

TANK

RECKLESS SOULS MC CALIFORNIA BOOK 10

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KB WINTERS

TANK

A MOTORCYCLE CLUB ROMANCE

RECKLESS SOULS MC

BOOK 10

KB WINTERS



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ABOUT TANK

Time behind bars can change a man. It's made me more determined to protect what's mine.

My life as a former Navy SEAL and now a patched member of the Reckless Souls MC has taught me to steer clear of love. It's chaotic, unpredictable, and unmanageable—much like my current stint behind bars.

Then there's Sophie, a recent flame in my otherwise dark existence.

While I'm locked up, she drops a bombshell that changes everything—she's pregnant with my child.

Her fierce independence is as captivating as it is infuriating.

I won't let anything happen to her or our baby. Even if she looks at me like I'm the devil incarnate.

With enemies closing in, my options are dwindling. I need to neutralize the threat to my club before the next assault shatters everything I hold dear. I'm no stranger to battle, and I'll go through hell and back to protect what's mine.

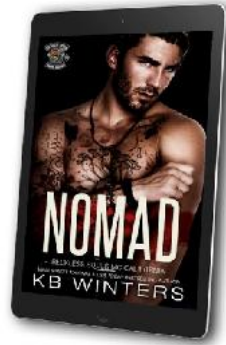
But will it be enough to win Sophie's heart?

If you crave workplace romances tinged with a flavor of forbidden love, then Tank from the Reckless Souls Series is your next must-read.

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CHAPTER ONE

SOPHIE – 1 MONTH AGO

“How are we doing tonight, Joaquin?”

I don't know if he can hear me, but I ask the same question each night, after Nova leaves the clinic for the evening, putting me in charge of his friend. He's too young and vital to be lying here motionless. When he came in, he was on the brink of death, but now he's stabilizing. And that's a good sign.

For now.

I tell him, “The guys were here earlier to see you. I think they miss you like crazy.” I like to talk to him as I clean and re-bandage his wounds. “I'm sure they can't wait until you open those eyes and get out of here.”

I only know the bikers of the Reckless Souls MC by name. Well, except for the three that stand guard over Joaquin. And Dr. Nova. But when Ace, Dix, or the others are here, I mostly keep to myself.

The door opens behind me, and I don't have to turn around to know it's Tank. Sure, it could be Olly or Stone, who have also been on night duty with me, but I know it's Tank. The air is different when he's around. It's charged, electric, like a live wire caught in a windstorm. Dangerous and thrilling. “You know he's not gonna answer you?”

I smile at the sound of Tank's deep, gravelly voice. When I've secured the last bandage, I close my eyes and let his deep chuckle wash over me, succumbing to the goosebumps that

rise up every time Tank's near. "He won't answer until he does," I shoot back, aiming a playful grin his way.

"Fair point," he concedes, sitting in the chair beside Banger's bed. "How's he doing?"

"Better," I sigh as I gather the old bandages and shove them in the orange box fixed to the wall. "His body is healing and getting stronger, but the fact that he's not awake yet is alarming."

I look up and watch Tank as he watches his friend. Worry darkens his face, and I resist the urge to go to him, to lay a comforting hand on his broad shoulders.

Broad shoulders I'd love to squeeze.

There's an underlying attraction zipping between us that I can't deny. A little bit of flirtation here and there, but nothing more. It's pure lust. "Alarming like he might still die?"

"No. But there's a reason he isn't waking up. Nova thinks he's out of the woods, so now we just need him to wake up." I wash my hands and dry them before sitting beside Banger's bed. He's like our unconscious chaperone.

Tank's gray eyes leave his friend and settle on me. Those captivating eyes are like magnets, pulling me in and making me want to see them up close. Are there pale flecks of silver or gold in there? Or are there ribbons of brown floating in the gray depths?

"You look really fucking fine today, Sophie."

I'm thirty-four years old, yet that gruff compliment has me blushing all the way down to my toes.

There's something about Tank—a softness combined with his big, well-muscled physique that's very appealing.

He looks rough and gruff, but then he says something like 'really fucking fine,' and I blush like a schoolgirl. I can't explain my attraction to him, and honestly, I don't want to.

I think.

Then again, did I work my ass off to get involved with a biker?

I know what the Reckless Souls do, and they pay me very well, but is this what I want for my life?

Tank's deep laugh pulls me from my thoughts, and I realize he's still watching me, those gray eyes raking over my body like a lover's hand, slow and tantalizing. "I'd love to know what's going on in that pretty head of yours right now."

I could tell him the truth, but his flirty tone is irresistible. "I was just wondering about you, Tank. Why did you become a biker?"

Interest flares in his eyes, and he leans forward, giving me his full attention. "You want the long version or the short one?"

Long, please. "I got time."

He licks his full pink lips, and my breath hitches. My nipples tighten as I imagine all the things he could do with that tongue. "The short answer is that I met Dix in the joint."

My eyebrows raise. "The joint?"

He nods. "Yeah, I was locked up for a couple of years." He says the words and lets them linger in the air, almost as if he's waiting for me to get up and march away. "You not gonna ask me why?"

"Okay, I'll bite. Why?" In my line of work, I've treated people from all backgrounds—rich, poor, and everything in between. Everyone has a story about how they ended up where they are. And right now, I'm really interested in Tank's story.

"I got into a fight with an asshole who knocked up my sister and then beat the shit out of her when she refused to get rid of the baby." He speaks matter-of-factly, but there's a thread of anger in his words.

"Did you make him apologize?"

A slow smile spreads across his face, and I feel that smile working its way deep into my chest and my core.

“Damn right, I did. But I also broke his fucking arm and busted a few ribs. The prosecutor called it aggravated assault and hit me with a felony charge.”

“Was it worth it?”

“Yes, because he’ll think twice about putting his hands on my sister again. No, because I lost a little over two years of my life that I can’t get back.” He leans back, studying my expression carefully. “I met Dix on the inside, and he told me all about his MC. I thought it might be a good fit for me, being as I like to ride.”

I tried to imagine Tank as a lost soul, not knowing what to do when he regained his freedom, but he’s so strong and tough it’s hard to imagine him as anything close to vulnerable. “So you didn’t have a lifelong desire to be a biker?”

He laughs. “Not at all. I got my motorcycle license when I was in boot camp.”

My eyes practically bug out of my head. “You’re in the military?”

“I was. Navy SEAL.”

Holy. Shit. “Damn. That explains the physique.” The man is big with broad shoulders, a wide chest that tapers down to a narrow waist attached to powerful legs that carry him with purpose.

“Admiring the physique, Nurse Sophie?” His brows wiggle, tugging a laugh out of me.

“Hard to miss it,” I admit without a hint of shame. “Not many men out there like you.”

“But you like what you see?” The heat in his gaze confirms the attraction that’s been humming between us.

I lick my lips and nod. “You’re very easy on the eyes,” I tell him because there’s no way in hell I’ll let him know that it’s his face I see when I break out my vibrator.

He laughs. “Easy on the eyes? Is that what women call it when looking at a man who soaks those lacy panties?”

“Silky, not lacy,” I correct him, and yes, the silky panties are getting wet.

He nods slowly. “Silky panties. Got it,” he answers. “You gonna let me see ’em?”

I snort at his bold question. “Maybe.”

Tank swallows hard, and my heart races. I like him. I genuinely like him, which may or may not be a bad idea, but every interaction with him makes me want to know more.

“You do know I can get you so wet, you’ll have to wring ’em out in that sink over there.”

Mission accomplished. “Just from looking at you?”

He rises from the chair and rounds the bed where Banger lies still and leans in close. Tank’s large hands grip the arms of my chair, his thick forearms almost too much to resist. He smirks at me knowingly, and when our eyes meet? That’s when I know this makeshift hospital room is about to get seriously hot.

Tank is gorgeous—light hair, eyes like crystal, gray with flecks of silver, chiseled jawline that could cut diamonds. He stands there so tall and handsome, and damn it, if my panties aren’t already wet with anticipation.

“How am I doing?” he asks gruffly. Embarrassed, I look down, but that’s a mistake because now all I can focus on are his muscular forearms and his crotch.

“Wow,” I breathe out before realizing how stupid I must sound.

“Wow?” he teases, one side of his mouth quirking up in a small smile. I lick my lips nervously. They’re probably dry from nerves, or maybe it’s because the temperature keeps rising between us.

His jaw clenches. “Sophie,” he growls through his clenched teeth as if it’s taking all his willpower not to touch me.

Touch me. Please. “Tank.”

His grip on the chair loosens, and he steps back. “Tell me something about yourself before I tear those fucking scrubs from your body to see just how wet that silk is between your thighs.”

I swallow and nod, searching for something to say before I do something stupid, like let a biker fuck me in the room with an unconscious patient. “I like to draw and paint sometimes,” I stammer. “Well, sketch, really. I’m not an artist or anything, though. I just do it for fun.”

He smiles but doesn’t put more space between us. “So you’re an artist? I am, too. A tattoo artist.” He places his finger under my chin and whispers, “I’d like to tattoo your cunt with my cock.”

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Hot with a dirty mouth, *and* he’s an artist?

My heart races and my face heats up as I try to think of something else to say before things get any further out of hand—anything that might keep me from tearing off his clothes right here and now.

“I...uhm...like to read too.” I smile sheepishly, my heart beating out of my chest.

CHAPTER TWO

TANK

The first thing I hear when I roll into the clinic is Sophie's laugh. She's got a full body laugh, the kind where you know she's tossing her head back, her long dark hair tumbling down her back, exposing her sweet, kissable neck. It's a real laugh, none of that fake, polite chuckle bullshit.

And sure enough, when I turn the corner, she's giggling it up with Nurse Hannah. Sophie's lips turned up at the corners, gripping Hannah's shoulder to keep from falling over.

"Don't get into too much trouble tonight, girl," Sophie says with a wink.

"Oh, I'll be causing some trouble for sure. It'll give us something to gossip about tomorrow," Hannah fires back, smirking at me as she brushes past. "Night, Tank."

"Night," I reply. Gotta admit I'm itching to get to Sophie, but duty calls. I trail Hannah and lock up the rear exit. The clinic's officially closed for the night. Olly's bike is parked out back, so we got the night shift covered.

I do a quick lap to check the front door and all the rooms. This isn't an overnight infirmary, but Banger's family, so Nova set him up private where no Bloodthirsty Devils can find him. The place is as quiet as a graveyard now, none of Sophie's laughter ringing out.

I find Olly standing guard over my wounded brother laid up in bed with Sophie leaning over him, checking the tubes and the pinging machines.

“About time you showed up,” Olly grumbles by way of greeting. “Gotta take a piss something fierce.”

I chuckle. “Well, maybe you oughtta have the doc check out that busted bladder of yours.”

“Jackass,” he mutters.

I sneak a peek at Sophie, and damn, does she makes my pulse pound. “Hey,” I say, making her jump a little. She turns with that stunning smile that hits me like a fist.

Sophie’s a knockout, no doubt about it. Thick dark hair she usually keeps tied back, but today, it’s wavy like she just got off a ride along the coast. Big brown eyes tilt up slightly at the corners, framed by thick lashes so it looks like she’s made up even when she’s not wearing a lick of makeup.

Most days, those eyes are hidden behind glasses, but today, her glasses are tucked into the pocket of her blue scrubs. She’s classy as hell but approachable, sexy as sin.

“Hey yourself,” she says, beaming like she’s genuinely glad to see me. And that right there revs my engine something fierce. I switched up my shift just to spend more time with her fine ass.

“How’s he doing?” I ask, nodding toward Banger, lying in bed.

“Better but still not waking up.” She jots down something on the bedside tablet and drops her arms to her sides before her gaze crashes into mine again. “How are you?”

I blink at the question. When was the last time someone asked me how I was doing? No fucking idea. “Better now that I’ve laid eyes on you.”

She shakes her head, laughing at my words. “Cheesy.”

“Cheesy as fuck,” I agree with a smile. “But true. Those scrubs are giving me all kinds of naughty thoughts.”

Her lips part slightly, just enough to let me know she’s got naughty thoughts too. She recovers but only enough to face me and arch one sculpted dark brow in my direction. “These scrubs do that?”

“No, the woman in the scrubs.” I know I’m playing with fire and shouldn’t even entertain the idea of taking this flirtation with Sophie to the next level. She works for Nova, which makes this shit all kinds of complicated, but as I stare at her now and that little pulse flickering at the base of her throat, I know she wants this as bad as I do. Somehow, I can’t find any fucks to give.

“Noted,” she stammers and then stands taller, smoothing one hand down her sides in a soothing move.

“Am I making you uncomfortable?” Every night for weeks, I find a reason to be where she is. Here in Banger’s room. It’s easy. He’s my friend and my brother, so where the fuck else would I be?

But when she’s in the break room or in the reception area updating charts, I’ll find an excuse to be there, too. I’m drawn to her in a way I can’t fucking explain. I just really like her.

“Not in the way you mean,” she finally answers, her voice low and thick with something I want to believe is desire, but this chick is all sophistication. What does she want with a biker like me?

“I’m uncomfortable as fuck right now.” She flashes an uncertain smile. “Then again, that tends to happen when I’m near you.”

The smile transforms her from simply beautiful to a goddamn sexpot, and she stands a little taller, sauntering out of the room before I can come up with a comeback or make good on my promise.

I give myself a few minutes to get my cock under control. “I hope you’re enjoying the show,” I grumble to Banger, and his lips don’t twitch. His eyes don’t move. “Wake the fuck up, brother.” I watch him another minute, but he’s as still as a fucking tree trunk.

“What’s going on with that?” Olly asks the minute I step outside the room, his gaze on Sophie as she stops at the reception desk.

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.” It’s not even a good lie, and just like I’d do to him, Olly doesn’t let me get away with that shit.

“Bullshit. It’s no secret you’re crushing on the hot nurse with the Penthouse curves.” He’s laughing and shaking his head like I’m just going to crack. “Are you gonna have her break out the white uniform and the little hat too?”

“You better stay the fuck away from those Penthouse curves.”

“Hey man, chill. She’s a stunner, and I don’t blame you for making a play. She give you the green light?”

“Olly, shut the fuck up.”

“Sorry. She just seems like a classy lady,” he says innocently.

I think so, too, and I wonder if a classy lady like that would want a guy like me despite her words and clear flirtations. “She is. Stay the fuck away from her. And shut up.”

But Olly doesn’t shut up. “Then again, I’ll bet it’s those prissy broads that like to get the nastiest behind closed doors. Gotta be exhausting, putting on that goody-two-shoes act all day long.”

The kid’s got a fucking point. Now all I can think about is bending Sophie over and sliding my cock into that sweet pussy. “Fuck,” I growl, shifting to ease the pressure in my jeans.

“That bad, huh?” Olly smirks like he’s enjoying my discomfort, the little shit.

I don’t respond, fuming silently instead. Getting tangled with Sophie is a mistake, but it’s too late now. Wouldn’t be the first brother to break the rules. But the prospect better keep quiet if he knows what’s good for him.

I give Olly a hard stare to get the message across—any gossip about me and Sophie is off-limits. He needs to learn when to keep his trap shut.

“Seems like she’s into you, too,” Olly says, wiggling his eyebrows. “Giving you googly eyes every time she walks by.”

“Can it, Prospect,” I snap as we head back into Banger’s room, clenching a fist. Sophie’s off limits for his stupid gossip. The prospect better not push me if he values his life.

“Asshole.”

“You bet I am,” I say just as Sophie walks in, looking like the hot librarian out of my hottest, darkest fantasies, dark lashes blinking quickly.

“Bet what?”

“Nothing. Just Olly being Olly,” I grumble.

She smiles prettily but rolls her eyes like we’re a group of rowdy teens at a skate park.

“I brought dinner, enough for three if you guys are hungry.” Her gaze bounces from me to Olly, then back at me.

“I’m always hungry,” Olly declares, rubbing his belly. “What did you make?”

“Enchilada casserole with fresh salsa and guac.” She flashes a proud smile. “You want some?”

“Absolutely,” Olly says with an eager nod, rubbing his hands together. “Sophie, I might have to ask for your hand in marriage,” he tells her, flashing a grin over his shoulder because I know he’s just trying to piss me off. “At least I would if Tank’s big ass wouldn’t kill me first.”

A laugh bubbles up from Sophie, a beautiful sound that echoes in the room. She then throws me a teasing look. “What about you, Tank? Hungry?”

“Yeah, sure,” I say, more out of reflex to her gaze on me than anything else.

Her smile brightens even further. “Great, I’ll get the plates ready. Meet me in the break room.”

I watch her walk off, and I swear I’m drooling.

“Dude, it’s obvious you’re into her. Don’t blow it.” Olly nudges me, his grin a little too goofy.

Shaking my head in amusement, I throw a playful jab at him, “I thought I told you to shut the fuck up about that.”

Olly shrugs. “Just saying, it’s your chance to make a move.”

As we step into the break room, Sophie hands a plate to Olly, a warmth in her smile. “Hope you like Mexican food, or at least my version of it,” she says.

Olly gives her a fake salute and says, “I love all food. I’m gonna go hang out with Banger. See you two after a while.”

Sophie looks at me, her brown eyes sparkling. “What about you, Big Guy? You like Mexican food?”

“I’m pretty easy to please when it comes to food,” I reply, letting my gaze linger on her. When I catch her licking her lips, I’m a goner.

While Sophie busies herself with dinner, her curious eyes find mine. “You’re showering me with compliments today. Any special reason?”

Trying to play it cool yet drawn to her like a moth to a flame, I reach out, letting a strand of her hair wind around my finger. “Do I? Can’t say I’ve noticed,” I smirk, though we both know I’m lying through my teeth.

Her brown eyes go wide and clash with mine, her mouth slightly open as if I’ve shocked her again. “Tank,” she whispers just as the microwave beeps.

I look through the cupboards for silverware and napkins, setting them on the table while she finishes warming up dinner. “That smells good as fuck,” I growl as the aroma permeates the air. “You really made this?”

“I did, and I expect you to be honest when you taste it. Don’t lie just because you like me in scrubs.”

“I won’t,” I tell her. “And I’d like you better out of those scrubs.”

She stares at me with an amused expression, then tosses her head back and laughs. “Your honesty is refreshing. It’s oddly blunt, but I like it.”

“Good, because I like you, Sophie. I probably shouldn’t, but I do.”

She smiles and puts the food on the table. “Why shouldn’t you like me? You got something against nurses? Or is it sketch artists you object to?”

“Don’t object to either one. But you work for Nova.”

“Work for, yes. But he doesn’t own me or my personal time. Now if you’re saying you can’t date your friend’s employees, that is something else altogether.” She nods to the steaming food. “Eat.”

“I love it when you get all bossy on me.” I wink, and just like I expect, her skin flushes pink. “It’s sexy.”

“Good to know,” she smiles back. “Now eat it while it’s hot.”

My eyebrow raises. “You offering? I’m a dessert-before-dinner-kind of guy.”

She laughs again, and I swear that fucking sound is sweeter than honey. What would I do to hear her laugh like that every day?

