Hard (Dirty Riders MC Book 1) Universal Link->

<https://books2read.com/u/mlIBXZ>

Do you love the Royal Bastards and missed how it all began for the guys at Savage Hell? You can start at the very beginning now with Savage Heat (The Royal Bastards MC: Huntsville Chapter) by K.L. Ramsey! Here is a special sneak peek bonus just for you! Enjoy!!

SAVAGE

Savage watched as his latest failure floated down from the atmosphere back to earth. At least this time the damn parachute deployed, and he wouldn't have to start from scratch again to rebuild his rocket. Last time that happened, his boss threw a major fit, telling him to get his shit and clear out of his office. A short week later, his boss was standing on Savage's front porch, proverbial hat in hand, begging him to come back to work. He even gave him some bullshit about the government needing his service and all that shit. Savage didn't have the desire to tell his boss that he had not only served his government for almost twenty years, but he had also had the bullet holes and shrapnel in his leg to prove it.

Sure, he could sit around and complain about his past and wake up every day in pain, but where would that get him? It was his choice to join the Air Force and it was his choice to re-up when he could have gotten out. He saw active combat for the third time and that was when his copter went down and most of his buddies died. There was nothing he could have done differently that day but God, it was just about all he could think about every night when he laid down and tried to sleep. Their faces would flicker through his memories, and he knew that he was going to have another restless night ahead. It was who he had become since he was honorably discharged.

Of course, the Army was quick to jump on his specific skill set and make him the best fucking job offer he'd ever gotten. How could he refuse and why would he? He got to stay in Huntsville, Alabama, where his kid could stay in the same

school with the only friends she had ever known. Uprooting Chloe wasn't part of his plan—the poor kid hadn't had much stability in her life. Chloe wasn't really his kid, but that wasn't something he liked to think about too often. It brought up too many bad memories and he tried to only look forward, never back.

Savage adopted Chloe when she was just six months old after her mother and father died in a horrible auto accident. She was his niece and when child services showed up at his doorstep with a baby in tow, claiming that his estranged sister had given him full custody in her will, what was he supposed to do? Savage didn't have one fucking idea how to take care of a kid and they were handing him one that still needed twenty-four-seven care. He quickly learned how to change a diaper and what to feed and not feed a six-month-old. Honestly, that last part was learned the hard way because the kid ended up not being able to handle table food at such an early age. Everything he fed her seemed to run through her like sand in a sieve. But that was all behind him now. He wasn't sure how he would have survived without that little girl. She had become his whole reason for living. Hell, she basically saved his life and gave him purpose and the will to keep going after his accident.

He had only been home for a few months when Chloe came into his life, and he was feeling pretty down and sorry for himself. Both of his parents were gone. His father was never really in the picture and his mom died the year he graduated from high school. Her death had sent him into a spiral that led to him joining the Air Force after he graduated. It also was one of the reasons his older sister, Cherry, stopped talking to him. She begged him not to go into the military; and even tried to guilt him into feeling bad about leaving her with no one, since both of their parents were gone. But he didn't listen. Hell, the only thing Savage wanted to do was ride his damn motorcycle and get the fuck out of that town. He was a punk-ass kid who didn't know any better and the day he left to enlist was the last time he saw Cherry alive.

Now, every time he looked at Chloe's sweet face, he saw his sister. He never met Chloe's dad, but he had heard that his

sister met a good guy and got married. He liked to imagine Cherry happy with her beautiful new family, at least for a little while. She deserved some happiness after all the shit life had thrown at her, including a punk-ass, eighteen-year-old kid brother who thought he knew better than she did. God was he wrong. His relationship with Cherry was the one thing he regretted in life, but Savage learned that regrets would only hold him back and he couldn't allow that. He had too much going for him to wallow in self-pity.

“I think your rocket's a dud.” Savage turned to find the hot guy who always seemed to follow him around Redstone Arsenal. It was as if the guy was his personal bodyguard with the way he watched Savage and he had to admit, he wouldn't mind having his body guarded by him.