“Dessert, huh?”

I nod. “You look sweet. You smell sweet. I’ll bet you taste sweet as fuck.” My mouth waters just thinking of how wet she probably is under the table, behind her *silky* panties right now.

“Well,” she sighs, leaning back and folding her arms, her brown eyes studying me closely. “The first step is to not let my food get cold.”

“And the second step?” I lean forward, close enough that I can smell her perfume.

“The second step is for you to keep doing what you’re doing, and we’ll take it from there.”

And that right there? That’s the motherfucking green light I didn’t know I was looking for.

CHAPTER THREE

SOPHIE

The grin on my face is starting to make my cheeks ache, but I can't stop smiling. This isn't my usual polite *nurse* smile—this one's real. I'm downright giddy. And it's all because of Tank.

Just thinking about our charged conversation yesterday makes my pulse quicken. Sure, I've met attractive men before. But none have affected me like Tank. He radiates an earthy magnetism I find irresistible.

It's not just appearances, either. He's real—no pretensions or artifice. And the way he looked at me...like he could see right into my soul. It's been far too long since I've felt this kind of attraction.

As I walk down the clinic hallway, I feel light as air. I'm already looking forward to our next encounter, though I know I need to remain professional with my patients. Still, a girl can dream, right? Just picturing those strong arms wrapped around me makes me weak in the knees.

I let out a contented sigh as I enter the next patient's room. This unexpected twist has made my ordinary day extraordinary. And I have a feeling my smile won't be fading anytime soon. Tank has breathed new life into me, awakening a thirst I'd nearly forgotten. I only hope this is just the beginning...

"Hello, Mr. Manning. How are we feeling today?"

The eighty-year-old smiles wide and waves me into the exam room. "Better now that I've seen your pretty face, Ms. Sophie.

What's got you so upbeat today?"

My brows dip, and I shrug. "I'm always happy, especially when a tough guy like you gets serious about treating his hypertension." I flash him a wide smile that he returns easily.

"As much as my ego wants to believe that, you have the glow of a woman in love. Who's the fella?"

My cheeks flame at his words, and my thoughts go to Tank.

"No fella," I lie with an easy laugh. "I'm just having a good day." That's also the truth, but I can't deny that my flirtation with Tank has me feeling more than a little energized. Invigorated. Maybe even inspired.

"Keep up the good work on your diet, and call if the new meds give you any trouble."

Mr. Manning laughs, shaking his head. "That's one lucky fella. Just make sure he treats you right."

I say nothing. Just offer another smile before leaving the exam room and heading to the supply closet. The rooms are empty, and the lobby is filling up again, which means those rooms need to be restocked. I grab what I need and turn, coming face to face with a smart-ass-looking colleague.

"Hannah. What's up?"

Hannah's heavily lined eyes narrow, and she leans in, cocking her brow. "Mr. M is right. You *are* super happy today. I want to know what's going on," she smiles. "And don't even think of leaving out any details. I want *all* the tea!"

I roll my eyes playfully and give Hannah the same answer as Mr. Manning. "I'm always happy."

"Yeah, that's true," she says, waving a dismissive hand. "But today, you're so happy that rainbows are shooting from your vajajjay, and I want to know why. And who."

I sigh. Normally, I wouldn't mind spilling the tea with Hannah, mostly because the tea is usually lukewarm. But whatever is going on with Tank and me is white-hot, borderline combustible, and I want to keep it to myself a little while longer.

It's only a few kisses at this point, but those kisses are the stuff of fantasies. Right now, they're just for me.

"There is no *who* or *why*, Hannah. I'm just having a really good day." And in less than an hour, it'll be better, at least if Tank is on Banger duty tonight.

I leave the supply closet with an armful of fresh Ace bandages and other supplies and busy myself restocking the exam rooms to help push through the last hour of patients, my thoughts full of Tank. It's been a long time since anyone has made me feel how I feel when I'm with him. It's like I'm young and carefree. He makes me feel like the world is full of possibilities and that I'm not coming up to the age of settling for what I can get in a man.

Maybe it's because this flirtation is new, but everyone is right. I'm flying high today, and it doesn't lessen as the lobby thins out until there are no more patients left in the building, except for Banger. He's improving physically. Most of his wounds are completely healed except the one to his midsection. He just hasn't woken up from his coma.

Yet.

He will, I'm sure of that. Nova doesn't seem worried, so I don't let myself worry either. I check on Banger, walking past Olly, who's been keeping watch during the day shift today, just in case.

"Hey, Olly," I say. "How are you?"

"Good. You bring any dinner tonight?" He flashes a boyish smile that tugs up the corner of my lips.

"I might have, but I won't torture you with the details since you're about to clock out."

He laughs. "Depending on what it is, I might be tempted to stay."

I laugh again and slip inside to check Banger's vitals. His heartbeat is strong, and his pulse is exactly on point. The monitors play the same song of the healthy young man, which is to say, nothing is alarming.

“You’re fine,” I whisper. “You just need to wake up, that’s all.” His eyes move behind his lids, another sign there’s no neurological damage. “Whenever you’re ready,” I tell him before checking his bandages and tidying up the room.

When I step outside the room, I see Stone chatting near the back exit with Olly. I sigh and let my shoulders sink in disappointment. Tank doesn’t have the night shift tonight.

Then, I hear a whisper close to my ear. “Looking for someone?”

I suck in a sharp breath and turn to face the man occupying my thoughts all day, glaring at his smiling, handsome face. “Nope.”

He laughs. “Liar.”

I take in the sight of him in jeans that are so worn I can see the outline of his thigh muscles. The gray t-shirt under his *kutte* gives his eyes a silver glow. The sleeves cling to his biceps so tightly they send butterflies soaring in my belly. He’s well-built and ruggedly beautiful. Tattoos and Harley’s aren’t usually my type, but when it comes to Tank, he’s just my type. “What’s in the box?”

Tank’s smile widens, and he holds up the box with a *For Goodness Cakes* logo. “I brought you a treat. Ever had one of Maven’s creations?”

“Not in years,” I say and shake off the fog of lust that grips me and make my way to the break room for water. Icy cold water to chill my overheated body.

He follows me close enough that I can feel the heat of his breath on the back of my neck. “Years? Why not?”

“Just smelling the deliciousness is enough for me. I have to watch my figure. One whiff of Maven’s Cakes and I gain two pounds.”

I’m very familiar with the bakery. Maven was a bit of a local celebrity after winning a cooking show that gave her the cash to open up the bakery. Plus, she is what the guys call an Ol’ Lady since she hooked up with one of the Reckless Souls.

“I can work it off of you, babe.” There’s a glint in Tank’s eyes as he sets the box down on the table, slowly revealing the donuts, croissants, cookies, and a few slices of cake inside. He picks up one of the cake slices, chocolate with jam in the middle and some type of cream on top. He holds it up to my mouth, lips pulling into a tantalizing smile.

“You have a bite of this, and I’ll watch your figure.”

Heat courses through me at his words, and I’m not sure if it’s the man or the cake making my mouth water.

“I shouldn’t,” I say with a lustful groan. Oh, but I want to. Badly.

“You should,” he teases, swiping a finger through the cream on top and smearing it on my bottom lip.

“Lick it.”

His eyes are smiling because he knows what he’s saying. Worse, he probably knows just what I’m thinking.

My tongue sneaks out to swipe away the cream, and my eyes flutter shut.

“Damn, that’s good.” I lick the rest of it off and open my eyes to meet Tank’s heated gaze.

“One taste is never enough, is it?”

I shake my head, mouth slightly open, as my heart gallops like a racehorse against my chest.

He holds up the cake. “Take a bite, Sophie. You know you want to.”

“What the hell,” I whisper, biting the corner off the cake. The flavors hit my tongue, and a moan escapes the moment my eyes close. It’s dark chocolate with a raspberry filling with a lemon and raspberry cream frosting.

“Fuck, that is incredible.” My eyes open, and Tank stares at me with enough heat to set the whole planet on fire. I clench my thighs together at the way he looks at me. “What? It’s good.”

He leans in so his lips brush my ear when he speaks. “Never in my whole fucking life have I wanted to be made of flour and sugar and butter.”

I laugh at his anguished admission and step back, taking the cake from his hand and holding it to his mouth. “Have a bite,” I insist.

His gray gaze sears through me, making my nipples bead painfully behind the lacy black bra I put on today, thinking about Tank.

“Sophie.”

“No?” I ask teasingly as I repeat his move, slicking the frosting against his bottom lip with my finger.

My belly does a backflip and then a twisty flip when his tongue curls out and rolls over the frosting. He smiles as if he knows I’m thinking of his tongue doing that to me.

“Fuckin’ delicious. More,” he demands, and my body responds.

I hold the cake up for him to take a bite. “Aha! I know what you mean about wanting to be sugar and butter,” I tell him as he sinks his teeth into the cake.

I’m ready to pull back, but Tank grabs my wrist, swiping his tongue along the tips of my fingers. The totally erotic move draws a shaky gasp from me.

I freeze and stare at Tank, unable to think because lust clogs my brain and throat.

Tank looks just as shocked and turned on, his tongue still hovering above my finger.

I don’t know who moves first, but suddenly, our bodies smash together, our mouths and tongues dance, and our lips wrestle in a fiery kiss.

My heart pounds hard and loud against his chest, and my hands slide down his wide back, down to his firm ass. It really is a thing of beauty, but the way this man devours my mouth? It’s the stuff of my dirtiest fantasies, the ones he’s been starring in for weeks now.

Tank's big body presses against mine, squishing me between him and the wall, and there's no place else I want to be right now. When he pulls back, I let out a whimper that makes him smile.

"Is there a door in this fucking room?"

I look around the break room as if I just remembered where we were, and my eyes swing back to him. "No lock," I answer in a breathless voice.

"Fuck," he growls and leans in, kissing and licking a trail of heat from my collarbone to my earlobe. "I want to fuck you so bad right now, babe."

My body pulses with desire, and normally, I wouldn't consider getting inappropriate at the office, but with Tank so close, my mind is buzzing wildly, my vision is a little blurry at the edges, and my body coils so tight with need that I can't think straight.

"Follow me." I step out of the breakroom and into the hall, looking to the right toward Banger's room and then to the left, where Olly and Stone had been talking.

Empty.

I go left and slip inside the second door on the right, Tank hot on my heels. "A supply closet?" His voice is low and thick with want.

"One of the few places with a lock on the door," I say as I reach past him and flick the lock. "Now what?"

"This," he growls and grabs my face with one hand, the other yanking the elastic band to free my ponytail before he sifts his fingers through my thick hair. His mouth is on mine instantly, his tongue teasing the seam of my lips until I open up for him. Another growl escapes, and then a moan as he tilts my head back and kisses me like he's starving, and only I can satisfy his hunger. "Ah, fuck," he groans when he pulls back.

I lean forward and nip his bottom lip because I can't get enough of him. "Tank," I whisper against his mouth. "I want you too."

Those words break the dam, and he pushes me back against one of the shelves, neither of us giving a damn as boxes of gauze fall all around us. His mouth takes control in rough nips at my lips, deep plunging thrusts of his tongue as his hands roam my body, pulling my pants down to my ankles, and I step out of them.

“Sophie,” he moans. “So fucking soft.” One hand palms the outside of my thigh and lifts it over his hip, bringing my panty-covered pussy right up against the rough denim covering the thick erection he’s not trying to hide.

His knuckles brush against my panties, and my head falls back, a moan escaping and echoing in the small room.

“You’re already so wet for me,” he growls in my ear, slipping one hand into my panties and running two thick fingers along my swollen lips. “So fucking wet. Is that all for me?”

I nod, gripping his broad shoulders as he fucks me with those two thick fingers. “Has been for weeks now. Oh!” His fingers sink so deep his knuckles hit my clit, and my hips buck forward. “Tank...”

Tank pulls back, his eyes full of heat as he licks my juices from his fingers. “Panties off.”

The feminist in me wants to say no. The sassy bitch in me wants to make him take them off me. But the horny slut whose pussy is dripping just shoves down the panties and steps out of them. Feeling bold, I shove them into the pocket of his jeans. “Panties off. Happy?”

“Soon,” he growls and drops to his knees, tossing one leg over his shoulder as he opens me up and runs a wide, flat tongue up and down my clit. “Suh-weet,” he growls and goes back in, licking my clit the same way he licked the frosting from his lips.

“Tank,” I moan and let my fingers tangle in his hair, thrusting slightly against his mouth. “More. I need more.”

He stands, and my legs nearly buckle when his tongue leaves my pussy. “More what?” he growls. “Tell me.”

“More,” I whisper, unfastening his belt and then his button.
“More of you.”

“You want this cock.” It’s not a question, but when I reach into his jeans, wrapping my hands around the long—holy shit, it’s really long—thick cock, he lets out a loud hiss that hits me low in my belly.

“I need it,” I tell him, running my thumb over the drop of pre-come at the tip. “Now.”

In one swift move, Tank shoves down his pants and boxer briefs, holding his thick cock in his beefy hand, stroking it roughly while his gaze never leaves me.

I risk a look down and gasp at the size of his cock. It’s long, maybe eight inches and thick. The head is pink and swollen with need. “Wow.”

His lips kick into a teasing grin. “Can’t wait to fill up that tight pussy.”

I swallow and nod. “Yes, please.”

“Such a good little girl,” he growls and lifts me by the waist. “Tell me how you want me to fuck you, Soph. Long and slow,” he asks, lowering me just enough that his thick tip slips inside, and shallow thrusts teasing me and making me want more. Over and over, those shallow thrusts send waves of juices flooding my core and his cock. “Or hard and fast?”

“Fuck. Me. Tank.” This teasing is hot as fuck, but right now, I’m so wound up, so horny for his dick that I’ll let him fuck me upside down as long as I get his cock inside me.

“Hard and fast it is,” he grunts, sliding me down in one long thrust until his big cock impales me up to my stomach. “Ah, so fucking tight.”

“So fucking big,” I grunt, breathing slowly to adjust to his size.

“You good?”

I nod. “I will be when you start fucking me.”

His lips kick up into a satisfied grin. “Good girl,” he says back, fingertips digging into my waist as he lifts me up and down on his big cock, fucking me like a rag doll, and I love every second of it.

“This pussy is perfect,” he growls. “Tight. So fucking wet I’m not sure I can hold back.”

“Tank.” He’s holding me, controlling all of it, and I have nothing to grasp onto, which only heightens my arousal. Every stroke brings me closer and closer to coming, and every dirty syllable from his mouth nudges me to the edge.

“Even your pussy lips, wet and dragging against my cock. So fucking good,” he growls, moving me faster and faster until I can’t stop the flood, between my thighs or shooting out of my pores. “Fuck, you’re about to come. That greedy cunt is gripping me tight.”

My hands grip his forearms, and my body jerks with the power of the orgasm shooting through my body. I feel like I’m floating, only his thick forearms keeping me from flying off into the stratosphere.

“Tank, oh fuck, yes!”

“Get it, Sophie. Come on my cock,” he growls and pushes his chest against mine, my back against the now half-empty supply shelf as he fucks me good and fast, so deep it triggers another orgasm that grips him tight, milking him dry. “Oh fuck, that’s it, mama. Cream all over me.”

His hips thrust a few more times, the last few strokes right before he explodes within me are so powerful my thighs shake, and my teeth sink into the corded muscles of his shoulder.

Oh. My. God. I rarely come with a cock inside of me unless it’s my vibrator, and with Tank, I manage two full orgasms and enough aftershocks to count as a third. Not to mention my titties are hard enough to cut glass. “Wow. Wow.”

Tank sighs, his tongue licking a trail of heat from my shoulder to my jaw.

“Fuck, Soph. It’s like this cunt is made just for me.” His hips move in slow strokes, drawing every last drop of pleasure from my body.

Just for me. I like the sound of that, maybe more than I should. “Your cock is magic.”

He flashes a proud grin. “You can have this magic wand anytime you want, babe.”

I smile at his sweet but rough words. “Noted.”

“This ain’t over,” he growls when his cock finally slips free.

I don’t know what that means, so I nod and look around at the mess we made in the supply closet, smiling wide.

“You make me forget myself.” The admission slips out, and I cover it by bending to pick up the boxes of gauze, the IV bags that cover the floor.

“Stay like that, and we’ll never get out of this fucking room,” he growls, sliding one finger along the inside of my thigh. “Ah fuck, I love the feel of my come dripping down your thighs.”

I gasp at his dirty words and dirtier touch. A low moan seeps out, and my head falls forward. “Tank.”

He lifts me so we’re face to face, cupping my jaws before kissing me long and slow. It’s hot and sweet, like he knows the perfect combination to turn me on instantly. Except for giving me his dick again, he keeps kissing me for endless moments before stepping back and putting his clothes back on.

“Not over,” he says one final time and leaves the supply closet.

I stand there half-naked, looking at the mess we’ve created, both in the room and between my thighs, and I can’t find it in me to give a shit. My body is buzzing with pleasure, and I can’t stop smiling.

The best sex of my life, and it happened at work...in the supply closet!

I am so fired.

A smile breaks out over my face. I give myself a few moments to enjoy what just happened before I tidy up the room and clean myself up.

My mind is occupied with only one thought: when can we do this again?

CHAPTER FOUR

TANK

Sophie peeks behind me to the sun rising in the break room. “I have to get back to work.” Her words come out between stolen kisses as a whisper against my mouth. “Seriously.”

“Go,” I tell her in a rough voice, my lips still on hers because I can’t get enough of her lush lips and the potent, fruity taste that lingers on her tongue. “I’m not going to stop you.”

A husky laugh sounds from her, and she fists her hands in my t-shirt. “Your mouth is stopping me,” she argues, tilting her head back while my mouth leaves a trail of fire up the column of her neck, across her jawline, and back to her mouth. Another laugh erupts as her fingers tangle in my hair. “Dammit, this mouth.” She cups my jaws and presses another kiss to my mouth, long and hot and hard enough that my cock swells behind my zipper. “Utterly fucking irresistible.”

My heart kicks into overdrive at her words, and I pull her close, absorbing the intensity of her kiss and her embrace.

How in the fuck did I get so lucky? That an angel like Sophie manages to see beyond my rough exterior, beyond my façade to what I keep buried deep? I don’t know, but I know enough not to question it, instead gripping her hips and pulling her against my cock, hard and aching for no one but her. “This mouth can’t get enough of you.”

“Right back atcha,” she says, slipping her tongue between my lips for one last kiss before she steps back, lips plump and eyes

half-glazed with desire. “But I need to check on Banger and update the charts before I leave.”

She smiles and says, “Okay. One more.”

Her laugh gives me another round of energy after a long night shift protecting Banger. I grip her tighter, hugging her close while I indulge in one last kiss before I let her go. With her taste on my mouth making my whole body hum, I say, “Okay. No more.”

She let out a whimper as our bodies separate, a smile curling her mouth as her fingertips brush against her lips. “Okay. I’ll, uh, see you around?”