“Yeah, well, this is literally rocket science, so I can't really use that old line.” Savage looked the guy up and down, liking the way he filled out his fatigues. Not having to wear a uniform was one of the many perks of no longer being enlisted. He usually wore ratty old jeans and a t-shirt when he was on base, partially out of defiance but mostly for comfort. The Alabama heat was quite unbearable, but he was used to it. He never really lived anywhere else except for being stationed overseas.

“I'm Bowie Wolfe,” the guy said, holding out his hand, waiting for Savage to take it.

He shook the younger guy's hand and smiled. “Are you named after the singer?” Savage questioned.

“Yeah,” he breathed. “My mother was a huge fan and well, I got stuck with the name.”

Savage shrugged, “All in all, I'd say you did all right. David Bowie is a legend, man,” he said.

Bowie groaned and laughed. “Yeah, now you just sound like my mother,” he teased.

“Thanks for that,” Savage grumbled. He knew just by looking at the guy that he had a few years on him. Hell, he had

more than a few years but that usually didn't bother him. Savage liked his guys young and feisty.

"Sorry, man. Um, I didn't catch your name," Bowie said.

"Savage," he offered.

"Wow—you gave me shit about my name but yours is pretty epic too. How did you get a name like Savage?" Bowie crossed his arms over his massive chest and waited him out. It wasn't something Savage liked to talk about, but the determination on the guy's face told him he really had no choice in the matter.

"Savage is actually my last name. My first name is Logan, but my club gave me the nickname after I told them about my helicopter going down. Lost a lot of good guys that day and my buddies said I'm still alive because I'm too savage to die."

"You served?" Bowie asked.

"Yeah—career Air Force until the accident and then honorably discharged," Savage admitted. "How about you?" Bowie held his arms wide as if showing Savage his fatigues to prove his point.

"I enlisted in the Army right from high school and haven't left yet. I've been in for twelve years now and I hope to make this my career, but we'll see." Savage did the math in his head and whistled.

"So, you're what—about thirty?" he questioned.

"I'll be thirty-one in a few months," Bowie admitted.

"You're just a kid," Savage teased.

"Yeah—okay, old man," Bowie said. Savage knew the guy was teasing but at forty-five, he was really beginning to feel his age. "And how old are you?" Savage winced at the mention of his age. It was something he usually didn't share because it wasn't anyone's damn business.

Savage smiled at Bowie, trying to deflect his question with one of his own. "Want to have a couple beers with me?" Savage knew he was pushing his luck with the younger guy, but he didn't give a shit. He was hot and tired, and Bowie

turned him the fuck on. It was time to knock off and if Savage could convince him to have a couple of beers, then he might be able to talk Bowie into coming home with him for the night. If he was reading the signals correctly, his new friend was interested but he had been wrong in the past—so who knew?

“You asking me out, Savage?” Bowie questioned. Now it was Savage’s turn to waiver in his answer and he suddenly worried that he had misread the chemistry that hummed through the air between the two of them.

Savage shrugged, “Maybe I am,” he said, not really answering Bowie’s question. The guy was as stoic as they came and Savage was trying to read him, but he wasn’t having any luck.

“Listen, if I misread the situation, then just forget I asked,” Savage grumbled. He picked up the last part of his rocket that landed a few hundred feet away from where he had parked and by the time he turned around and headed back to his pick-up truck, he found Bowie leaning up against the passenger side door, his hands shoved deep into his pockets.

“I’m in,” Bowie said, flashing him a wolfish grin.

“Sounds good,” Savage said. He was trying for nonchalant, but his tone sounded anything but. It had been a damn long time since he met a man who made his cock pay attention, but Bowie did that for him. Savage needed to get himself under control or he’d blow his whole cool guy routine. Hell, he was far from being cool, but Bowie seemed interested, and he wasn’t about to do anything to fuck that up.