Around. It’s such a nondescript word that feels like bullshit where Sophie is concerned. I’ve had her—twice—and it’s nowhere near enough for me to have my fill of her. I want her more than I want my next breath, and the uncertainty in her tone only makes me want her to stay.

“No,” I growl.

Surprise flashes in her dark eyes, but she recovers quickly. She gives me a slow, sensuous nod.

“Yeah. Right. Of course.”

“No, not around,” I say and pull her close once again. “Have breakfast with me.”

Her full lips part into a smile, and her eyes sparkle with satisfaction. “Breakfast? Sounds good to me. I’m actually famished.”

“I’ll meet you out front when you’re ready.” I kiss her again because how the fuck can I not? Her taste is seared into my brain. Her lips fit mine perfectly, and now that I’ve had her, I don’t even want to think about anyone else.

“Okay,” she rasps out, stepping back until she’s at the break room door. “Soon,” she promises before disappearing for the next hour.

The sun is high in the sky when I step out onto the sidewalk in front of the clinic. The heat isn’t quite oppressive yet, but with

the early morning breeze sweeping in off the ocean, it's just warm enough to know that today will be another scorcher.

"You know what you're doing?" Stone's question brings me up short.

"Not at all, but I'm doing it anyway."

Stone flashes a wide cowboy smile and nods as if he understands. "Be careful and be safe, brother. Call if you need anything."

"Always." I take his hand, and we shake like brothers. He's not officially a member of the Reckless Souls MC, but Stone has been around since I got here, and that makes him as good as a brother to me.

Then I see Sophie standing less than a foot from me, her dark eyes wide and bright. "Everything okay?" she asks, looking first at me and then at Stone before her gaze sweeps the street.

"Perfect now," I tell her and wrap an arm around her waist as we walk down the street, perfectly in sync like old lovers who know this walk and have a routine. "I can still smell you," I growl as I inhale deeply.

Her face turns an adorable shade of pink, and she laughs.

"It's all in your head," she says, gripping my hand as we walk toward the little bistro. "But fuck me, your words are enough to make me come again."

My steps stutter at her words, and I stop, turning to stare at her. "You're gonna be the death of me."

"Maybe," she agrees with a bright smile. "But don't die before we get pancakes with whipped butter and warm maple syrup." Sophie leans her head on my bicep as we walk to the restaurant right on the water.

The first sight that steals my breath is the ocean, sparkling like gems under the morning sun. Boats float by, providing a picture-perfect view for this, technically our first date. "You're so fucking beautiful, Soph."

She grins as she turns to me, pressing a soft, almost chaste kiss to my lips. "I think you might be a little lust crazy," she

whispers against my face just outside the diner. “Are you sure it’s okay that we’re out like this?”

My brows dip, but I nod, confirming that we’re safe. Working for Nova for the past few years, Sophie knows what MC life is like, even though she’s not technically a part of it. She’s well-versed in the life without being involved in it, which I should find problematic, but I don’t.

“Yeah, it’s fine. It’s early, and this place isn’t on anyone’s radar.”

I know Bloodthirsty Devils are surely on the hunt for us, but they aren’t even stupid enough to attack this place.

We step inside the diner and choose a table on the water with a view of the sun rising into the sky.

“This is perfect,” she says, admiring the boats sailing by.

You’re perfect. Luckily, I don’t say those words, but they bang around in my head as I watch her smile at the waiter and the morning manager before placing her order. “It’s better than whatever the fuck perfect is.”

Her lips tug into another grin. “You have a way with words, Tank.”

As she looks at me with those dark eyes full of life and heat, I realize that I don’t want her to be just another hot fuck. I want to know more about Sophie and her life. What brought her to Angel Harbor and the clinic? Why the fuck isn’t she scared about being tangled up with a motorcycle club?

“Why the fuck is a beautiful woman like you single, Soph?”

Her grin is wide and brilliant as she shakes her head. “In a nutshell? A history of bad choices. You name it, and I’ve dated it. Cheaters, deadbeats, guys who look good on paper, controlling assholes, jealous and insecure. All of it, I’ve dated and discarded. And now here I am.”

I want the name of every man who’s done Sophie wrong so I can hunt them down and make them pay, but I don’t say those words to her. “Idiots. Every last fucking one of them.”

“Thanks,” she sighs. “But honestly, it’s a learning process, and I’m sure the bad choices also reflect on my own circumstances.”

“Circumstances?” Does she have issues or is she one of those women always searching for her happy ending?

“You know,” she shrugs. “Wanting to see the best in a person despite the red flags.” She studies me for a long time, head tilting gently to the right. “What about you, Tank. What is it you’re after?”

“Good question,” I shoot back quickly. “I don’t fucking know. I’m not really a long-term relationship kind of guy, but lately, my whole mind is full of thoughts of you.”

“That’s bad?”

I shake my head. “Fuck no. It’s the most fun I’ve had in a long ass time.”

“But you’re wary of relationships?”

I nod, searching for the words to make her understand. “There’s no major heartbreaks or any shit like that in my past. Just never met a woman who makes me want to settle down.”

I can admit, at least to myself, that when I think of Sophie, my mind automatically puts her into distinct roles in my life.

“Ah,” she smiles, nodding as if she understands. “You’re a perpetual rolling stone.”

“No. Maybe.” I grin, and she laughs. “When I was a SEAL, my life was always in flux. A different mission and location, none of which I could ever talk about. But now, things are different.”

She studies me again after the waitress takes our order, and I wonder what the fuck she’s thinking, but she doesn’t say anything for a long damn time.

“Do you miss being a SEAL?”

“Nope. Our government’s too fucked up to be blindly following orders. I do miss my brothers, though.”

“I think I’m starting to understand you, Tank.”

“Yeah? What do you think you understand?”

She flashes a smile, not offended by my tone. “You want to help people, to do the right thing, but you want to be sure it is the right thing. You are a good guy, and you’re trying hard to pretend you aren’t. Why?”

I shake my head. “I am who I am, Soph. The worst thing you can do is turn me into something I’m not.”

“Oh, I see you who you are quite clearly. Maybe even better than you do.” She takes a sip of her coffee and sighs heavily. “And you know what? So far, I like what I know about you. A lot. Maybe even too much.”

A breath catches in my throat at her words that echo my thoughts. I want her more than I should, and I’m not sure that having her is the right thing. For either of us. Sophie deserves more than what I can offer. She deserves the sun, moon, and stars. More than the chaos that trails behind me.

But dammit, she’s smart and funny, wicked smart. A woman who has no problem laughing at herself. “Too much?”

She nods. “Yeah. Too much.” Her lips curl into a smile, and she looks away briefly. “But I want this.”

Me too. “This?”

Sophie nods. “Whatever this is,” she says, motioning between us. “It’s fun and exciting, and I look forward to seeing what happens next.”

“Next?” I lean forward, her eyes on mine. “What happens next is just between you and me, babe.”

We finish breakfast and toss the seagulls some leftover hash browns. Every fucking thing about this woman calls to me in a way I can’t explain, a way I’ve never experienced before, and I’m sure I’m out of my depth with her.

Capturing my attention, she grins slyly, a glint in her eyes. “You know, Tank, most guys I meet are like elevator music—just background noise. But you? You’re the kind of song that gets stuck in your head. The good kind.”

A laugh rumbles in my chest. “Oh, is that so? Well, tell me, what genre am I?”

“Rock with a hint of jazz. Unexpected, captivating.” She flirts back, eyes shimmering in the dim light.

Pulling her closer, the world around us seems to blur. “Ever thought about writing song lyrics, Sophie?”

“Maybe,” she teases, her voice barely above a whisper, “if I have the right muse.”

Her lips graze mine, sending electric shivers down my spine. “You think we’re both a little crazy about this?”

“Absolutely,” I say, brushing her hair behind her ear.

She smiles, an aura of innocence surrounding her. “Good.” Our pace slows, neither of us in a hurry to part ways.

The scent of coffee and freshly baked pastries fills the air as we pass a small coffee house. “You smell that?” I ask, breathing it in.

She nods. “Makes me want to curl up with a cup of coffee and a good book.”

“Or,” I say, smirking, “with a handsome guy named Tank?”

She punches my arm playfully, her laughter infectious. “Very smooth. I see what you did there.”

We continue our leisurely stroll toward the clinic, the morning wrapping around us like a comforting blanket.

“I’m glad I met you,” she says, leaning into me as we approach the parking lot.

“Ditto,” I say with a grin. “Thanks for making last night and this morning memorable.”

She wraps her arms around my waist. “Anytime, Tank.”

As she heads inside, I realize there’s a connection, something unspoken—yet undeniable—between Sophie and me. I want her by my side, to be the one she turns to.

The world might be fucked up and unpredictable, but one thing’s for sure, I’ll move mountains to make Sophie mine.

Every fiber of my being tells me she's worth it.
And I'm determined to prove that to her.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOPHIE

It feels like forever since I had a night off. Friday nights have become a blur of IV drips, patient charts, and the unyielding scent of antiseptic. Tonight? I'm clocking out of Nurse Sophie mode and clocking into Sophie's-gonna-have-some-fun mode.

Josie texted earlier with simple instructions. *Dress to impress.* That's exactly what I plan to do since Tank is busy keeping guard outside Banger's room.

The plan is to slip into something a bit wild, get a teensy bit tipsy, and indulge in some quality girl time with my numero uno, Josie.

I'm rocking a sapphire blue number tonight—makes my eyes pop like caramel candies. And okay, maybe it's a tad forgiving around the midsection, but who's looking there when the rest of me is so on point? And these heels? Sky high and comfortable. Well worth the hefty price tag.

Every step feels like I'm on the runway, especially when the young man at the door gives me a once-over.

"Thanks," I say, flipping my hair.

"Anytime," he calls after me, giving me a cheeky grin. "Have fun!"

If these young guns are noticing, I must be radiating some good vibes tonight. I stand a little taller and scan the place for Josie.

She waves to me from a seat by the window with the harbor as her backdrop. “Thought you might’ve been abducted by aliens,” she teases, looking me up and down appreciatively. “But now I see you were just busy turning up the heat. Nicely done.”

I laugh, feigning modesty. “You know me, always getting distracted by shiny things.” I slip into the seat opposite her and ask, “Been waiting long?”

“Not even long enough to finish my first drink,” she says, holding up her half-empty vodka cranberry as proof. “And got your signature dirty martini comin’ your way.”

I smile. “You’re a lifesaver.”

I can feel Josie’s scrutinizing gaze on me, and I squirm a little. “So, what’s the tea, Soph?” she asks, narrowing her eyes. “You’ve been all mysterious lately. What’s the story?”

Ugh, she’s always been unnervingly observant. I’ve got a tug-of-war pulling inside my head. One side wants to gush about everything, the other wants to keep my newfound happiness to myself. Finally, the former wins out. “All right, all right... I met someone.”

She leans in, intrigued and maybe a touch skeptical. “You... met someone?” She’s tasting each word, rolling them around as if trying to decipher a hidden message. “Who’s this Mr. Mysterious, and why you been keepin’ him under wraps?”

I feel the defensive rise in me. “He’s not a secret,” I quickly retort, even though, in many ways, Tank has been my sweet secret. But not in a shameful way. More like a delicious secret I’m not ready to share... yet.

She nods slowly, sipping her drink, and gestures for me to continue. “Go on then. Tell me about this... not-so-secret man of yours.”

With a gulp of liquid courage, I start, “His name is Tank. And yes, before you even go there, he’s built like one. In every possible sense.” I chuckle, but then quickly add, “He’s a biker.” I see her expression, or lack of one, and rush to fill the silence. “But he’s more than that. He’s got this unexpected,

sweet side, a wicked sense of humor, and, well, a way with words that's... captivating."

I can feel myself blush, thinking about some of our conversations. "For someone so rugged and rough around the edges, he's got this gentle touch that surprises me every time."

Josie remains silent, sipping her drink, her poker face in place. Nervous energy bubbles inside me. When she finally speaks, her voice is laced with concern. "Soph, I don't like it."

I wasn't expecting her full endorsement, but the bluntness stings a little. "I didn't think you would," I admit, forcing a small smile. "But it's not like I was out hunting for him. It just... happened. And I really like him."

"Sophie," she exhales, frustration and worry mixing in her voice, "you know you need to be cautious, right? This isn't some fairy tale. He's a biker. And with that life, who knows what kind of criminal he is."

"Seriously, girl? Dr. Bishop's a biker, and he's not a criminal," I insist. "He's a veteran and a doctor. Tank is also a veteran."

"And? Doctors and veterans can't also be criminals? Have you seen the news these days?" She shakes her head in exasperation. "You work for Dr. Bishop at the clinic. You treat people with him, but you have no fucking clue what he and his biker gang get up to when he leaves."

"Motorcycle club," I say because that's not the point, even though it is an important distinction. "The clinic was opened up *by* the Reckless Souls," I remind her. "They operate tons of legit businesses, including this bar and where you get your car serviced."

"Even mobsters have legitimate businesses, Sophie."

I concede the point. "True," I say slowly. "But politicians aren't opening up clinics in underserved communities. Billionaires aren't hiring ex-cons to work their businesses, are they?"

I know I've made my point when she sighs again. "He's a *biker*, Sophie. A fucking biker."

I know what she's saying, and I get it, but I hate it. "Yeah, well, let's see...I've dated an accountant, a lawyer, that stupid, sleazy realtor out of L.A., a banker, and even a chef. All with the same shitty results. Cheaters, liars, creeps, and assholes, regardless of how they make their money. Their jobs don't make them better, Josie. Grab the waiter. I need another drink."

"Of course not," she shoots back and waves a hand in the air to order another round of drinks. "But a banker won't put you in harm's way."

"Ralph, the pharmaceutical rep, doesn't cause harm? Because believe me, I see enough opioid addicts in the clinic to say he's doing more harm than a thousand MCs possibly could."

"Okay, you have a point. A good one, dammit. But you're not seeing things clearly. It must be that big, tank-like dick blurring things." Her lips twist into a teasing smile. "I'm right, aren't I?"

I shrug. "Maybe." Just thinking about his dick is enough to make me shiver. Good God, the man gives a good orgasm, and after a few drinks, that's exactly what I want. Right. Now.

"Oh shit," she laughs out loud as our drinks arrive. "You're getting some seriously good dick if I can't make you see reason. You're never this good at arguing your point."

"It's not just the dick," I admit. The truth is that I can't resist the magnetic pull I feel toward Tank. I feel as if I've known him longer than a few months, and more than that, I can't stop smiling when we're together. "I can't promise that I'll stop seeing him, Josie. But I can promise that I will be careful."

After a lifetime of being a good girl, I owe it to myself to explore this thing I have with Tank. Maybe he'll end up being just like the accountant and the chef, or maybe he'll be better than all the rest.

"I really wish you would just get a job at the hospital or literally any other medical center in town."

"I love my job, and these people deserve health care the same as the people on the rich side of town." It's why I chose to take

the job at the clinic all those years ago. I believe in Nova's mission and his goal.

"Can't you help people without being surrounded by criminals?"

I let out a loud laugh. "You work as a shipping agent. Do you really think everything in those containers is one hundred percent legal? What about the union? You think those mobsters are legit? If so, I have a bridge in Alaska to sell you."

Josie rolls her eyes. "Smartass."

"It's all part of my charm," I tell her. "You have until we finish this round to ask questions and plead your case. After, we talk about you."

Josie shakes her head with a groan. "No thanks."

"Oh, now I'm interested." I flag down our server for more drinks. "Spill it, girl."

"We're still on the round where we're talking about you." Holding her drink in her hand and fighting a smile, Josie stares me down.

I stare back.

Her lips twitch.

I pick up my glass and finish it in three gulps. "You're up, buttercup."

CHAPTER SIX

TANK ~ PRESENT

“What the fuck were you thinking?” Ace’s voice booms from the other side of the cell at the Sherriff’s Department. He fists his hands at his hips and shakes his head like a disappointed mama. “We don’t do shit like that without talking about it first.”

I nod. I know I fucked up telling Doherty that I killed that fucker when I don’t even know Jake Lilly. Must be that dude Nova gave a beatdown. But Nova does a hell of a lot of good for the community and the MC, and there’s no fucking way I’d let him go down when he saved my life.

Fuck that.

“I know,” I say instead of all that because Ace is right. This is something the whole MC decides on. Period. “I wasn’t thinking. Just acted on instinct.”

He nods. Even though I might have gone about it the wrong way, it was the right call. For the MC and for Nova. “Good instincts. Terrible fucking execution.”

I flash a smile I don’t quite feel. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

“You’ve got a meeting with your lawyer before Doherty has to shuffle you off to County. She’s the best defense attorney in SoCal.”

“Fucking County. I hope she’s good.” I’ve done time in County before, and I can handle it easily. But there are always

those fuckers who want to test you, to prove they're the *big dawg*, and showing those fuckers they ain't always leads to more time in a fucking cell. "Think she'll get me bail?"

"Maybe." Even Ace doesn't look sure when he lies straight to my face. "I don't know, Tank. It is a murder charge." One hand rakes through his hair, and he shakes his head again.

"Lawyer's here," Doherty mumbles under his breath.

The sheriff isn't an asshole, but he's a lawman and has no choice but to do his job. Last night, I forced his hand by confessing—like a fuckin' idiot—right in front of him.

"I told her what we have so she can do her best for you." His words come out slowly, almost guilty, as he unlocks the cell.

"Thanks, Sheriff." I give his shoulder a squeeze, grateful he doesn't have me locked up in cuffs.

"She's a looker," he whispers, then guides me through the maze of desks and computers. The bullpen buzzes with local law activities before he turns down a quiet hall and into a small windowless room. "Good luck."

"Yeah, thanks."

Once inside the room, I spot a woman with thick dark hair, big hazel eyes, and enough curves to tempt any man with a heartbeat. Decker out in a suit with a blouse that barely covers her tits, she looks more like a stripper playing the role of a lawyer than an actual lawyer. She flashes a smile at Ace and then me. "Thomas Rutherford?"

I extend my hand absently. "Call me Tank. Or Tommy."

"Right." She flashes a smile while she pushes her tits out, and I get a bad feeling about this. A quick glance over my shoulder at Ace, who has a fucking smirk on his face, doesn't do much to put my mind at ease. "Have a seat. We have a lot to go over."

I take a seat and slide so my back is against the wall, my head directly below the camera in the room. "And you are?"

She smiles again. "Noelle Sabella, Esquire. You want my resume, or can we get down to business?"

I think about it for a minute. “How old are you?”

“Old enough to have a ninety percent success rate when my clients listen to me and do exactly what the fuck I say.”

Perfect. I flash a smile. “Good enough. What are we gonna do?”

Noelle lets out a sigh. “Apparently, there’s a video of you or someone beating the crap out of a Mr. Jake Lilly.”

I nod. “Yeah. Don’t know him.”

Surprise flashes in her eyes before that confident look returns. “The video has gone viral at this point, and it doesn’t look good. A figure in a leather vest, with Reckless Souls patches on the back, is beating the holy fuck out of the now-deceased man. It’s not clear who it is, which works in our favor.”

I frown. “Why do I hear a *but* coming?”

“But,” she sighs with a wide grin. “It’s not hard to make the jump to you. A biker is shit-kicking a man, and you’re a biker. Not just any biker, but a trained SEAL with a history of assault.”

“Fuck,” I growl.

“Exactly.” Her gaze slides to Ace and then back to me as she leans in closely. “So, are we looking for an acquittal or the best deal you can get?”

“Acquittal,” Ace and I answer at the same time.

“Oh, good. Because looking at you now, I got this. I know it.” The gleam in her eyes worries me. I don’t need some chick who gets off on the thrill of the game. I need my fucking freedom.

My brows shoot up at her confidence. “You really think you can keep me out of prison?”

“Hell yeah. But I doubt I can get you bail. Is that going to be a problem?”

“Yeah,” Ace answers in a gruff tone.

“No,” I answer at the same time. “I can do it.”

I don't want to, but I can do it if it's what's best for the MC.

"All right. I have your retainer, and my investigators are looking into every piece of evidence and everyone involved. "You'll get out one way or another," she promises.

That should bring me some relief, but it doesn't. Lawyers are always confident, and she's no different, but what happens when it comes to court is the only fucking thing you can rely on.

"If you say so." In the meantime, I need to readjust to life behind bars. Again.

"I do. They'll transfer you to Men's Central this evening. Do me a favor, keep your head down, and stay out of trouble. Can you do that?"

A wicked grin tugs my lips into a flat smile. "You ever done time in County before?"

Her dark brows dip into a pronounced V. "No. Why?"

"Ain't no keepin' your head down, and trouble has a way of finding a guy like me, Noelle. But I want to be a free man, so I'll do my best."

"Excellent." Her shoulders square just a little as her gaze bounces between me and my Prez. "I've looked into the other thing we discussed."

Ace nods. "And?"

Other thing? What other thing?

"I've looked into shutting down the clinic, and it's the easy part. Just lock the doors and put a closed sign on the front of it. We'll take care of the paperwork."

"Wait. What?" I turn to Ace. "We're closing the clinic?" I have no right to question my Prez, not when I'm already in shit up to my armpits, but I do it anyway.

Ace nods again, but he doesn't look happy about the decision. "Shit is getting hella complicated, Tank. We can't risk Nova's safety or the other girls who work at the clinic."

Other girls like Sophie. My mind instantly goes to her and what she'll think when she learns about my arrest. Will she be relieved? Terrified? "Complicated?"

"Ghost isn't gonna let this shit drop, not any time soon. And as long as he's after Maggie's head, it's not safe for her and Nova to stick around Angel Harbor."

I frown. "You're exiling him?"

Ace's lips twist into a smile. "Jesus, man. Who fucking knew you had a flair for the dramatic? Not exile, but they need to disappear for a while, at least until Ghost has been neutralized."

I nod because now Ace is speaking my language. "So, how long is Nova gonna be gone?"

"Don't know," he says. "We're selling the clinic. We'll make a nice profit that'll help Nova and Maggie get set up somewhere else."

Selling the clinic. Again, my thoughts go to Sophie. She's going to be so fucking devastated when she learns the news, and I won't be there to comfort her.

"What about Sophie?" I ask. "And Hannah?" I add, because I don't want Ace to know I've been fucking around with Sophie.

"We'll take care of them," Ace says matter-of-factly. "Very well."

"Of course." The MC doesn't hang people out to dry who do right by us, and the clinic isn't just financially lucrative—it's why Banger is still alive and more of the MC guys aren't behind bars. "But I can't do shit while I'm locked up."

Ace slaps me on the back and flashes a smile. "You're giving Nova and Maggie time to get the fuck out of town. He'd be killed before sundown in here. What you did, even though I didn't fucking approve it, is giving us time to plan our next move."

"I hear ya, brother. But I'd rather be out knocking skulls and breaking necks," I grunt.

Noelle raises her hand and says, “Guys, I didn’t hear of this. I know nothing. Tommy, keep your nose clean and I’ll be back soon.”

I have no choice but to be patient, given my current predicament. Ace and Noelle leave, and then, too soon, I’m settled into the middle row of the sheriff’s van as it takes me to County Jail, where I’ll stay for the foreseeable future.

I distract myself, thinking of Sophie and those wicked curves. Who knew such a prim and proper chick would be such a hellcat in the sack? Goddamn, but she’s an unexpected surprise, one I’d like to get to know better.

However, as tantalizing as those memories are, I push them aside. I can’t get involved with thoughts of Sophie, not on the inside. That’s the kind of shit that gets a man killed.

After I get out of the van with five other criminals, I get processed, searched, and handed a jumpsuit, my paper-thin bed and pillow wrapped up in a green blanket. That’s enough to put Sophie and her sexy as fuck curves out of my head.

For good.

My life, for the foreseeable future, is about one thing and one fucking thing only.

Survival.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOPHIE

Being back on the day shift is a godsend. My sleep schedule is finally back to normal, so I'm getting some decent shuteye. Well, mostly. My dreams still revolve around a certain tattooed biker but waking up sweaty and breathless beats staring at the ceiling all night, counting the minutes until morning—or evening—rolls around.

I wake up feeling fresh and energetic, taking my time to scoop my hair into a ponytail, slicking the perfect wingtip eyeliner to wear behind my glasses—blue to match my scrubs today—and walk into the clinic feeling like a whole new woman.

The only downside to working the day shift again is that I no longer get to spend my evenings with Tank. I mean, it's a good sign, since it means Banger is out of the clinic and well on his way to a full recovery.

I'm happy for him and Willow, but I hope this means I'll get some uninterrupted time with Tank. Go on a real date or two, catch a movie, and go out to a long romantic dinner where we both smile so much our cheeks hurt.

Maybe he'll stay the night at my place. We can fall asleep together, exhausted and satisfied, his big arms wrapped around me with my face pressed against his chest. The soothing beat of his heart lulling me to sleep.

When I go to the breakroom, I pour myself a generous cup of black coffee, letting the hot liquid prepare me for the

whirlwind shift ahead. Days at the clinic are always hectic, and I need to get my head in the game.

Hannah comes to a skidding stop in the break room, a wary expression on her face. Her almond-shaped eyes are wide and perfectly smudged with brown and beige eyeshadow, her rosebud lips parted into a shocked ‘O’. “Sophie,” she sighs. “There you are.”

“Here I am,” I tell her with a smile. At twenty-four, everything in the world seems like an emergency to Hannah.

“Have you heard about Tank?”

My brows crinkle. “Just walked in. Heard what?”

Hannah’s sleek brows dip, and her lips twist into a frown. “Tank got arrested.”

She continues talking, but her words become distant noise as the world around me shatters. Tank got arrested? “What? When?”

“Last night,” she answers matter-of-factly. “But I don’t know any details, not even why.”

“Then how do you know he was arrested?” This could all be some giant mistake, office gossip that gets everything backward.

“Willow called this morning to thank us for caring for Banger, and she told me.”

Shit. I sip the coffee that now tastes bitter and lukewarm, setting it aside because my appetite disappeared. Hannah’s stare is more than I can take right now. She suspects something is going on with Tank and me, but given her penchant for gossip, I don’t share it with her.

“Wow,” I respond with a sigh because I know Hannah, and she won’t go away until she gets some sort of reaction.

“Right? I mean, it *has* to be a mistake, doesn’t it?”

Exactly. Tank isn’t some criminal mastermind. Well, technically, he’s a criminal, but it’s all for a good cause. I need answers, so I abandon the coffee and search for Nova. He’s not

in his office, and the examination room doors are wide open. I dart past each one, holding my breath because I know Nova will have the scoop. But he's nowhere to be found.

Damn it.

I slip into one of the empty exam rooms and pull out my phone, staring at Nova's number in my contacts. Nova and I have known each other for years and are pretty close. I don't think he'd care if I called to ask about Tank, even if it's not work-related.

I hit call on Nova's number. It rings a few times before going to voicemail. That's weird. Nova always answers my calls. *"Hey, Nova, it's Sophie. Give me a call when you get this. I just wanted to check in and see if you know what's going on with Tank. Hope all is okay. Talk soon."*

I tap the red button and sigh. Then I open up a new text to Nova:

Sorry to bug you, but I heard about Tank. Do you know anything about it? Thx.

I hit send and wait anxiously for a response. Nova has always gotten back to me quickly in the past. I just hope he has news about Tank. My gut is telling me something serious is happening. I'll just have to wait and see what Nova texts back. In the meantime, I'll keep searching online for any news.

Lunch comes and goes, but I hardly notice because my stomach is too twisted up to eat or think about anything other than Tank. Nova hasn't responded, which is weird in itself. Makes me wonder what's really going on.

Tank dominates my thoughts, and I'm not sure if I've dodged a bullet or lost my shot at something that could've been amazing.

That's always how it is, though, isn't it? When we don't get something, we romanticize it and turn it into the best thing that could ever happen.

But I feel like Tank and I had a connection, physical and emotional, and it's unlike anything I've ever felt with another man.

“Hey, Soph, how’s it going?”

I look up at Diesel’s smiling face and Olly’s stern expression.

“Hey, guys. What are you doing here?”

Seeing them puts me on edge because Banger isn’t here, and the clinic doesn’t usually have this kind of security.

Diesel shrugs, flashing a smile as if this is all normal. “Just checking things out. Nothing to worry about.”

I glare at him and cross my arms. “See, when you say that, all I can do is worry.”

“Really, it’s nothing,” Olly says, his tone working to reassure me more than it should. “Just being cautious.”

“Does this have anything to do with Tank?” I ask.

They look at each other and then back to me with blank expressions. “Nope.”

“Do you know anything about Tank getting arrested?”

“Nope,” they say in unison.

Might as well be a yes. “Okay, then. See you around.” My shift is over, and I have just enough time to get home and change into real clothes before I head over to County to see Tank.

I’m nervous. I’ve never been to a jail before, and I don’t know what to expect.

I slip into a pair of dark jeans and a pale pink blouse that I pair with my favorite nude pumps that make my legs look great because I need every ounce of confidence I can get.

I keep my makeup natural, adding a shiny pale pink lip and my black frames because they make me look more professional and less like, what exactly? A scared, not-exactly-a-girlfriend? A worried temporary lover?

I don’t know.

I don’t even know what I’m doing, but I snag my keys and purse and make my way to the County Jail, someplace I never thought I’d go.

“No bags or purses inside, ma’am.” The heavysset man in uniform speaks in a firm voice, and I freeze, looking down at my bag. “Lockers over there.”

I head to the storage lockers, where a prominent sign lists all the rules for visiting inmates. The first step is to sign in with proper identification and provide the inmate’s first and last name. My heart sinks as the realization hits me like a ton of bricks.

Tank. I don’t even know his name. Not his first name, not his last name—nothing. I only know him as Tank. How could I let this happen? I’m not the type of woman who engages in encounters with nameless, faceless men. Instantly, Tank’s face flashes before my eyes, his charming smile and rugged masculinity making my stomach tighten.

“Shit,” I mutter and jot down *Tank* in the name box. It has a snowball’s chance in hell of working, but I hold my breath and wait to be called.

“Sophie Harmon.”

I rise from my seat, approach the woman behind the thick glass, and smile hesitantly. “I’m Sophie Harmon.”

Her expression remains disinterested as she taps the sign-in sheet. “You need to provide the inmate’s first and last name. No aliases.”

My voice trembles with hope as I ask, “Is there any way you can look it up for me?”

“Nope. Get the name and come back between four and six o’clock,” she replies, her tone still indifferent. Then she calls the next name on the list.

I sigh, totally disheartened. I retrieve my purse from the locker and walk out of the crowded visitor’s area with tears swimming in my eyes. I feel horrible.

How could I have been so foolish? I’ve spent months envisioning a future with a man, sharing dreams and desires, and yet I neglect to ask the most basic question—his name.

Was it an oversight on my part, or did he deliberately keep it from me? Why didn't I ask sooner?

Realizing that I've been wrong again about a man sends tears streaming down my cheeks. I slow my pace when my vision blurs, but my emotional breakdown escalates into the ugliest cry the world has ever seen. I don't know how, but I manage to make my way home without driving into a wall.

Is Josie right? Should I stay away from Tank altogether? The question falls with a thud in my belly because no matter how shitty I feel right now, I know being with Tank isn't a mistake. Whatever else is true about us and about why he was arrested, the time I had with him was right. It was damn near perfect.

I know that.

But when I lock the door behind me, I'm exhausted and emotional. My eyes sting from crying, and my heart *aches*.

Tomorrow, I'll figure everything out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TANK

Most guys probably think jail is predictable. Same shit, different day. But when you've lived the kind of wild, unhinged life I have—bouncing around as a kid with a drunk, abusive dad, getting into trouble on the streets, then escaping to the Navy the first chance I got, pushing myself to the brink as a SEAL—the concept of predictability doesn't even exist.

So, sitting here rotting away in County Lockup, staring at the same four cinderblock walls, you'd think I'd relish the monotony. But it's torture. Every endless minute I'm stuck in this damn cell is another minute I can't be with Sophie. I can't run my fingers through her hair or feel her smooth skin under my hands.

I chuckle to myself. Big bad biker obsessed with some chick he's known for what, a few months?

Yes. Hell yes.

Sophie's different from any woman I've ever known.

With her, life was unpredictable in the best way. She made me feel things I didn't know I could feel. And the way she looked at me with those deep brown eyes, like no one ever has before...it woke up something deep inside me.

Made me start thinking about more than just the next ride, the next fight, the next adrenaline rush. She made me think about the future for the first time in my damn life.

So now what? Do I hang on to this agonizing *maybe*, or do I let her go?

Letting go. Now that's a mission I've never trained for.

But this time, it's the right thing to do. Walk away. Set her free. So I do something really fucking unexpected. I write her a letter.

Hey, Soph, this is really hard to write. You probably know by now that I'm in jail. The lawyer says it could be a while. I know things were getting good between us, and I can't stop thinking about you. But you need to move on. You deserve better than what I can give you right now—maybe ever. You matter to me. A lot.

That's why I'm writing this.

Take care of yourself, Sophie.

Yours truly,

Tank

I'm trained to do hard things. Things I don't want to do.

But this letter might be the hardest. I'll send it out tomorrow, but for now, I can't help but think of the last time I saw her.

One last memory of the most beautiful woman in my world before I let her go.

"HEY, TANK. YOU BUSY?" A tipsy Sophie isn't one I've met, but hearing her laugh makes me smile.

And makes my dick twitch. "Never too busy for you. What's up?"

"What's up," she sighs, "is you. I want to see you."

Hell yeah. "When?"

"Now, Tank." There's a heat and a heaviness in her voice that zips right from my ear and down to my cock. "Does that work for you?"

Fuck, all I've been thinking about all night is Sophie. Fucking her once only whet my appetite. Fucking her twice only fed the addiction. But thinking about having her now, at her place and on a bed? My cock hardens just thinking about all the ways I can make her scream my name. "Yeah, it works for me, Sophie. Really fucking well."

"Good," she sighs as if she wasn't sure I would say yes. "I'll text you my address."

"Sounds good."

She laughs again. "And Tank?"

"Yeah?"

"My panties are already soaked."

She ends the call before she hears the anguished groan I let out, thinking about sliding those wet panties to the side and flicking my tongue against her wet, swollen clit. After a quick call to get Stone to cover for me at the clinic, I hop on my bike and get to Sophie as fast as I fucking can.

"Hey." She opens the door with a breathless greeting and a wide smile.

"Hey, yourself." My gaze rakes over her in the figure-hugging blue dress. "Fuck, Sophie. You look good enough to eat."

Heat blazes in her eyes. "Good because that's what I was going for." She takes a few steps back and waves me inside. "You coming?"

"Soon enough, we'll both be coming."

She does nothing to hide the shiver that vibrates her whole body. "Tank," she whispers, jumping in my arms the minute I close the door. "Been thinking about you all night."

My hands go to her ass, gripping those firm cheeks and kneading them as she wraps her legs around my waist. Her tongue flicks against mine, and she lets out a soft little moan that makes my dick so hard it hurts. She feels so fucking good in my arms, and she tastes like booze and French fries. "Sophie," I growl. "Right here, right now. Or your bedroom."

She's breathless, and her skin is pink. She parts her kiss-swollen lips. "Both?"

"Oh, fuck," I growl with a dark smile.

She flashes a matching smile, gripping my hair tight enough to sting. "The door at the end of the hall."

"Thank fuck," I growl just before her lips crash down on mine.

Sophie is a wildcat, kissing me deeply and raking her fingers through my hair while I take us both down the hall as fast as I possibly can. She squeals when I toss her onto the large bed decorated in shades of purple. "Tank." Her legs part slightly, showing off nothing but a bare pussy.

"What happened to the wet panties?"

She tosses her head back, laughing. "They were a little too wet. I thought you might prefer this."

"I do," I growl, unable to tear my gaze away from the glistening pink folds of her pussy. "Lay back," I order, my dick getting harder when she obeys completely.

She parts her legs a little more, letting out a soft moan as she bites down on her bottom lip. "Like this?"

I nod, leaning forward to steal another taste of her mouth before I settle between her legs, my broad shoulders spreading her wide. "Fuck, I can practically taste how much you want me, Sophie."

"I do want you, Tank. So fucking much." She hisses out a breath, arching into me when I run one finger between her wet pussy. "Yes!" The uncontrollable shudder shooting through her is almost more than I can stand.

My tongue touches her pussy, and her hips buck off the bed. Her fingers tangle in my hair as my name falls from her lips. I smile against her, devouring every inch of that hot, wet core. Her hips move in time with my tongue, but I surprise her, sliding two fingers into her wet and pulsating center.

"Tank," she moans, wrapping one leg and then the other around me, hips pumping in a slow, intoxicating rhythm.

My tongue wraps around her clit, tugging gently at first and then not so gently until the damn breaks and an orgasm shoots out of her, hard and fast, so powerful I worry she's going to snap my neck in two. I grunt my pleasure, pumping my fingers into her to prolong her pleasure.

"Tank, please," she pants. "Please, I need you. More of you. All of you."

The words are music to my fucking ears, but I'm not ready to pull away from her delicious cunt, so I lick, and suck and finger fuck her until she's trembling and begging me to stop.

"Now, Tank. Gimme some, now!"

I smile and sit up with her juices dripping down my chin. "Impatient, huh?"

"Greedy," she pants with a slow, satisfied smile. "Give me some dick."

In one quick move, I'm on my feet and undressing like my commanding officer is timing me. Sophie chuckles, but her gaze is dark as she takes in the sight of me completely naked.

"Holy shit, you're beautiful."

Her words stop me, and I flash a smile, ignoring the heat creeping up my body at her bold appreciation. There's lust, sure, but there's something more behind her gaze, something that's almost like reverence. "Thanks, babe."

She smiles, crooking one finger to beckon me to her. When I don't come, Sophie is on all fours, crawling to the edge of the bed where she takes my cock in her fist, pumping hard and fast. "You really are a work of art," she whispers just before leaning forward to flick her wet tongue over my slit, stealing the pre-come from the tip with a low, hungry growl.