“You have someplace in mind?” Bowie asked, helping Savage shove the last of his equipment into the back of his pickup. “I mean, do you have a place you usually go to, you know, for a few beers?”

Savage liked the way Bowie seemed just as flustered about their situation as he was. He found it kind of cute the way the guy was floundering for words. He could have helped him out but giving him a hard time felt like the better option and would be a lot more fun.

“You mean, like a gay bar?” Savage asked. He knew he was adding fuel to the fire, but he didn’t care. Bowie turned an adorable shade of red that ran down his sexy neck and had Savage wanting to see just how far down his blush went.

“Well, I mean—sure. Or any bar, for that matter. It doesn’t matter to me,” Bowie stuttered.

Savage reached out and put his hand on Bowie’s arm. “I’m just messing with you,” he said. “I don’t know of too many gay bars in Huntsville. I usually just go to my own bar, but I don’t really advertise that I’m gay and I don’t feel like answering questions tonight. You mind just going to the Voodoo Lounge? It’s a bit yuppie but I think we can blend in with the regular crowd. Plus, they’ve got great live music a few nights of the week.”

“Wait—you have a bar?” Bowie asked.

Savage smiled and nodded, “Yep—the bar’s called Savage Hell. It’s also where my motorcycle club meets. We’re a part of the Royal Bastards, which is a nationwide MC, but my little chapter calls themselves Savage Hell, after the bar. I try to keep my personal and private lives separate.”

“Meaning you haven’t shared that you’re gay with your club,” Bowie guessed.

Savage wasn’t sure what to say to Bowie’s assessment. On the one hand, he felt the need to set him straight, and on the other, he wanted to tell him it wasn’t anyone’s business whom he was having sex with. From the way his body was responding to Bowie, he hoped to have sex with him before the end of the night.

“Listen,” Savage said. “I learned a long time ago that who I’m fucking is no one’s business. I like you, Bowie, but if you’re not interested, tell me now if I’m wasting my time.”

“I was just talking, man,” Bowie said.

Savage sighed, “Yeah—I’m just on edge lately with these damn tests needing to be done yesterday and I’m being an ass. Sorry,” he offered. “And to answer your question—I haven’t told my club that I’m bi.” Hell, he hadn’t told many people

about that part of his life. Savage was careful not to bring any of the men or women he slept with home to meet Chloe. He didn't want to expose his daughter to his unstable dating life and that was exactly what it was—chaotic.

He hadn't been much of a serial dater, usually not making it past one night with a person. It was easier that way. He didn't have to make any promises to anyone, and he didn't expect anything in return. The one time he broke his no-dating rule, he ended up running away like a fucking coward when messy feelings got in the way.

“So, we doing this?” Savage asked. He started for the driver's side of his pick-up, not waiting to see if Bowie was going to join him or not.

“I get it,” Bowie said. “I don't share that part of my life easily. I haven't even come out to my family yet.” Bowie slipped into the passenger side of the cab of the truck and pulled his seatbelt on, clicking it in place.

“What about your truck?” Savage asked, nodding to where Bowie's vehicle sat, just down the road.

“I'll get it tomorrow when I'm back on duty. That is if you don't mind giving me a lift back to my place later.” Bowie seemed to assume Savage would just agree and honestly, he didn't mind. If he was Bowie's ride for the night, there was a better chance they'd end up in Bowie's bed for a little while. Savage never left Chloe overnight, but he had a sitter with her, and he knew that she'd agree to a few extra hours if he paid double.

“Sure,” Savage said. “No problem.”

“Thanks,” Bowie said. “I have to admit, I could use a night out. It's been a shit show around base, and I could use the break.”

“Yeah, I heard about the cutbacks, and I guess being down so many people makes for more work for the ones who are left.” Savage knew some other guys on base from his club and they were all complaining about the changes to the budget and having to take on more hours for the same pay. His MC was

made up of mostly military guys, both active and retired. But his guys came from all walks of life—he even had a few one-percenters who he was happy to help get their lives straightened out. He liked helping his guys and even took a few of them under his wing, as a sort of personal project.