The move unravels my resolve, my determination to go slow now that I have all night to take my time. "Sophie," I growl. "Slow down."

"No," she whispers as she wraps her lips around my cock, taking me inch by inch until I feel the back of her throat.

“Fuck.” I pull her away and toss her on her back, enjoying the surprise flashing in her brow eyes and the smile curving up her pink lips. Her mouth parts slightly when I crawl up the bed and settle my hips between her thighs. “Ready?” My cock head is swollen and aching, perched right at her entrance, waiting for the green light.

“More than,” she pants, digging her heels into my ass and urging me to sink into her. “Please, Tank.”

I don’t wait for another word. I plunge deep in one long, slow stroke, letting her pulse and settle around my length. She’s hot and wet as fuck, and I’m not sure I can last as long as I want. “Fuck, Soph.”

“Yes. Perfect. Just like that.”

I push into her, slow, deep thrusts that send her higher and higher. Every stroke tears my name from her lips. and it’s a heady fucking thing, having a woman so completely tied up by me and how I’m making her feel. She tosses her head back and arches into me, body shaking with desire as she takes all of me.

She’s pulsing around my cock, her fingers digging into my forearm as she bucks her hips up, taking me deeper and deeper. Words of pleasure drip from her lips and my cock hardens painfully.

“Tank,” she says, her voice a warning.

“Let go for me, Sophie. Let. Go.” I lean forward, taking her mouth in a hot, wet kiss that connects to my hips, thrusting harder and faster, so deep I think we’re becoming more than whatever the fuck is going on between us. I kiss her and pinch her nipples while my cock pounds into her, deep and out of control. “Soph.”

Her hips buck up over and over, my pelvis rubbing up against her clit, and that’s all that she needs before her body erupts, shaking and jerking, milking my cock until my own orgasm shoots out of me with the force of a volcano.

“Tank!” The words leave her mouth over and over as her body convulses, squeezing around me like she never wants to let me

go. “Oh, fuck Tank!”

I grin and pull back, gripping her thighs wide to change the angle, still fucking her harder and harder. Her pussy clenches around me harder and faster until overwhelming aftershocks rock my body. “Fuck, Sophie.”

I collapse on top of her, hips still pumping slower and slower until I’m completely fucking spent. I lean forward, taking her mouth again as I roll to my side, bringing her with me because I can’t stop fucking kissing her, touching her, reveling in the soft cries she makes when my fingers slip between her thighs.

It’s the best damn night I’ve had in a long time, and though I didn’t know it then, it’s that night that helps me get through my time in County.

However long that may be.

CHAPTER NINE

SOPHIE

Relief washes over me when I get to the clinic and find Nova in his office, sitting at his desk at work on his laptop. “Hey, Boss. You’re here.”

He looks up with a smile that shows signs of strain around the edges. “I’m here.”

“How’s Joaquin doing?”

His smile is more genuine at that question. “He’s actually doing pretty well, considering. Willow takes good care of him.”

“Great to hear.” I look around his office, which looks the same as it always does, leading me to think it must be me who feels different. “Uhm... I have a question. It’s not a work-related question, so feel free to tell me to mind my own business, but I’d like to know.”

“Okay. Shoot. I’ll answer if I can.”

His words surprise me, but I take them at face value. “Well, I have a few questions.” I’m fidgeting and I don’t like it. “Did you get my messages? I called and texted you the other day and you never responded. Is everything okay? I’m curious about Tank. What do you know about him getting arrested?”

Nova’s face tugs into a frown. “Sorry about that, Sophie. There’s just so much happening right now. I know Tank got arrested. I also know that it’s a huge mistake that’ll be over soon enough,” he says, shaking his head. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I’m worried about him. When Joaquin was here, we got to know each other a little, and I just wanted some... *insight.*” That’s one way of putting it. “What do you know about him? Do you know his real name?”

“Tank is a good man. Loyal and protective, a good brother. But sadly enough, I only know him as Tank. Ace or Dix might have that information. Why do you need to know?”

Shit. Do I tell Nova I want to go see Tank in lockup? No. He may tell me not to go or not to get involved. So I keep that to myself.

“I’m just curious. Like, I know your name is Nova Bishop. But all I know about Tank is... *Tank.*”

Nova chuckles. “My real name isn’t Nova, if you can believe that. It’s the name the MC gave me when I got patched in. My real name is Kane. Kane Bishop.”

“No way. Why do they call you Nova?” This is interesting. I thought I knew more about Nova and the MC. Guess I don’t.

Nova looks at me with a smirk on his face. “Because I’m a doctor, and the club thought it was cool to name me Nova. As in Nova. Kane. Get it? Novocain.” He smiles and returns to the laptop. “Do you need anything else?”

“Uhm...no,” I say, planning my next move. “Are you doing okay?”

“Yeah,” he says. “I’m doing all right. Thanks for asking.”

“Okay then. See you tomorrow,” I say and turn to leave the clinic.

I get in my car and head over to Ace Motors for answers. Well, really just one answer. Tank’s legal name.

My gaze lands on a woman with a very round, pregnant belly hustling across the parking lot. She’s wearing a flowing dress that stops just below her knees, and I pull into a parking spot right beside her. “Excuse me? Hello?”

The woman stops walking, one hand still holding her belly as she turns to me with a scowl on her face. “Yeah, what is it?”

“Do you know where I might be able to find Ace?” I ask, trying to keep my tone polite and friendly.

The woman’s expression shifts in a way that leaves me puzzled. Her lips purse and her gaze narrows suspiciously. “Who’s asking?”

I flash a warm smile, attempting to defuse the tension. “I’m Sophie, and I work at the clinic with Dr. Bishop. I’m... uhm...” I pause, searching for the right words to explain my request, “I’m looking for information on Tank so I can visit him in jail. We worked the late shift together, caring for Banger, and I just heard the news.”

Another woman with dark hair and fitted black jeans joins the pregnant woman, wrapping a protective arm around her waist. “What’s happening here?”

The pregnant woman snorts. “She wants to visit Tank in lockup.”

“Oh, okay. Why?” The newcomer asks, her curiosity evident.

“We’re friends, and I realized we never got around to the small detail of his real name. It’s necessary for the visitor’s list,” I explain, somewhat embarrassed. I’ve been dwelling on this for days, and it suddenly hit me that no one ever refers to Tank by his real name. “Can you help?” I wonder if they might be in the dark about his real name, too.

Both women eye me skeptically, as though I’m some crazed groupie, which strikes me as odd considering Tank is in jail, not on a tour bus. The woman in the black pants offers a sympathetic smile, but it’s clear she won’t provide the information I need.

The pregnant woman folds her arms, wearing a haughty sneer on her face. “If he didn’t give you his name, then he probably didn’t want you to have it. It means you must not be good friends at all.”

It’s a valid point, I admit to myself, but her bitchy attitude feels undeserved. The urge to respond with some snarky comment hovers on the tip of my tongue, but it won’t get me

any closer to the information I want, so I keep the snark to myself.

I glare at both women, and with a curt nod, I shift my car into reverse and pull out of the parking lot without saying another word.

The urge to cry is so strong it damn near overwhelms me on the drive home, but I refuse to let some territorial biker bitches bring me to tears. I'm stronger than that.

The pregnant bitchy woman might have a point. And her pregnancy hormones might be the reason for her attitude. Not that that's an excuse, because it isn't.

Tank had every opportunity to tell me his real name, and he didn't, so maybe this wasn't anything more than two consenting adults scratching an itch and nothing more.

That's a depressing thought, and I mull it over for a few miles, alone and lost in my thoughts on the freeway. Am I really so wrong about Tank?

The idea that everything I'm feeling—or *was* feeling—for Tank is just my mind playing tricks on me makes me sad. It's heartbreaking, really.

I'm drifting in my thoughts when I snap back to reality.

A quick look in the rearview mirror makes my blood run cold. A car is barreling up behind me, its brights blinding me. I'm not moving fast enough to get away.

I flick my blinker and change lanes, hoping to let it pass. But to my horror, it follows me over. My heart pounds wildly. What's going on?

I switch back to the slow lane. The car mirrors me again. Panic rises in my throat.

The car pulls up dangerously close. I can't even see its headlights anymore. "What the hell?" I yell, slowing up on the gas so they can pass me.

But the car keeps pace, right on my bumper. I have no clue who's driving or what they want, but I'm freaking the fuck

out. I push the pedal down, accelerating to dangerous speeds. Still, the car stays glued behind me.

I blow past my exit, too scared to get off anywhere near home. This creep could find out where I live. No way. I drive like a maniac, eyes glued to the road, my thoughts racing wildly.

Is this about Tank and the Reckless Souls? An angry ex-boyfriend? Just road rage?

“Fuck you!” I shout, flooring it again. I pull ahead briefly before the car closes the gap.

Up ahead, I have two choices—spin out or take an exit. No way am I wiping out at this speed. I yank the wheel a hard right and hit the brakes, fishtailing onto the offramp in a cloud of dust.

The car zooms past, windows too dark to see inside. I watch it speed away, no license plate, no stickers. “Dammit,” I curse.

It takes minutes for my pounding heart and ringing ears to subside. My hands shake as I continue down the offramp. “Fucking psychos,” I mutter, pushing away thoughts of who that was and why they wanted to terrify me.

Was it those biker girls? Shit. Did I start something? No, it can't be. I work for Nova. Why would they be after me?

Oh. Shit. Realization hits me like a ton of bricks.

I work for Nova.

CHAPTER TEN

TANK

Goddamn, but the days in lockup blur one into the next until I don't even know what the fuck day it is. Time doesn't mean shit in here because you're on the guard's time. When you eat breakfast, take a piss, talk to your lawyer, all of it is up to the asshole guards, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it. Day after fucking day, it's the same shit.

Head count.

Chowtime.

Rec time.

Chowtime.

Lights out.

Being here is getting to me more than I thought. Last time I was here, I promised myself that I'd seen the last of life behind bars. I walked out of the door so fucking cocky and sure that my ass was the last anyone would ever see of me in here, and yet, here I am.

Again.

I know I did the right thing in taking the rap for Nova. I'd do that shit again in a heartbeat because he's got something none of us has; his hands and his brain.

He's a doctor who helps the community in ways the rest of us can't. Sure, we can help a family in a bind, donate shit to those in need and even provide jobs for the perpetually unemployed.

But he fixes people. Takes people on the brink of death and brings them back to life. He can patch a hole, fix a heart, and stop a dying body from doing the very thing it wants to do.

What can I do? Hold my breath for a long time? Shoot a man sitting on his favorite sofa from a mountaintop miles away? Kill a man with my bare hands? Yeah. Hell yeah to all of that, but despite being a SEAL, there are others who can do what I can.

Nova is different and needs to be in the world doing what he does, working his magic on those in need. It's not just what he does. The goodwill it grants us in the community often comes in handy. So, yeah, I'd do it all over again.

And again.

I let out a long breath while waiting in line for chowtime, and a hard shoulder slams against mine. "Watch where you're goin'."

This motherfucker is insane if he thinks he can take me. He's scowling at me like he's some big swinging dick, and I'm immediately on edge. I could take this asshole down with my hands tied behind my back, but I don't want any problems in this place. I want to get the fuck out of here.

"Maybe you oughtta get yourself some glasses before you get hurt." I glare at him, and he glares back. We hold our stares for a second or two.

Then, he looks around, trying to make sure everyone knows he's tough when I already know he's a weak ass pussy. "Better watch your mouth. Boy."

"Boy?" I chuckle. "Better watch yours before your day gets worse." The line starts moving—thank fuck—and I keep my eye on the motherfucker who thinks he can step up on me. This ain't my first rodeo, and as much as I want to get the fuck out of lockup, I won't let the whole damn block think I can't protect myself.

The line moves slowly, but eventually, everyone makes it through the line and gets a bologna sandwich, fruit salad, juice, and mixed vegetables on each tray.

There are no exceptions for a special diet unless it's religious, so we all take the slop to our respective tables, sit down, and eat it. Not because it's good or anything, but because it's fucking sustenance, and inside this hellhole, you need to keep your energy up because you never know when shit's about to go down.

I don't know any of the guys at my table, but I take the seat that gives me the best view of the whole room and dig in, drowning the salty bologna with the sweet as fuck juice.

"Want my fruit salad for your veggies?" The scrawny guy beside me flashes a grin, dark brows raised full of hope.

"Sure, why not." He set the plastic container in front of me, and I let him scoop the bland vegetables onto his tray.

"Thanks." Without another word, he makes quick work of the vegetables and then his sandwich.

My gaze scans while I chew without tasting a damn thing when I see the asshole from earlier. He stands and looks around the cafeteria before his gaze lands on its target. Me. His lips curl into a smirk as if he's got a secret joke on his mind. One leg and then the other steps over the plastic bench seat, and he's heading my way.

My hands tense instinctively. *Relax, goddammit, this motherfucker is no threat.* I double-check that no one else is standing or looking like they might have his back. Then I relax because I can handle this jackass blindfolded. Thankfully, I won't have to, and I crack my knuckles under the table. And I wait.

In addition to the scar on his forehead, there are signs that the old fuck has been through the wringer. His nose is crooked from too many breaks, and his skin is pocked, a sure sign of a lifelong battle with narcotics. But I have no sympathy for this asshole who wants to step up to me and use me to make his bones.

No. Fucking. Way.

"I'm gonna need your fruit cup," he says as he leans forward trying to intimidate me.

“Yeah, and I’m gonna need you to fuck off.” My voice carries, drawing the attention of those pretending like they weren’t watching closely. That’s how it works in here. Everyone wants to see who’s the mark, the victim, the patsy.

Anger flashes for just a moment as if he really thought I would just hand that shit over, and then it’s gone. He replaces it with a smile as he looks around the cafeteria as if he’s not bothered at all. “Listen, asshole, you can give it to me, or I can take it from you.”

A slow smile spread across my face as I stand. “I’ll tell you what, *asshole*. You can try to take it from me, and we’ll go from there.” My brow arches, a clear challenge. “Go for it. You’re a badass, right?”

His eyes go wide, and then comes the indecision. He’s not sure if I’m all talk and just going to just let him take it from me, or if he’s about to get himself into a week’s worth of pain. He takes just long enough that I know I’ve won the fight before the first punch is thrown. He doesn’t *want* to fight, but like a fucking idiot, he chose one of the biggest, strongest inmates he could find.

Me.

I smile when he leans in to snatch the fruit cup, grabbing his wrist with one hand and slamming it on the table while I pound into his face with my right. The table clears immediately. The others have a sense of self-preservation greater than their hunger. *Good for them.*

It feels good to pound this asshole’s face. I’ve always hated bullies, and I decide to make him pay. “Still hungry, motherfucker?”

He grunts, pulling his arm and trying to free it, but my grip is tight, and my thumb presses into the veins on his inner wrist.

“Yeah, bitch!” The words follow a grunt, and he surprises me with a glancing jab to my jaw.

I stumble back, but only for a moment before jumping over the table, pushing him to the ground with a loud roar to let him know he fucked up.

“Stupid son of a bitch.” I land with my knees on his chest, sliding them wide so they dig into his biceps. I ignore his roar of pain and let my fist loose on his face. Left, right. Right, left. Over and over, my fists land blow after blow to his cheeks, his nose, his jaw, hell, even his forehead.

I’m angry. No, fuck that, I’m furious. This is the last fucking place on earth I want to be, and then this sorry motherfucker comes up on me.

I slam my fists into his face because I can’t stop, and since this asshole made his face my business, I keep it up until my fists are coated in blood.

My face is splattered with the warmth of his blood even as he bucks his hips, trying to get me off him. I smile.

“You should’ve thought about this before you got in my fucking face.” I punch him again, straight on, a simple jab that breaks his nose in a satisfying crunch. His head snaps back, and he sags against the floor, but I’m not done with him, not by a long shot.

I lean forward and pull back my fist, ready to uncoil once again, but there’s resistance, and I try again. Nothing. Finally, I look over my shoulder and see one guard grab my right arm and another grabs my left. *Shit*. This ain’t good. It won’t matter that this fucker started it, not one fucking bit.

That’s why the system is so fucked up. They don’t do shit to stop the violence. If you stand up for yourself to protect yourself, you risk a longer fucking sentence. I go slack and let the guards pull me backward because the last thing I want is for these fuckers to start beating the fuck out of me. I plan to get out of here in one piece.

Hopefully.

Maybe.

Shit. Will I even get the fuck out of here after this?

Two more guards help up the dude with the bloody fucking face, and he takes advantage of their loose grip and lunges forward. I see it coming from a mile away, but I only have a

few seconds to choose. Tense up and let the guards think I'm fighting them or take it.

Fuck that, I'll never take that shit.

My lips pull into a straight line, and I exhale, tensing my core muscles as my right leg pulls back at a ninety-degree angle. As soon as he leans forward, telegraphing the punch he thinks he's about to land, I flex my foot and push forward straight into his already bleeding nose.

"Ow!" Motherfucker wails like a baby as he falls back and right into the arms of two slightly amused guards.

"You done?" One of the guards leans forward, a small smile he can't hide on his face.

I nod. "Done." They try to drag me away, but I probably weigh more than both of those scrawny fuckers put together. Then they stop and make me get to my feet. I look over my shoulder one last time, giving my attacker a wink and a smile.

"You're a dead man." He mouths the words to me. It's not the first time I've heard that threat, but I can't say that I'm not concerned about it this time. I'm a strong son of a bitch, without a doubt, but I'm also in here without any backup and alone. I can only do so much.

I know where I'm going, and up there, I'll have plenty of time to think up a plan.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SOPHIE

I wake up feeling as sick as a dog and have no idea why. I mean, I haven't done anything in weeks. I haven't gone out since my girl's night out with Josie. I haven't had sex since Tank, but I feel as if I've picked up a bug somewhere, and it's knocking me on my ass.

I get up and rush to the bathroom, emptying the contents of my stomach as if I'd spent the previous night drowning in booze when the truth was that I ate tacos and fell asleep watching reality TV on my streaming service.

Still, I can't deny that I feel like absolute shit, enough so that I know going into the clinic today is not an option. Calling in sick isn't something I do regularly. Hell, I rarely stay home from work unless it can't be helped. There's too much to do at the clinic.

But after an hour of nursing my nausea and all the tools I have at my disposal to lessen its effects have proven worthless, I call the clinic and do the unthinkable.

Nova picks up on the third ring, and the words rush out of me in one long breath. "I feel terrible, Nova. I can't keep anything down, not even water, and I'm pretty sure I'd be useless to you today." I hold my breath, waiting for the anger he never displays or maybe the disappointment that I'm letting him down, but none of that is what I get.

Nova sighs heavily, and I brace myself for the lecture that's sure to come. But it doesn't. His next words shock me to my

core.

“It’s all right, Sophie. The truth is that I’ve been meaning to call you about changes to the clinic.”