“Yep, it sucks. But what am I gonna do? Uncle Sam owns me, and I go where he tells me,” Bowie said.

“Where are you originally from?” Savage asked. He usually didn’t get too chatty with his “dates” but there was something about Bowie that made him want to know more about the guy.

“Texas,” Bowie said.

“You get homesick?” Savage questioned.

“Naw,” Bowie admitted. “Like I said, I still haven’t come out to my family, and keeping a secret like that weighs on a person. It’s easier being away from home and not having to worry about watching my back or saying the wrong thing.”

“I get that,” Savage said. “I haven’t exactly been forthcoming about my sexuality with my friends or family either.” He had a few close buddies in his club that knew the truth and he trusted them not only with his secret but with his life.

“I’d like to blame my military background for all the secrecy, but that really isn’t an issue anymore,” Bowie said.

“Yeah, that wasn’t the case when I enlisted.” Savage had served under the, “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” era and he had to admit, it had its pros and cons. Not having people diving too deep into his personal life was always a plus. He valued his privacy over everything else.

“You originally from Huntsville?” Bowie asked.

“Yeah,” Savage said. “My family was from here, but they’re all gone now. Well, everyone except Chloe and me.” Savage mentally kicked himself for talking about his daughter. It wasn’t something he did with complete strangers, and he was starting to worry that asking Bowie out might have been a bad choice. Sure, the guy was the sexiest man he had seen in a

damn long time, but he was completely blowing his rules out the fucking window with Bowie, and that usually didn't end well for him.

“Who's Chloe?” Bowie asked as if he was able to read Savage's mind.

“My kid,” Savage admitted.

“You have a daughter?” Bowie asked.

“She's six and I adopted her when she was a baby. Chloe is my sister's kid and when she and her husband died in a car accident, I took Chloe in.”

“Wow,” Bowie breathed. “I'm sorry about your sister and brother-in-law. But Chloe is lucky to have you, man.”

Savage shrugged, “Thanks. And I'm the lucky one. She came into my life when I was in a dark place, and she gave me a purpose. She's a great kid.”

“That makes sense,” Bowie said. “She seems to have a pretty awesome dad.”

BOWIE

Bowie wasn't sure how the hell he had ended up in the sexy stranger's pick-up agreeing to go for a few beers with him. He had been watching Savage for weeks now, not that he'd ever admit to it. Bowie had always been attracted to older men and Savage was his type, right down to his salt-and-pepper beard that made him want to give it a tug.

It had been a damn long time since he found anyone interesting enough to go out for a few beers with. When Savage first asked him out, he wasn't sure he had heard him correctly. He usually had a pretty good idea when a guy or woman, for that matter, was interested in him. But Savage didn't give him anything to go by. It was hard to get a read on the guy and that made Bowie want him even more. He always did like a challenge.

Honestly, dating men was kind of new to him. He wasn't lying when he told Savage that he hadn't come out to his family yet. It was one of the reasons why he jumped at the chance to be transferred to Huntsville from Texas when the opportunity arose. He hated that he was taking the coward's way out, but that was easier than admitting that he was bi. He was even beginning to avoid his weekly calls home to his parents because he got sick of dodging their questions about whether he had someone special in his life. Even if he had, he wouldn't be able to admit it because that would mean telling his parents who he was.

"You're awfully quiet," Savage said. "You having second thoughts?"

“About beer—never,” Bowie teased. Savage shot him a smirk that told him he wasn’t buying him using humor to hide from the question.

“You always a smart ass?” Savage asked.

“Most of the time,” Bowie admitted. “I use humor to mask what I’m really feeling. My therapist says it’s a way for me to hide my true self because I’m afraid that if people get to really know me, they won’t like who I am.” Bowie looked at Savage and almost made it through without busting up laughing. Savage looked about ready to pull to the side of the road and kick Bowie’s ass out of his pick-up.

“Really, man,” Savage grumbled. “I’m not sure if you’re kidding or not.” He shook his head at Bowie and smiled.

“Your face, man,” Bowie said between fits of laughter.

“Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up,” Savage griped. “Was any of that true?” The sad fact was it was all true, but Bowie wouldn’t admit that to Savage on what could potentially be their first date.

“Naw,” Bowie lied. “I just like yanking people’s chains.” Savage looked at him as if he was trying to decide if he wanted to believe him or not. He seemed like a smart guy and if he was telling the truth earlier, a literal rocket scientist. Bowie worried that Savage would be able to see right through his facade and that scared the hell out of him.

“I mean, I’ve been to a therapist, but that was to work a few things out after I got back from active duty,” Bowie admitted. Giving the guy some truth might throw him off the scent. It would be best to get through the night together without Savage finding out just how messed up he really was. That was another one of his secrets he didn’t share with anyone—well, besides his therapist.

“Yeah—happens to the best of us. The Air Force shoved my ass into therapy after I got shot down, not that it helped much.” Bowie knew just how a tragedy like that could affect a guy. He watched his best friend die after their Humvee was attacked. It should have been him who was lying on the side of

the road, bleeding out but instead, it was his best friend, Drew.

They pulled into one of Huntsville's dive bars famous for its customers being a little on the shady side. It was a perfect spot for two guys who didn't want to be seen out together, to grab a few beers. No one got into anyone else's business in places like the Voodoo Lounge and that was just the way they both seemed to want it. He knew that score—Savage didn't look like the type of guy who had long-term relationships and that was fine with Bowie. He wasn't sure where he'd be tomorrow and settling down with someone like Savage seemed like a pipe dream. He never let himself imagine his life with a man. Hell, he never imagined settling down with anyone, if he was being completely honest.

Savage parked his truck and cut the engine. "Listen, man," he sighed, "if you changed your mind about all of this, I'd get it."

Bowie smiled at Savage and reached across the center console to take his hand. "You keep saying that, Savage. But I haven't changed my mind—about the beer or you. I'd like to hang out with you tonight, no pressure and no strings. You up for that?" Savage nodded and if Bowie wasn't mistaken, he could have sworn the big guy was blushing.

"I'd like that," he said. Savage grabbed his baseball cap from the back seat and covered his bald head, running his hand down his beard and Bowie couldn't seem to take his eyes off the guy. He was hot as fuck and Bowie was mesmerized by his every movement. He had been for weeks, following him around, watching him on base. Savage was big but carried himself with confidence and grace. He had a persona that screamed alpha and that alone turned Bowie completely the fuck on. He liked older men because the few he had been with usually insisted on being in charge in the bedroom. He wondered if Savage would be just as demanding, and the thought sent a shiver down his body.

"You good?" Savage asked. Bowie shook his head and smiled.

“No, but it’s nothing a few beers won’t fix,” Bowie lied. He had a feeling it would take more than alcohol to right what had been bothering him. In fact, Bowie had a sneaky feeling it would take at least a night of taking orders from the sexy man sitting next to him to start feeling like himself again.

SAVAGE

Savage felt about ready to turn back around and leave just as soon as he saw his ex sitting at the bar with her girlfriends. Apparently, one of them was about to get hitched and Dallas was there to help her celebrate. At least, that was what he had gathered from the group of rowdy women.

“Shit,” he grumbled and sat down next to Bowie. He looked down at the end of the bar to where Dallas mean-mugged him and had the nerve to laugh.

“I’d say ‘shit’ doesn’t even begin to cover it judging from the way that blonde is scowling at you, man. What did you do?” Bowie asked. That really was a loaded question. It was more like what he didn’t do, that was the problem. She was the only woman that Savage dated more than just a few times. Hell, she was the only person he had any kind of relationship with his entire adult life. And he fucked it completely up with her. He ghosted Dallas when he realized he wasn’t going to be able to commit to her. She’d never be enough for him and how did he admit something like that to her? It was easier to just walk away from her and hope that Dallas would just forget about him. Her angry scowl told him that hadn’t happened yet.