“Changes?” I can handle changes. When Nova’s buddies come in and need stitching up, I manage without so much as a blink of an eye, so I can handle change, but his tone gives me pause.

Is he firing me?

Nova sighs heavily, and I can almost see him pinching the bridge of his nose, trying to get the words out.

“Things have changed, Sophie. A lot. Keeping the clinic operational safely is no longer feasible, so...we’re shutting it down.”

“Shutting down the clinic?” My voice turns shrill and full of panic, and we both know it, but his words couldn’t have shocked me more if he said he was moving to Jupiter.

“Yes. I just found out myself. It’s on the market as of this morning because the best thing for the community is to sell it as soon as possible. That’s what’s happening now, so it’s probably best if you stay home.”

“What? How is that possible?” As sick as I feel physically, this news makes me uneasy and, I can’t lie, angry.

“The cleaning crew is here to prepare the place for potential buyers, Sophie. We need to move fast.”

We need to move fast.

Those words echo in my brain, and I fight the instinct to be angry that he hadn’t called me before now to tell me the news. I open my mouth to tell him just how fucked up it is, but I can’t because my stomach lurches. I run to the bathroom and bend over the toilet, emptying the contents of my stomach into the bowl.

Again.

It’s the second time this morning that I’ve been sick, which is worrisome, but not more than the fact that I’m out of a job.

“Sophie, are you all right?” Nova’s voice sounds far away, and I look at the phone at the side of the toilet. “Sophie?”

I snatch up the phone, feeling uneasy, and ask the one question on my mind. “Sorry. So, I’m unemployed?”

”As of right now, yes. But the Reckless Souls will take care of you. Financially. For a while. Sophie, I know this is a shock. It was to me, too, but we’ll get through this.”

“R-i-i-ight.” There’s nothing more I can say. “Thanks for letting me know.” I end the call feeling all out of sorts, frustrated, and worried about my future.

I never pictured myself as the employee packing up a banker’s box of belongings, looking around her former employer with a wistful gaze, but that’s exactly who I am. And on the heels of that thought comes another. *My letter.*

Since Tank got locked up, I haven’t gotten any information on him or his alleged crimes, but the letter he wrote to me is in my desk. At the clinic. After a tall glass of ice-cold ginger ale and a sleeve of salty crackers, I’m ready to head into the office to clean my desk and sever that last tie with the clinic. There’s no point in prolonging it, not when I’m already sick, so I dress quickly in casual jeans and a flowy blouse and make my way to the clinic to clear out my personal effects.

The place is empty other than half a dozen men dressed in hazmat gear, which isn’t all that alarming but makes everything *real*. This is happening. It’s not some lark. It’s not a bad dream. The clinic where I’ve helped the community for years is closing, leaving them without help and me without a steady paycheck. I shake off the sadness because the nausea is still making its presence known, and I head to my desk to clear out the few personal items I keep in there.

“Sophie, what are you doing here?”

I turn to Nova’s voice and try for a smile. “I didn’t know how long the place would be open, so I figured I’d come get my things since I don’t really have a reason to be here anymore.”

To prove my point, I hold up the monogrammed stethoscope my parents gave me when I graduated with my nursing degree.

It's a sentimental item that means the world to me, and I know it's a good reason for being here.

Nova smiles at the gold coils with the rose gold chest piece and ear frame. It's cute and girly, and most of all, it's mine. "I would've made sure you got your things."

"I know, but it's clear you have other things on your mind." There's a hint of a question in my words, so I voice them out loud. "How long do you anticipate the place will be closed? And why?"

"Maggie and I need to leave town for a while." The words come out easily, but there's a heaviness to his shoulders, to his very being, telling me there's more to the story. "I'll make sure you're well taken care of, Sophie. If not for you, I wouldn't have Maggie right now. You've been at my side from the beginning, and I want you to know how much that means to me. I won't leave you high and dry."

His unexpectedly sweet words bring tears to my eyes, and I swipe at them before looking away. "Thanks for saying that. It means a lot." Nova and I have been friends all these years, which matters to me. "What about your father and his cancer?"

"I'll keep an eye on him and Mom from afar, but I have to go. I need to do what's best for Maggie and my kid, not to mention the MC. Maggie is pregnant, and her safety is my top priority."

"Wow. Of course." But the Reckless Souls don't know peace. There's barely been a moment of quiet since I learned about them, which makes his quick departure alarming. I think of the person who tried to run me off the road, and I frown. "Is there anything I need to worry about?"

"No." His answer is strong and firm. "But it wouldn't be hurt to be more careful for a while."

I nod absently. All the years I've worked for Nova, and his MC life has never spilled into my personal life. Then again, before Tank, I'd never crossed the line between his biker life and my private life. "Yeah, sure. Of course."

“This might not be forever, Sophie, but I can’t risk putting our patients in danger with our enemies out for blood.”

“So this is MC stuff. I get it,” I say, even though I don’t get it. At all. It’s what’s made me a good and loyal employee over the years, never asking too many questions about Reckless Souls business. My lips pull into what I hope is a smile, but Nova’s frown says I don’t quite make it.

“You’ll be all right, Sophie.” He flashes a sympathetic smile, and that, for some reason, only makes me feel worse. “I have Tank’s information if you still want it. He’s in solitary right now, and we’re trying to get him out, but maybe a friendly face when he gets out will help?”

I want to scoff bitterly and tell him this isn’t the consolation prize I wanted, but I nod. He quickly scribbles on a prescription pad, tears it off, and hands it to me.

“Thanks,” I whisper as I slide the paper into my purse. “Good luck, Dr. Bishop. And congratulations to you and Maggie both. Please, if you need anything, don’t hesitate to call.”

He smiles, and this time, it’s genuine, reaching all the way to his worried eyes. “Thanks, Sophie. If anyone can land on her feet, it’s you.”

I’m not sure that’s true, but I give him the smile he’s expecting. I’m not rich, and neither are my parents. We all get by with a little extra each month, but I can’t afford to be without work for weeks or months without reprieve. “Yep. Thanks.”

“Hey, don’t worry. Seriously, the MC will make sure you’re well taken care of until this is settled and you land on your feet. You’ve always been there for us, and we will return the favor.”

“I appreciate that,” I tell him easily. It’s a nice gesture but does nothing to stop the anxiety filling my belly, or maybe that’s just the persistent nausea.

Either way, I offer a smile I don’t feel, hug Nova goodbye, and then slink back to my house to figure out what comes next.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TANK

“Dude, you look like you’ve had better days,” Officer Davis says, sliding the breakfast tray through the narrow slot in the solitary cell door. Been a week in solitary. A goddamn week in a box that smells like piss, sweat and regret.

I lock eyes with him. “How much longer am I stuck in this hellhole?”

Davis chuckles, no hint of sympathy. “Don’t know, man. That guy you beat up? Still in the infirmary. You’re here ‘til the powers that be decide what’s next for you.”

“Decide what? They’re treating me like I’m already guilty.”

Davis shrugs. “Welcome to the system. Might as well get comfortable.”

“It was self-defense,” I insist.

“If the cameras back you up, you’re golden,” he says, leaving me with my tray of rubbery eggs and stale toast.

I shove the tray aside. Fuck eating. The law might say I’m guilty, but I know I defended myself. Still, I can’t help but smirk, thinking about that guy’s busted up face. Small victories, right?

I look at the tray. The meal hardly qualifies as food. But in here, it’s not just the abysmal meals that fuck with me. It’s the isolation. I can’t size up anyone, can’t read their eyes, can’t anticipate their next move. Instead, all I’ve got is four walls, a ceiling too close for comfort, and my spiraling thoughts.

Feeling the need to move, to exhaust my energy, I start with push-ups. My palms press firmly against the cold concrete. One. Each push is a reminder of my discipline, my rigorous training. Two. Three. But as I push my body up, my thoughts drift to Sophie. Four. Five. The soft curve of her smile, the genuine laughter, the intimate conversations we shared—all of it fills the void of my solitude. Six. Seven. Does she think about me? Eight. Nine. Or has she written me off as just another stupid mistake?

I flip over to do some sit-ups, the floor's chill barely registers on my back. With each crunch, memories of Sophie come back to me. The little things, like her sipping coffee, lost in thought, or the vibrant energy when she showed up for work. As I lean back, the reality of my surroundings pushes back, reminding me of the fucking concrete walls between us.

I crunch again. Is she out there, moving on with her life? She deserves happiness, even if it sucks to think of her finding it with someone else.

The noise from the other cells gets louder—shouts, taunts, the usual crap from guys trying to get a rise out of anyone. Some days, it's damn near impossible to ignore it all. But a solid workout and memories of Sophie keeps my head on straight.

So that's what I do. Every damn day.

Get my muscles sore enough just to feel something, anything other than the numbness of this place.

Then, late one night, while I'm doing lunges, I overhear something—murmurs of revenge, whispers about my MC, Reckless Souls. I scoot closer to the vent and press my ear against the metal, straining to hear the quiet conversation.

There's gotta be three—maybe four—dudes talking in Spanglish, but the words I understand, I don't like.

Reckless Souls. Biker assholes.

I don't recognize the voices, but I need to get the fuck out of solitary so I can let Ace know the criminals in solitary are talking about us. Could be trouble. Whatever happens to me,

I've made my own choices, but my job is to protect my brothers from all enemies.

Finally, after about twenty days, the cell door opens all the way, and I'm out, greeted by Officer Davis. "Your lawyer's got a big mouth. Boss ain't happy."

"Good." I don't give a shit if anyone in the whole damn complex is ever happy again. "She's just doing her job, same as you, man. Right?"

"Yeah, sure, we're all doin' our jobs, but some of us do 'em a bit more quietly."

I turn away from the door so he can slap the cuffs on me, rolling my eyes because, yeah, he's just doing his job, but it's a fucked up job that I'm pretty sure violates a few laws.

"Quiet don't always get the job done, though. Am I right?"

"That's for fucking sure," he says and nods for me to move forward. "Good thing, too. Who knows how long you might've been up here."

He leads me to the stairwell and the land of the living, but instead of heading for the community pods, he guides me down the hall toward the meeting rooms and knocks on one of the doors before opening it.

Noelle jumps to her feet. Her cleavage spilling out of the top of a skin-tight blouse as she gets in the guard's face. "Remove the cuffs. Right. Now."

"The cuffs stay on, ma'am."

"The fuck they do," she shouts. "Take them off now unless you want to be named personally in the lawsuit, Officer," she checks his name badge. "Davis." Her gaze narrows to slits, and she folds her arms, fury radiating off her curves like a fucking cartoon character.

"Suit yourself," he growls, unlocking the cuffs and leaving me and Noelle alone.

"Are you all right?" Her chest is still heaving from the anger unleashed on the guard, but her tone is soft, and, if I'm not mistaken, genuinely concerned.

“I’m good. Glad to be outta there, though, so thank you.” I shake my head and drop down into the metal chair, outlining the details of the fight that landed me in the hole. “He started it, but I had to fight back.”

“Of course,” she says. “That doesn’t explain why the fuck you were in there for twenty goddamn days. First offense is twenty-four hours. Period. I’ve already started the lawsuit paperwork. I just had to make sure you were still alive first.”

“Noelle, I gotta tell you, it’s nice to have someone in my corner who can fight on a level playing field, but lawsuits and payouts aren’t at the top of my list.”

“No, this is serious, Tank. You have any idea how many people die in solitary each year? How many times inmates are forgotten about for months, sometimes years on end? It’s not right.”

“Yeah, I get it. You do you, but right now, I need you to get a message to Ace. Immediately.”

She stops her tirade and stares at me, dark brows pulling into a frown. “Why?”

“It’s MC business, nothing illegal.”

“Sure. but I’m not sure anything is as important as what’s happening in his life right now.” My heart stops at her words, but Noelle is unaware and keeps talking. “Ace’s wife is in the hospital. She’s having the baby.”

“No shit?”

A small smile touches her lips. “No shit. I called to see if he wanted to come up with me, and that’s when I got the news.”

I’m happy for Ace and Kenna. Another new life in the family is a good thing. “That’s fucking awesome but trust me when I say he’ll want to hear what I have to say. If you can’t get straight to him, get the message to Dix.”

She nods slowly. “If I promise to do this, will you give me your attention for the next five minutes?”

“Yep.”

“Okay.” She slides me a piece of paper, and I scribble the note while she waits patiently, accepting the paper and folding it before slipping it into her bra. “Okay, now listen. I have evidence to get you out of here. No trial and no verdict.”

“You do?” The skepticism in my voice is heavy because that’s the exact news I want to hear.

“Yeah, Thomas. I do.” She arches her brows as if daring me to contradict her. “I told you before, I don’t lose. I don’t like to lose, which is why I’m your lawyer.”

I respect her confidence, so I don’t tell her that Ace hired her, not me.

“We both know you didn’t kill anyone. It’s the prosecutor’s job to prove you did it. They can’t. We have video of the whole fight, not just the snippet on YouTube. It’ll get you out of here as soon as we see the judge. Trust me.”

I do trust her, but while she’s going on and on about the evidence, all I can think about is the threat to my MC. Who is this threat coming from, a new enemy or an old one?

That motherfucker I busted up? Can’t be.

Noelle keeps talking, and it brings me back to the present. “I have my own investigators and forensics going over the evidence, so I’ll be in touch. Reach out if you need me, yeah?”

I nod, not hearing half of what she said. I step back against the wall so Noelle can alert the guard that she’s ready to go. I know the drill and stay where I am as Noelle steps out of the room and one guard takes her back toward the exit for visitors. Another guard motions for me to step forward and I do, turning so he can cuff me again and what I see when I turn stops me in my tracks.

Sophie.

She has tears in her eyes as she pleads with the woman behind the thick glass who has not one fucking iota of sympathy for any of the people on either side of these walls. The woman shakes her head. She’s telling her no.

Sophie looks surprised, and now she's nodding and scribbling a note and hands it to the woman.

Sophie's shoulders sink as she walks away from the window, offering up an apologetic smile to those in line behind her. Despite her smile, I catch the shine on a tear that slips down her cheek before she pushes out into the sunshine.

Good. It's for the best. It doesn't matter if Noelle thinks I'll be out soon. She can't guarantee that, and I refuse to believe it until my feet hit the asphalt outside these walls.

I refuse to put Sophie in danger for my own selfish needs, and the best fucking thing I can do for myself is stop wishing for a woman like her and keep my dick to the club whores. They're guaranteed and easy.

And most of all, they don't make a man wish for things he can't have.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SOPHIE

I'm in jail. The lawyer says it could be a while. I know things were getting good between us, and I can't stop thinking about you. But you need to move on. You deserve better than what I can give you right now—maybe ever. You matter to me. A lot.

That's why I'm writing this.

Take care of yourself, Sophie.

Yours truly,

Tank

How often can a woman read and re-read a letter before it becomes torture? I don't have an answer—yet—but it's not twenty. Or thirty. That's how many times my eyes glide over Tank's words, replaying them and trying to make sense of them. I mean, the words themselves were clear as day. Forget about me. Whatever we could have been, might have been, is in the past.

It's good advice.

The smart thing to do.

It's exactly what I *should* be doing.

Yet here I am, re-reading this note like some lovesick teenager, which I guess I am in a way. Or maybe I'm just a fool.

Another attempt to see Tank backfired tremendously. Not only has he not added me to the visitor's list, but there was a woman there to see him. A very busty, beautiful woman, I

might add. I saw them leaving a private conference room together while I practically begged the policewoman to let me see him.

I can get over the beauty, maybe, but what kills me is that she knows what's going on in Tank's life right now.

And I don't.

Who is she anyway?

Is she his wife or a girlfriend? And if so, does that make me the other woman? Is he just like all the other men, a fucking lying piece of shit?

And then comes the one thought that hasn't left my mind since Hannah told me about the arrest: why didn't he tell me his real name? Was he hiding it from me?

Of everything we shared about our lives, our families and hobbies, he never told me his real name, the one on his driver's license and birth certificate. The one on his dog tags.

If he can keep that from me, then there's a lot of other shit he could be keeping from me. Like a wife. Two-point-five kids. A house with a white picket fence.

"Well, fuck," I half-laugh, half-shout to myself. Here I am, thinking I'm being progressive and open-minded because I don't care that Tank is a biker or an ex-con when the truth is that he's just a lying fucking cheater like all the rest.

I bawl my eyes out, a big ol' ugly cry that I'm happy no one is around to see, not even Josie. She'd give me so much shit for crying over a man that she'd mock me and tell me, 'I told you so'. But I let it all out, crying so hard that my shoulders shake and my chest heaves under the force of the grief.

It should feel cathartic, crying over something I lost, something I never actually had in the first place, but it doesn't feel healing at all.

I feel stupid, used, and sad.

I feel angry.

Pissed off.

And then I feel sick to my stomach. So sick that I toss the letter aside, practically leaping over the coffee table as I rush to the bathroom. Sinking to my knees, I hug the bowl and empty out the oatmeal and blueberries I ate for breakfast and then some. It goes on and on until there's nothing left but bile, and then I frown.

The same thing happened yesterday, but I didn't eat breakfast yesterday.

The day before that, I was sick as soon as I opened my eyes.

The same thing happened the day before and the day before that.

"Shit. Oh no," I murmur to myself as panic sets in. "Don't freak out yet, Soph. Let's diagnose first."

I suck in a deep breath and let it out slowly, but I nearly puke again from the smell in the bowl. I push up to my feet, flush the toilet and rinse my mouth and face, taking a long, hard look at my reflection. Pale with hollow cheeks, a sure sign of weight loss, which isn't completely abnormal since I'm heartbroken and unemployed.

But the nausea and the dizziness could be anything until you add exhaustion for no apparent reason and tender breasts. I hate that I'm even thinking of what I'm thinking, but I'm an adult and a medical professional, which means I can't ignore reality forever. *Just a little while longer*, I tell myself as I head back to the living room, where my phone is with my period tracker app.

"Well, shit." It's not definitive proof, but the likelihood is greater than I'd like, considering I'm a side piece. A homewrecker.

I switch over to the message app and send one to Josie. "*Forget the wine when you come over. Bring extra cake and two pregnancy tests. Will tell you everything when you get here.*"

I drop the phone and step back, knowing Josie'll have about a million questions even though I promised to tell her everything when she gets here later.

I fold Tank's letter and freeze. Part of me wants to toss it in the trash, but something stops me. I don't want to think about what that *something* is, so I tuck it back in my purse and hang it up on the hook by the door, and since I can't cleanse my soul or my heart, I might as well clean my house.

It's pretty tidy, so it takes about an hour, which gives me enough time before Josie arrives to shower and change into hot pink leggings with a pale pink tank that's lightweight and airy.

The front door opens a little after six in the evening and my best friend is here, staring at me with an expression of shock written on her face. "You're a nurse," she says in an accusing tone. "A nurse. A grown woman. And you're on the pill, aren't you?"

I smile and nod. "All true. What's your point?"

"My point?" Her voice grows louder. "My point!"

I roll my eyes and point at my best friend. "You're doing that repeating thing you do when your system starts to malfunction."