“We dated,” Savage admitted. “About a year ago.”

“Wow,” Bowie whistled under his breath. “So, whatever you did to that woman must have been big, if she hasn’t forgiven you in a year.”

“I didn’t ask for forgiveness,” Savage growled. “And I’m not looking for it now.”

“Well, I didn’t have you pegged as the dating type,” Bowie said. Savage held up two fingers to the bartender, signaling that he wanted a couple of beers. The bar really didn’t offer much in the way of choices and he was one of the regulars, on nights after he had a rough day at work and didn’t want to deal with his MC brothers asking him a million questions. At the Voodoo Lounge, he could just be himself and no one really bothered him.

The bartender brought them their beers and a bowl of pretzels that looked like they had been set out for a few weeks. “Hey, Savage,” the bartender said.

“Mike.” Savage nodded. “Start me a tab,” he ordered.

“Sure thing,” Mike agreed and nodded to Bowie.

“You new here?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Bowie said. “New to the area, really. I’m at Redstone Arsenal.” Mike grunted and Bowie smiled.

“Well, women around these parts seem to burst into flames around guys in uniform. Just watch yourself with the piranhas at the end of the bar. One of the chicks is getting married but they seem to be out for a good time. Just fair warning; unless you’re looking for something like that.” Mike looked between Bowie and Savage as if trying to access what was going on between the two of them and Savage growled.

“Thanks, Mike,” he barked, all but dismissing the guy. Bowie laughed again and he wondered what was so funny, but he had a feeling he wouldn’t like Bowie’s answer. So, he didn’t bother asking.

“Are you always so grumbly?” Bowie accused.

“No,” Savage quickly defended, shooting him a look that probably told him he was lying. Bowie held up his hands as if in defense.

“Okay, man,” he said. “No need to bite my head off. If you want to go someplace else, we can. Hell, we can go back to

my apartment. I have beer there.” Bowie shot him a wolfish grin, making Savage smile.

“I’m good here,” Savage lied. He could feel Dallas’ eyes boring into the back of his head and he wasn’t sure what the hell to do about her.

“Liar,” Bowie challenged. “That sexy blonde has you squirming in your seat. It’s hot, really—the thought of you with her. I just don’t want to cause any trouble. Does she know?”

“Know what?” Savage asked, playing dumb.

Bowie sighed. “Does she know that you date guys?” he whispered.

“No,” Savage breathed. He sucked down half his beer and shot a look across the bar to where Dallas was still giving him the stink-eye.

“You ghost her or something?” Bowie teased and Savage winced. “Fuck, man,” Bowie spat. “You didn’t fucking ghost that hot woman sitting at the end of the bar?”

“I did and can you keep it down, man?” Savage said.

“I’m pretty sure she can’t hear me over this God-awful honky-tonk music and the ruckus her girlfriends are making. Why did you do it?” Bowie asked.

“Because she would never be enough for me,” Savage admitted. It was the truest thing he had said to Bowie, and he worried that made him sound like an ass. “We had been on a few dates, and I really liked her, but then I realized that if I dated her—you know, just her—I’d be denying half of myself. You know what I mean?”

Bowie nodded like he understood exactly what Savage was talking about and he realized that he had just assumed the guy was gay.

“You like women too?” Savage asked.

“Yep,” Bowie admitted.” In fact, I haven’t been with many men. It was easier to deny that part of who I was while I was living so close to home. I didn’t start exploring that side of my

sexuality until I was stationed here. I had been on a few dates with men, but not a lot. So, I do get what you're talking about, man."

Savage sat back in his barstool and waved the bartender back over. "We'll take two more and buy the ladies at the end of the bar another round on me," he said. Mike nodded and walked back down to where the loud group of women sat and when he announced that Savage wanted to buy them a round of drinks, they all squealed and cheered. Well, everyone except Dallas. She shot him a look that could stop most men dead in their tracks, but he wasn't most men.

Dallas stood from her stool and started toward them, and Bowie cursed. "Um, I'm pretty sure the shit is about to hit the fucking fan now, Savage," he said. Savage had a bad feeling that Bowie was right.

He held his breath, second-guessing every decision he had made that day, right down to asking Bowie out and buying Dallas' friends a round of drinks. Yep, he was thoroughly fucked and all he wanted to do was get the hell out of there. Savage stood and threw down a hundred-dollar bill, knowing that would cover his tab, and smiled at Bowie.

"That offer to get a beer at your place still stand?" Savage asked.

Bowie smiled and nodded. "Sure," he said. "But, for the record, you're being a chicken." He looked across the bar to where Dallas was making her way across the crowded dance floor and sighed. Bowie was right but he didn't give a fuck. Better to leave as a chicken than face his ex's wrath.

"Yep," he breathed. "Ready?" He held out his hand for Bowie, knowing he might be sending not only Dallas but everyone who was currently watching the exchange between them, a clear sign that the two of them were together.

Bowie took his hand, and they made their way to the front of the bar. Just as Savage stepped out of the doorway and into the night, he looked back to find Dallas watching him; frozen to her spot with her mouth gaping wide open. Yeah, she had gotten the message, loud and clear—he was leaving the bar

with Bowie and there would be no backtracking now. There would be nothing he could do to erase the hatred and pain that he saw in her beautiful eyes.

DALLAS

Dallas St. James just about fell off her damn barstool when Savage walked into The Voodoo Lounge with the handsome guy in fatigues. The two made quite a pair and she wasn't the only female in the bar to notice them. Every woman in her group seemed to sit up and take notice of the new conquests as soon as they walked in, even the bride-to-be.

She thought she'd never see Savage again and that was just fine with her. They had dated for about a month and then nothing—he seemed to vanish off the face of the earth. It was her fault really. She never pushed to know more about him than his first name and the fact that he used to be in the Air Force. He had mentioned that he was a scientist, but Dallas worried that if she pushed for him to tell her more, he'd bolt. It was ironic, really. He ended up changing her life forever and then ghosting her, never to be heard from again—or so she thought.

Dallas was determined to steer clear of Savage and whoever the guy was that came into the bar with him, but then he went too far and bought the bridal party a round of drinks. Was he trying to get her attention? If he was, it worked. By the time she got her nerve up, Savage and the guy got up to leave but what she saw next—it couldn't have been right. The bar was crowded, and she had to have seen the whole thing wrong because if she wasn't mistaken, they were holding hands when they left the bar.

She tried to rejoin her girlfriends, but she just wasn't in the mood to party after seeing Savage. He dredged up everything she had worked so hard to suppress—her anger, her fears and damn it, even her desires. How could she still want him like she did after the hell he'd put her through over the past year since he left her without a word? Sure, Savage didn't make her any pretty promises. She thought she meant more to him than just a fuck, but she was wrong. She had not only misjudged him but so many other things too.

Dallas bowed out for the rest of the night, not really in the mood for the strip club the girls were heading to next. All she could think about was getting back to her little apartment and shutting the world out until she could think straight again. Savage always seemed to have that effect on her—made her thoughts a little cloudy. Seeing him tonight just reminded her of the crazy, lust-filled month that they spent together, and she needed to put those thoughts and images out of her head. There would be no more remembering the man who controlled her body, mind, and soul. Savage threw her away and that was going to be the painful reminder she took home with her tonight. He didn't want her, and she'd do well to remember that.

Dallas climbed the two floors to her apartment and unlocked the door, letting herself in. "Hello," she whispered.

"Hey—did you have fun?" Her friend Eden poked her head around the corner and smiled. "I'm assuming that since you are home so early my answer is no, but I thought I'd be polite and ask."

Dallas made a face and Eden softly cursed. "You saw him, didn't you?" She asked. Her friend always was able to pick up things.