"You're making my whole fucking brain malfunction, Soph. Pregnancy tests? Seriously? Please tell me you had a really fucking hot one-night stand with someone recently and kept it to yourself. *Please.*"

"I had a really fucking hot one-night stand with someone recently and kept it to myself."

It's not exactly a lie but her expression says *don't fuck with me*. "Okay, fine. After our last night out, I called Tank. He came over and we got it on. Everywhere."

Josie sighs and flings the drugstore bag in my direction. "Have you people never heard of birth control?"

"I'm on the pill," I insist defensively. "I don't think I'm pregnant, but something is going on, and my period app says I'm late."

"What the fuck? Pills don't work anymore? And condoms are completely unnecessary? I mean, all diseases have been wiped

off the face of the earth, so that makes sense. And then there's the fact that this man has been in jail for years."

"Save the sarcasm, Josie. I'm not in the mood."

"Yeah, well, guess what? Kids don't give a fuck what kind of mood you're in, not even when you're a single mother. What the hell were you thinking, Sophie?"

I sigh because I know if the shoe was on the other foot, I'd be asking her the same questions. "Honestly, I wasn't thinking. Tank makes me lose my mind when I'm with him. One minute we're laughing and talking, and the next we're naked and his big cock is pounding into me."

Josie heads toward the kitchen, shaking her head and rolling her eyes at me. "You're so damn lucky that I love you because seriously, I just want to shake the shit out of you right now."

"I know, and I appreciate that you're only yelling at me." I decide not to tell her about the gorgeous woman at the jail visiting Tank, mostly because I haven't told her I've been trying to see him since Nova gave me his real name.

"Oh, don't think I'm done yelling at you." She nods at the bag in my hand. "Go piss on the sticks, all of them, and then we'll go from there."

I nod as I walk away on shaky legs, choosing the front half-bathroom to find out the truth. With two full bottles of water in me, it takes no time at all to soak each stick and line them up on the counter. Like a firing squad.

"Knock, knock," Josie says as she pounds on the door.

I yank it open with a frown. "I haven't even set the timer yet."

"Okay," she shrugs, leaning against the door. "And then we need to talk."

Her serious expression puts me on edge, but I tap the timer on my phone and look up at my best friend. "We are talking."

"No, honey. We need to have a serious conversation." She's holding up her phone. "I went back to the messages and that night we went out was months ago, Sophie. Months!"

I nod my head, my voice catching a little. “Yeah, life’s been a whirlwind. Tank’s drama, his arrest, work going to hell, and then bam, jobless. My head’s been... elsewhere.” I try to laugh it off, but it’s a half-hearted attempt. “Big mistake, I get it. Can’t turn back time, can I?” I side-eye the pregnancy tests, those damn things, perched on the countertop like they’re crowning me queen of bad decisions.

“It’s just not like you... to be so out of control,” she says, more in surprise than judgment.

“I know, I get it,” I echo, the familiar ache of disappointment in myself flaring up. I was always the reliable one. “Maybe part of me wanted to see what being... not that... felt like.”

The timer goes off, slicing through our little bubble of denial. Josie doesn’t skip a beat, doesn’t even glance at the counter. “So, what, were you auditioning for the role of a lifetime? Single mom?”

I can’t help but roll my eyes, even though her words hit like a gut punch when I look down at the tests. Positive. A bold plus. Double lines. It’s like every synonym for *pregnant* is on display right there. “Shit, Josie, I can’t be... not like this, not now. I’m on the pill for crying out loud.” I feel the tears welling up, a mix of anger, fear, and about a million other things.

Her expression softens just a tad. “Expired pills or just bad luck?”

“I don’t know. I just...” I let out a defeated sigh. “I’ve got to get it confirmed by a doctor, right? This is just so messed up.”

“And the guy’s in jail,” Josie says, like she’s reminding me of an appointment I forgot, not the fact that my baby’s dad is locked up.

She’s not wrong, and it stings. “A single mom,” I mumble. It feels like admitting I’m about to climb Everest in flip-flops.

“You’re stubborn, I’ll give you that,” she says, her tone softer now. “But you know this means cutting ties with that biker crowd for good.”

“I’ve cut some ties. They shut down the clinic, didn’t they?” My mind goes to Nova and his promises. “Nova said the club would take care of me until things settle down.”

Her skepticism practically radiates off her. “Take care of you how? A few bucks here and there, or are we talking *bury you in the desert* kind of *take care of you*?”

I frown at her. “Josie, don’t.”

“I’m dead serious.” There’s an edge to her voice now. “These guys, they live by their own rules. And Nova... did he even give you the details on this so-called support?”

I bite my lip, feeling suddenly defensive. “No, he didn’t, but that’s because he’s got his own stuff going on.”

“And what if he forgets, doesn’t tell the others to look out for you?”

“He won’t forget,” I say, but it sounds more like a wish than a fact.

Josie shrugs, her eyes tired. “You think you know them, Soph. Just be sure you’re putting yourself and that baby first, okay?”

“I will. I promise.”

“Okay.” She pulls me in for a hug and a loud smacking kiss on my cheek. “There’s takeout in the paper bag, mushroom risotto, and groceries in the cloth bag. Call if you need anything else.”

“I will, thanks. Love you, Josie Bug.”

She smiles, pulling me into another tight hug. “Love you back, Sophie Bear. I’m here for you, whatever you need.” Her gaze briefly drops to her phone, and she sighs. “I hate to bail on you after such big news, but I still have to pack for a business trip tomorrow. I’ll be gone for two days but call me if you need anything. Anything.”

“I will,” I promise, my emotions a whirlwind. “I’m still trying to process.”

“I get it,” she says as she heads toward the door. “Love you, girl.”

“Love you back,” I reply, closing the door behind her.

Josie is my ride-or-die, my true blue, the best damn friend I’ve ever had. I know she’ll support me in every way she can.

Alone with my thoughts, my future crashes in like a tidal wave. I’m going to have a baby. With a criminal bad boy. My dad’s going to lose it. Hell, the entire family will.

But there are other factors to consider, like my job. However, the club plans to *take care of me*—great, now I sound like Josie—it’s not a long-term solution. I need to tell Tank, but who knows when or if he’ll ever be a free man again. And even if he is, I’m sure the big, busty woman *allowed* to visit him in lockup might have something to say about him spending their hard-earned money on someone else’s baby.

And that’s assuming he even wants anything to do with me or his baby.

“Fuck,” I mutter aloud as I unpack the risotto. The word hangs in the kitchen like a dark cloud refusing to dissipate.

A baby. I don’t know if I should celebrate, cry, or jump off the roof. A baby is an enormous responsibility. What if Tank tells me to go away once he finds out? What will I do then? I’ll have to arrange daycare and babyproof the apartment. Damn it, daycare costs a small fortune.

But then again, what if he’s excited and happy? Do I even want that? Screw it. I don’t even know what I want anymore. If he’s married, I don’t want anything to do with him. But I have to tell him.

Should I tell him now or wait until the doctor confirms it? I’ll need to schedule an appointment. I take a bite of the risotto, but it tastes like cardboard. My favorite takeout, and I can’t even eat it.

The silver lining to my anger at Tank and the news of my pregnancy is that I forget about his jailhouse letter for the rest of the night. There are more pressing matters to think about. But there’s one thing I can’t put off for too long.

Telling Tank.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TANK

Another goddamn day in this hellhole. All I can do is lie here on my cot, staring at the wall, thinking about Sophie. Her smile, her laugh, the way she feels in my arms. I know it's stupid to be so hung up on her, but I can't help it. She's something special.

Part of me wishes I could just let her go, stop obsessing over what could have been. But I know if I ever get out of here, the first thing I'll do is look her up. I don't care if she's moved on or wants nothing to do with me, I have to see her again.

Something interrupts my daydreaming. I hear footsteps, and a shadow crosses over me. I look up to see some ugly mug standing over my bunk, staring at me like he wants to start something.

I jump up and get right in his face, staring him down. "You got a problem?" I ask, ready to throw down if he makes a move.

Something resembling a smile crosses his face, and he shakes his head. "Me? Nope, no problem at all. But you are gonna be drowning in problems. Real soon."

I watch him closely as he walks away, fighting the urge to go after him and ask for clarification on his not-so-thinly-veiled threat before I beat the fuck out of him. I watch him walk across the rec area and up the second set of stairs leading to the cellblock directly across from mine.

He slips into a multi-person cell. That tells me he's here waiting for judgment, or he's only serving two years in lockup.

He shakes hands with a guy I don't know or recognize. Must be new. So, I reach out to one of my bunkmates.

"Hey, man?"

The kid looks up from his comic book. "What's up?"

I nod across the way. "Do you know that ugly motherfucker who just walked into cell D?"

It's never a good idea to ID your enemies, even to the man who sleeps in the same room with you. You never know where anyone's loyalties lie, so I keep my questions vague.

The guy looks like he's in his twenties, early thirties, but with enough prison tats that I know he's not new to the system.

He says, "They're Latin Mafia, one of the biggest gangs in Central California and here in lockup. Looking to get a toe into Southern California, too. I've been here about a year, and when I first landed, there were about twenty of 'em. Now? More than a hundred."

I listen as he talks, absorbing the information and trying to make sense of it while I watch the two men interact. They smile, shake hands, and keep their heads close while exchanging information. Whoever they are, they're close. More than gang members, which I find interesting.

"Thanks, man."

"Anytime. Can't imagine they're too thrilled with the way you fucked up Manny."

My brow shoots up. "Is that his name? Don't know the asshole from Adam."

He shrugs. "In the real world, that might matter. In here, it only puts a target on your back. Good luck."

"Yeah, thanks," I grumble, keeping my eyes on those two. They're talking about me. I can just feel it, but they're trying really hard not to look over here, almost like they can feel my gaze on them.

"Rutherford!"

Instinct kicks in, and I stand tall when I hear my name, turning to see one of the corrections officers coming my way.

“What’s up?” I turn and fold my arms, a protective gesture that does nothing to soothe my nerves.

He sighs, scraping a hand down his face as if he doesn’t want to say whatever he tracked me down to say.

“Just wanted to let you know that nothing’s definitive yet, but you’re probably gonna catch charges for that fight with Olivera.”

“Manny Olivera?” I ask.

“Yeah. You know him?”

I shake my head. “He bumped into me right before lunch, but otherwise, never saw him.”

“Yeah, well, prepare yourself because it can go either way.” He shakes his head. “Tell your lawyer to check the mess hall tapes.”

I nod, and without another word, the officer walks away while my hands ball into angry fists. Any sign of weakness can and will be used against me, so I sit on my bunk and shift gears, thinking about Sophie.

Yet, it’s pointless to think about her when I might be facing additional charges.

Noelle might pull some lawyer magic to clear me for that kid, but this fight? That’s on me. System forced my hand, and I played right into it.

“One other thing, Rutherford.” The same C.O., his nametag reads Johnston, walks back and slips a tiny square of paper in my hand. “This came for you a couple days ago.” With a curt nod, he’s off again, returning to the booth that lets him oversee the entire block.

I wait until he’s out of sight before sitting up and unfolding the slip of paper. It’s Sophie’s neat, slightly slanted cursive writing. “*I need to see you, Tank. Please put me on the list. Please.*” At the bottom of the note is her phone number as if I could ever forget it.

Every part of me wants to see her, but I know it's a shit move. I've got to guard myself, especially here. Thinking with the wrong head will only make me a bigger target.

Still, as the lights dim and the cell block settles, a tempting thought crosses my mind...one more time couldn't hurt, could it?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SOPHIE

“Tell me you’re not doing this, Soph.” The skepticism in Josie’s voice is so damn thick I can practically reach out and touch it. “You are not thinking like the clear-headed woman I know you to be.”

She’s right. “What the hell else do you want me to do, Josie? He can’t call. Not sure if he can send me another letter, and I’m sitting around my apartment like a desperate groupie, hoping that *a boy I like* is gonna call me!”

I’m so wound up that I’m shouting at the phone inside my car as I pull out of my reserved parking spot and onto the street. “What else would you have me do?”

“Say fuck him and all the rest of them? You don’t need him, Soph. You have a big ass support system.”

I sigh, shaking my head and slowing down for the upcoming red light. “I know that, and if I have to do this on my own, then I will, but Tank deserves to know.”

Josie scoffs. “He knows he fucked you, Soph, and you haven’t heard one fucking peep from the guy. That says everything about how he feels about you.”

“Ouch.” My left hand goes to my heart at her harsh—but not entirely untrue—words. “Look, Josie, you’re probably right. Is that what you want to hear?”

“No, I want you to stop the car and go back home.”

“I can’t do that.” I let out the sigh I’ve been holding in and merge onto the freeway. “I can’t just decide for him and then hate on him for not being involved.”

Yeah, okay, I still think Tank is a good guy despite the silence. Maybe I’m wrong, but today is the day I’ll find out.

“You sure about this?”

Hell, no. “Yeah, Josie. I’m sure.”

“Fine. Call me later. Got a meeting. Good luck.”

I end the call with another heavy sigh and risk a quick glance in the mirror. I took care of my appearance today with natural makeup because I don’t want him to see any traces of my exhaustion. Or my tears. I’m wearing my armor in the form of black slacks and a bright red blouse with matching glasses, and my comfy red pumps because my feet are swollen. I look much better than I feel, which is all I can hope for today.

I’m nervous as hell as I drive to the county jail because Tank doesn’t know I’m coming, and he could—and might—turn me away. He might reject me straight to my face this time or through one of the county employees.

“It’s a risk I have to take,” I tell myself. But then I spot a dark blue car with four doors that looks terrifyingly familiar.

It’s not the same car. It can’t be. That’s what I tell myself because anything else is too scary to think about. Besides, there are millions of dark blue cars on the road in California, and it could be anyone on their way to the mall or a dinner party. Anything.

I slow down and merge into the right lane. The blue car does the same.

I take the next exit, and the car is three cars behind me but also exits.

“Shit.”

I hit the gas when the light turns green and jump back on the freeway, keeping at least one car between us until I arrive at the exit for the jail.

At the first light, the blue car slips right behind me, following until I turn into the parking lot of the county jail. Finally, I release the breath I've been holding when the car sails by slowly, though I'm still convinced it's the same car that tried to run me off the road.

I turn off the engine and step out, squaring my shoulders and breathing deeply as I prepare to see Tank. Hopefully.

Fingers crossed.

“Sophie Harmon to see Thomas Rutherford.” My stomach is full of butterflies, and I wait for the woman with the blank expression to tell me to get out and don't come back. When that doesn't happen, I scribble my name on a sticker and move toward a row of lockers where I have to store everything except a twenty dollar bill, which I put on a vending card in case Tank wants anything from the vending machines in the visiting room.

My heart races a mile a minute until the moment the first group is let into the visiting room, and I'm in the middle of the line.

First step complete.

I sit anxiously at the bolted-down table, fidgeting with my fingers as I glance around the dreary visiting room. The dull gray walls and fluorescent lights give an oppressive feel to the space crowded with inmates and their visitors.

A few more men in orange jumpsuits emerge from the locked door on the other side of the plexiglass barrier, lighting up when they spot their waiting loved ones.

My pulse, thudding in my ears until now, kicks up a notch when I see Tank's hulking, imposing frame fill the doorway as he steps through. His steely gaze scans the room until it lands on me. The hard edges of his face soften into a smile that makes my heart leap.

Damn. He's still handsome as hell, seemingly bigger than when I last saw him. He's big and beautiful, even though his face looks a little beat up.

He scans the room with those steely grey eyes until they land on me. Shock, then joy flash across his face. He strides over and says, “Sophie,” in that gravelly voice I’ve missed so much.

“Tank,” I whisper softly. “Or should I say Thomas?”

His smile blooms, and he drops down in the seat right next to me. “Call me anything you want, Soph.”

I want to smile, but I don’t. I need to know who the busty chick is. “Tell me the truth.”

He blinks in surprise, and then his brows furrow in confusion. “About what?”

“I saw her,” I explain as calmly as I can. “The gorgeous woman with the dark hair. Well-dressed and special enough that *she* was put on the visitor’s list.” My heart races, but I have to confront him with what I know before I lose my nerve.

Understanding lights up his steely gaze. “Ah, that’s just my lawyer, Noelle. She’s working night and day on my case, trying to get me outta this hellhole.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. “Your lawyer? You mean—”

He reaches for my hand. “Yes, Sophie. There’s no other woman in my life but you. You’re all I think about.”

“But that letter? You told me to go away. To get on with my life.”

“I know. I don’t want to stay away from you, Soph. I mean, I don’t know how long I’m gonna be in this place, but my lawyer, Noelle, says she has evidence that will get me out of here.”

My eyes go wide, and I smile so big it hurts. “Really? Are you sure?”

Tank snorts. “That’s what she says, but I got into a scuffle,” he points at his bruised face, “so I may be looking at charges for that, too.”

My stomach drops. “What kind of charges? Just fighting?”

“Yeah. I busted that guy up pretty good.”

“Is that why your face is all fucked up?”

He chuckles at me. “Yeah, but you should see his face.”

Tank’s thumb caresses my hand, and I know I have to get the courage to tell him about the baby, but I’m afraid of his response. “Tank. I have to tell you something.”

He frowns slightly in concern. “Sophie, if you want to tell me to go to hell, I’ll understand. I’m sure my being locked up wasn’t on your bingo card. Hell, it sure as hell wasn’t on mine.”

“No, Tank. It’s not that. I mean...I just, well shit, I’m just going to tell you.” I take a deep breath and blow it out slowly, steeling myself. Then, I meet his gaze head-on. “Tank, I’m pregnant. And I don’t ca—”

“—What? You’re pregnant?” His eyes light up like a Christmas tree and a huge smile crosses his face. “We’re havin’ a baby!” His shout of joy echoes through the room. Other inmates shout out congratulations and catcalls as Tank sweeps me up in a bear hug, my feet lifting off the floor as he swings me around.

“I’m gonna be a dad? Oh fuck! I’m gonna be a dad!”

“Settle down, Rutherford!” a guard roars from his post by the door. Tank gently sets me down, beaming with elation. Eyes shining, he takes my face in his big, rough hands.

“A kid...I can’t believe it. We’re startin’ a family, Soph,” he whispers gruffly, his eyes wet.

Happy tears fill my eyes, spilling down my cheeks. His ecstatic reaction means everything to me. I open my mouth to tell him as much when everything about his demeanor shifts.

He goes stiff, and the softness in his face hardens. “Soph, I hate to do this, but Ace just walked in. and I need to talk to him. I can only have one visitor at a time. You need to go. But, come back, baby. As soon as you can.”

I nod and wipe my nose with the back of my hand. “Okay, Tank. I will. Promise.” Then I kiss his cheek, not sure if it’s allowed. I turn away, feeling a little dejected.

Once outside the visiting room, I nod at Ace and go to the locker to get my purse. I turn and watch Tank fist bump his Prez with a feeling he's not going to tell Ace about the baby.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TANK

The last thing I want to do is to say goodbye to Sophie after she's just dropped a life-altering bomb on me. But I see Ace pacing in the background, and I can't leave my Prez waiting.