"How the hell did you figure that out?" Dallas grumbled.

"You make a face anytime his name is brought up. Listen, I've never met the guy, but you're going to have to get over this anger you're harboring towards him. If not for yourself then for Greer," Eden said.

Dallas sighed and nodded. Her friend was right—she owed it to both herself and her daughter to stop hating the man who had given her the greatest gift she ever had.

“I ran into him tonight at The Voodoo Lounge,” Dallas admitted.

“Well, shit. That’s not good. Did you talk to him?” Eden asked. Dallas could hear the question her friend was really asking her.

“Just go ahead and ask,” Dallas said.

“Did you tell him about Greer?” Eden dramatically whispered.

Dallas shook her head. “No. I didn’t even get the chance to talk to him. He was sitting across the bar with some really good-looking guy and by the time I tried to make it across the crowded dance floor, they bolted.”

“Good,” Eden said. “You don’t owe him anything, Dallas. He used you and left you pregnant and alone. Hell, you didn’t even know if that fucker was alive or dead. Telling him about Greer would be a huge mistake.” Dallas wondered if her friend was right. For months after Savage cut off contact with her, she worried that he had been in some horrific accident and was hurt or worse—dead. It was silly really but believing some made-up tragic story was so much easier than knowing the truth. He just walked away from her, and that realization stung like a son-of-a-bitch. Eden was right about one thing—Savage used her and didn’t even have the common decency to tell her it was over. He was a coward, and he showed his true colors tonight when he ran out of that bar again.

“Maybe you’re right,” Dallas said with a shrug.

“No maybe about it, girl. You’ve proven that you don’t need his damn help with Greer. You’re an awesome mom and your daughter will get everything she needs from you and well—me, her fabulous auntie.”

Dallas giggled, “Thanks, fabulous auntie,” she teased. “I needed to hear that tonight. It was just so strange, you know?”

“You mean seeing him again?” Eden asked.

“No—the way he left out of that bar. First, he took off like his pants were on fire and then, I could have sworn that he was holding hands with the hot guy he was with.”

“What?” Eden questioned. “As in—they were there together, on a date?”

“Yeah, but that’s crazy, right?” Dallas asked. Maybe she hadn’t seen them correctly or she had just misread the situation.

“Well, that would explain why he ghosted you,” Eden offered. “Maybe he realized he liked being with guys,” she teased.

“Are you implying that I turned him gay?” Dallas mocked upset and Eden giggled.

“That is one explanation,” Eden joked, but Dallas found the whole topic less funny than her friend seemed to. Dallas had more at stake in all of this—she had more to lose and there would be no way she’d take chances with her daughter’s happiness, not even for the sexiest man she had ever known. When Savage walked away from her, he didn’t realize he was also leaving behind a little piece of himself that would remind Dallas, every day, of the time they had spent together. Her three-month-old daughter, Greer, was the spitting image of her father and the reason why she needed to work through her anger towards Savage. She owed her daughter at least that much.

Savage Heat (The Royal Bastards MC: Huntsville Chapter) Universal Link-> <https://books2read.com/u/brq7pA>

ABOUT K.L. RAMSEY & BE KELLY

Romance Rebel fighting for Happily Ever After!

K. L. Ramsey currently resides in West Virginia (Go Mountaineers!). In her spare time, she likes to read romance novels, go to WVU football games and attend book club (aka-drink wine) with girlfriends. K. L. enjoys writing Contemporary Romance, Erotic Romance, and Sexy Ménage! She loves to write strong, capable women and bossy, hot as hell alphas, who fall ass over tea kettle for them. And of course, her stories always have a happy ending. But wait—there's more!

Somewhere along the writing path, K.L. developed a love of ALL things paranormal (but has a special affinity for shifters <YUM!!>!! She decided to take a chance and create another persona- BE Kelly- to bring you all of her yummy shifters, seers, and everything paranormal (plus a hefty dash of MC!).

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