Ace approaches the table so fast, Sophie's scent still lingers. "What's up, brother?" he says, flashing a smile.

I extend my hand to him "Same shit, different day."

He nods, his gaze looking around before he settles that all-knowing look squarely on me. "Why was Nurse Sophie here?"

It's a good question, one I'd probably ask in his situation, too. But the truth is I just found out I'm going to be a dad, and I don't want to tell him yet. So I shove away all the emotions I'm feeling and put on my game face. I stretch my arms out and say, "People love me."

Then I motion for him to sit down as if I'm hosting a party. "What's up?"

Ace's brows knit into a frown, and he takes a seat. "You talked to Noelle about the video?"

I nod. "She's confident she can get me out of here, and I really want to believe her, but I'm not so sure." It would be different if I was new to the justice system, but I know how this works. "When the government wants you guilty, they'll do everything they can to make sure you're guilty."

Ace sighs, shaking his head. "Jesus, man. What the fuck are we even doing if you don't want to fight this shit?"

I shrug. “Didn’t say I didn’t want to fight it. Just said it’s a losing battle.”

Ace laughs. “You’re a fucking SEAL. Isn’t a losing battle where you shine?”

He has a point. “Damn right.”

“Then stop acting like a pussy and believe that shit. Noelle is damn good. She’s seen the evidence, and she’s convinced, so I’m convinced. Get your head out of your ass and *get* convinced too. Feel me?”

I nod, still absorbing my Prez’s certainty. The only shit I can be certain about in life is the shit I can control. But I took an oath to support and trust the MC, and if he believes in Noelle, then I do too.

“Yeah, yeah, I feel you. Did you get my message about the homies I heard talking in the hole?”

Ace’s smile disappears. “I got your message, yeah.” He leans forward, looking around to make sure no one is listening. “You figure out yet who the fuck it was talking shit?”

“No, but I’ve been thinking. They specifically talked about retaliation, so I figure it means it’s likely someone we fucked over, beat the fuck out of, or someone who’s just fucking jealous of how awesome we are.”

Ace scrunches his brows together as he does when he’s thinking. “That could still be a lot of fucking people. Ask around and keep your ear to the ground to see if you can gather more intel.”

His order is clear, and there’s nothing I can argue with, even if I am the kind of fucker who argues with a direct order.

“What?” he asks when he sees me hesitating.

I shrug. “Nothing.”

“Tank,” he growls. “What the fuck is up? You got that look on your face like you’re trying to squeeze out a shit.”

I sigh and shake my head. “Nothing I can’t handle,” I assure him. “Just that shit is getting hot in here, and if Noelle can get

me out of this fucking place, sooner would be better.”

“Yeah, I know, but the wheels of justice move slow as fuck. You know that better than most.”

I nod because, yeah, I know that. The government takes its sweet fucking time unless it’s one of their own on the chopping block. And there isn’t a damn thing I can do about that. “Yeah.”

“You’ve been here before, Tank. This ain’t shit, and you know it. Play nice until we get you the fuck out of here. You remember how to do that, don’t you?”

I smile, resisting the urge to flip him off. “Yeah, I remember.”

“Whatever it takes, brother.”

I repeat his words. “Whatever it takes.”

“You know, an old marine buddy of mine is runnin’ shit in here. At least, last I heard. Iron Reapers MC. I wanna say they’re up in Tig Heights. Not sure if Riot is still in here, but I know his MC has control of all the drugs coming into County. He’s good people. Find him.”

I stand up and look around the visiting room again before my gaze lands back on Ace.

“Whatever it takes,” I say again, bumping my fist against his, a silent agreement that I’ll sure as shit walk out of here as soon as Noelle does her lawyer trickery.

“Stay safe and keep your fuckin’ head on a swivel.”

“Always, brother.”

Ace walks out without waiting for a guard to escort him, and I smile at the way he doesn’t take any shit from anyone. No one tells him what to do, and he owns that shit, which provides me with a level of comfort I need right now.

In the past, I only had myself to worry about, but now, I can’t stop thinking about Sophie. She’s fucking pregnant with my kid, which only gives me another reason to make it out of here sooner rather than later, and in one goddamn piece. I’ll do

exactly as I told Ace—whatever it takes—to make it out of here for Sophie and my kid.

I can't wait to see her body fill out with my kid. Round belly and big tits, weird food cravings, and an insatiable sexual appetite for just one thing, my cock. Just thinking about it puts a smile on my face. When I step into the cell block, I take note of everyone, all the different factions.

Friend or foe.

Enemy or ally.

Once I find out who Riot is, I'll make my move.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SOPHIE

I pop the plastic container of mac and cheese into the microwave, my mouth watering as I watch the timer count down. It's been too long since I've enjoyed a proper meal. Not that microwave mac and cheese is proper, but it's what I'm craving right now.

Extra cheesy.

I finally got the answers I needed about Tank and that woman. Now I can relax and dig in.

The microwave dings, and I grab a fork. I hit the remote and curl up on the sofa. I take my first rich, creamy bite and nearly moan in satisfaction. It's absolute heaven after weeks of no appetite.

But just as I start to savor the comfort of my food, the newscaster's ominous tone grabs my attention. I freeze, cheese dangling from my lips as the news comes into focus.

"Breaking News Alert."

The image appears first, and it's total devastation. A building has been leveled, and as the camera pans around the area, I realize it's the clinic.

"No. Shit. Shit," I moan into my plate as I watch the bulletin.

"The Angel Harbor Medical Clinic, a place where the poor and underserved receive emergency and free healthcare, has fallen victim to a firebombing." The newscaster's voice is deep and somber, the feeling mirrored in my gut. *"Authorities*

don't yet have any leads as this story is still developing. Stay tuned for more details."

"What. The. Actual. Fuck." The question is for no one in particular since I'm alone, but my sentiment is genuine. My heart is beating like a racehorse, and I can't even swallow the mac and cheese growing cold in my mouth. I stumble to the trash, suddenly unable to swallow another bite. Sobs build in my chest as the reality sets in. The clinic is gone. My vision blurs, and I rush to the sofa to sit back down. Fuck.

Sucking in shallow breaths, I bend my head between my knees, willing myself not to pass out. Nova and Hannah—were they there when it happened? Bile rises in my throat as terrifying images flash through my mind. I don't even know what time the blast went off. They could be trapped, injured—or worse.

I clench my eyes shut, focusing on steadying my breathing. After a few agonizing minutes, oxygen finally reaches my brain and jumpstarts it back to life. I fumble for my phone with shaking hands.

"Please pick up, please," I beg as Hannah's phone rings straight to voicemail.

"Shit!" I hiss, immediately tapping Nova's name. It rings twice before disconnecting.

"No, no, no!" I cry out. I have to get over there, have to figure out what's happening. Grabbing my purse with trembling fingers, I race to the door. Fear and adrenaline pump through my veins with every step. Images of the destroyed clinic flash through my mind, the rubble and smoke clouding my thoughts.

Distracted driving has never been my vice—trust me, I've seen the results. So I take a deep breath and exhale, forcing my eyes on the road. I try to push away all my morbid thoughts, but after about a mile, I feel a gnawing unease.

I peek in my rearview mirror. There's that fucking car again, stalking my every move.

The window tint is really dark. So dark that the driver should worry about getting a ticket. Who is this freak? And why the

hell does he keep following me?

There's a car between us, which isn't all that alarming, except they systematically make sure that there is only ever one car between us. A Prius slips in front of the car, and it changes lanes, speeds up, and gets back in front of the Prius.

I refuse to spiral this time. I am not going to freak out because it's literally a black fucking car. It could be a random car, a chauffeured vehicle, a rideshare, or a new driver.

Hell, it could even be protection from the Reckless Souls. I won't entertain the idea that it's one of Tank's enemies simply because no one knows about me and Tank or the baby. No one but Josie, and she'd die before she'd spill my secrets.

But even as I tell myself those comforting lies, I think about the sedan that tried to run me off the road. I know I can be naïve, but I can't be stupid. I push the button on the car's Bluetooth to call Nova. His voicemail picks up, and I leave a message asking if he's all right and telling him that I'm on my way to the clinic and someone is following me. I focus on breathing deeply so I don't cause an accident.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

In.

Out.

Okay. Okay, Sophie. You're good. I can't go to the clinic, not now. I'm too damn distracted, and with this jerk following me, I'd probably be in the way.

At the next offramp, I act foolishly and cut across three lanes of traffic to exit the freeway before the idiot can follow me down the exit ramp.

Good. He's gone. After driving around a few blocks to make sure no one is following me, I head home. Once locked inside my apartment, I pull out my phone and text Josie. *Feeling tired AF. Gonna nap. Don't come over today. I'll text you later.*

I turn off my ringer because I know she'll call and demand an explanation, one that I can't give her right now—nor do I want

to.

The excitement or maybe the terror of the day takes its toll. Soon I'm drifting off to sleep on the sofa, dreams filled with images of Nova and Hannah a mangled, burned mess inside the clinic. It's horrible, and for some reason, I'm the one identifying the bodies, which makes me sick to my stomach.

I wake up out of breath, a light sheen of sweat covering my forehead as I reach for my phone. *I turned the ringer off.*

I cringe in hopes that Hannah and Nova have checked in to say they're all right. I have eight text messages and ten missed calls from Josie, of course, demanding answers. And then a text message from Hannah.

Have you seen the news? OMFG! Are you safe? Hello? Sophie! Despite the urgency in her message, I smile because she's all right. She's safe and likely far away from the clinic.

I send a quick text back. *Yes, I'm okay.*

There's nothing from Nova, though, and the worry clenching my belly intensifies. I pop off another text to Hannah.

Have you heard from Doc Bishop?

The sun has set, and though I'm fresh from a nap, I'm mentally exhausted and feeling alone and vulnerable, so I grab some seltzer water and go to my room where I plan to curl up in bed for the night.

Curiosity gets the better of me, and I risk a look outside my window. I don't know what I expect to find, but my heart pounds when I see the same black car sitting across the street.

I can't make out a face or even a gender or general description of the person behind the wheel, but I stare for a few minutes as if sheer will can give me his—or her—identity. *Who are you? What do you want?*

It can't be a biker because they would be on a bike, right? It's ridiculous logic, but it's all my terrified brain can come up with through the fear.

I leave the window and curl up in bed, watching TV without really seeing anything that's happening on screen because I

can't stop thinking about that stupid black car and the blue one from earlier today.

"Do something," I whisper to myself and jump from the bed, creeping into the living room, where I pull at one side of the blinds and snap a few photos of the car, along with an image of the rear license plate. I zoom in to make sure the plate is visible and then send Nova a message with the photos.

Do you have someone watching me?

An hour passes with no response and then another, and another.

It's way past midnight, and sleep is just not happening. I mean, how can I? There's someone parked outside my apartment. And I'm in here, pregnant, alone, and freaked the fuck out.

I've tried everything to distract myself. I binge-watch a sitcom on Netflix, hoping for something to lighten the mood. But every creak and noise makes me jump. I keep glancing at the clock, and I swear, it's like time is standing still.

I try not to think about the car outside. But it's hard. My mind races, wondering who's out there and why. The baby's kicking too, like he or she can sense my anxiety.

As the night drags on, I start to feel a weird mix of tired and wired. I'm exhausted but my mind won't shut off. And just when I think I might finally doze off, another noise snaps me back to reality.

As morning light starts peeking through the blinds, I wonder what's going to happen. Is this person outside going to make a move?

If he is, what's he going to do? Hell, what am I going to do?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TANK

There's a group of five guys near the main stairwell and another three around the west stairwell. Each of them has a tattoo with a scythe. Gotta be the Iron Reapers MC that Ace told me about. I don't know which one is Riot or if he's even still inside, but now that I know who they are, I can make my approach.

A gravelly voice sounds beside me. "You're showing an awful lot of interest in my men," he says, and I turn my head to take in the man.

He's shorter than me, but most men are, with short dark hair. Just beneath the overgrown buzzcut is his scythe tattoo, but the handle of the scythe is an 'I' with the blade arching over the 'R'. Iron Reapers. He sizes me up, trying to figure out why I'm scoping out his men.

"We gonna have a problem?" he adds.

"Don't know. Are we?"

His lips curl into a grin that says he's one crazy motherfucker, and somehow, I know he's Riot. "You looking to get high or get stuck?"

I smile at his threat. "I'm looking for Riot."

"You got 'em. Who's asking?" His gaze goes from alert to curious in a flash.

"Tank. Reckless Souls MC. My Prez, Ace, says you're the man to see while I'm in here."

His eyes round in surprise. “No shit. Ace is your Prez? How is that motherfucker?”

“Good,” I smile. “Runnin’ shit. Just had a kid.”

“No shit? Ace is a father. Holy shit.” Riot laughs and pushes off the wall, extending his hand to me.

I take it, and we give each other a firm shake. “Yep. Just had the baby since I’ve been locked up.” It’s still strange as fuck that we now have babies in the MC, and my baby—boy or girl—is next.

Riot looks at me, questions burning in his eyes. “Who you piss off since you got here?”

“Nobody,” I say with a smile. “Well, Manny Olivera tried to take my food, and a big fucker like me needs to eat. He might be pissed off at me, but I can handle that pussy.”

“That was you?” He shakes his head with what looks like a proud smile. “Shit, I’d have given anything to see that motherfucker get the shit kicked out of him.” He’s laughing as if he can see that shit in his mind. Like I said, crazy motherfucker. “What you in for?”

I sigh, giving myself time to think about what I want to say or rather, how to say it without airing club business. “For doing the best thing for my MC. Got into a fight, and a dude died.”

Riot nods. “I feel ya, brother. I’m halfway through eighteen months doing what’s best for my MC. It’s a motherfucker, ain’t it?”

I nod. “Not my first time inside, but this time I got a target on my back as a man without a home in here.”

I hate to admit that shit. Makes me feel like a weak-ass bitch, but I’m not too proud to admit when I need someone to have my six.

“Say no more, man. I owe Ace my life. He’s come through for me more times than I like to think about, so this is a favor I can happily repay. You think Olivera’s crew is planning to retaliate?” He nods toward a table with a few guys sitting around, and we walk over.

“Scram,” he says in a calm voice that’s just as scary as if he’d issued a threat, and they do.

“I don’t doubt they’re planning something,” I say as we pull out our chairs. “But that’s not even on my radar right now.”

That’s a goddamn lie. It’s on my radar because it has to be. Anytime I go to take a piss, grab my chow, or wash my ass, I could be jumped or shanked or worse.

“Bullshit,” Riot answers with a smile.

“Okay, it’s not my priority right now. When I was up in the hole, I heard some shit.” I sit across from him, both of us already in silent agreement to watch the other’s back, and I tell him what I overheard.

“Don’t know the voices, and they never identified themselves. Nothing but threats.”

He leans over and says quietly, “I can find out who was in solitary when you were to help narrow it down. I’ve got a few of the guards in my pocket.” He shakes his head and nods toward the group of three guys circling a fish—a new inmate. “Latin Mafia. Those motherfuckers love to target fish, and they love it more if he’s a member of a MC. Always their first target followed by gang newbies. All that matters to them is that you’re on your own. It’s how they grow their influence on the inside.”

“Pussy shit,” I murmur to myself.

“No doubt, but the MC guys grow their numbers, and beating up a brother ups their street cred on the inside.”

“Fuckin’ politics,” I grumble. This shit is so stupid, and I’d rather fight it out on the inside than do dumb shit that keeps me in here longer than I have to be. “Okay, so I need to watch out for the Latin Mafia in here. What’s their reach on the outside?”

Riot blows out a long breath and shakes his head. “Depends on the day or the week, honestly. They’re a gang for hire, willing to do the dirty work for pretty much anybody willing to pay. It’s a good way to make a buck but makes it hard as fuck to figure out if their beef is with you or if it’s a beef for hire.”

“Well, fuck.”

Riot laughs. “Right?”

“I might be looking at another charge after that fight with Olivera, so I’m not trying to stay in this fucking place any longer than it takes my lawyer to get me the hell out of here.”

I can plan a mission to take out a terrorist or rescue a diplomat on one hour of sleep and my team behind me, but this shit is out of my wheelhouse.

“You gotta be careful, man. But I got a plan forming.” He smiles as he taps his temple, “and I think it’ll work for both of us.”

I lean forward, a rapt audience. “I’m all fuckin’ ears, man.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SOPHIE

Instead of feeling rested and ready to do something productive, I'm frantic, exhausted, and so fucking on edge that I can barely see straight.

My building is full of ambient noises. Doors shutting, the low muffle of television shows, early morning news, all of it just the right amount of sound to make me feel not quite so alone.

I creep over to the window and peek outside. My shoulders sag in relief as I look up and down the block and find the black car gone.

"Finally," I groan and double-check the door locks before slipping into the shower.

The hot water does fuck all to wake me up or wash away my fear, but I'm clean, and that's a good first step. I pull out an outfit that doesn't make me feel fat and think about where I plan to go first. Instinct tells me to head to the clinic, but there's someplace else I can go for answers.

The Reckless Souls clubhouse.

Dressed in a pair of jeans that hug my curves and give me the confidence boost I need to ask for answers I'm not sure I have a right to know.

I pair it with a gauzy peach blouse and slap some makeup on my face so I don't look like I'm dead. Then I pull my hair into a ponytail for convenience, and I'm ready to go.

Because there's no still no sign of the black car, I feel good as I slip behind the wheel and make my way to the biker headquarters. Nova's world isn't my world, but he's been a friend for years, and I need to know what's going on. If I'm safe or in danger.

Stone is standing outside with another biker I haven't met, which is odd. "Hey, Stone. Is Ace around?"

"Yeah, he's inside. What's up?" he says, and I notice the other biker is standing there, stoic.

"Not much, just wondering what's happening. You know, with the clinic and all. Is Nova okay?" I ask, hoping to get some information.

Stone opens the door and lets me in. "Go on in, Nurse Sophie. Ace'll talk to you about it."

I nod and say, "Thanks, Stone. I appreciate it."

It's not even noon yet, but the clubhouse is bustling with activity. Women mill about with a purpose. Some are serving drinks, and others are sitting around talking quietly. There's a woman with blue hair and another pretty woman with a toddler next to the bitchy pregnant chick from before. Only she's not pregnant anymore.

It's all very...*homey*. More than I thought it would be.

"Sophie? How are you? What're you doing here?" Ace stops about two feet in front of me, his dark brows pulled into a confused frown.

I fix my gaze at the President of the MC. Sure, he's as tough as they come, but so is Dr. Nova, so Ace doesn't scare me at all. "I'm here because things are getting weird. And kind of scary. Where's Nova?"

I tell him about the blue car trying to run me off the road. "And then yesterday I was heading to the clinic when I saw the news, and I noticed a different car following me. I hauled ass back home, but you know what? That car sat there all night."

“Sophie,” he begins as if I’m some hysterical woman, and *that* pisses me off.

“Ask me how I know they were out there all night, Ace.”

His expression changes and now I can see the intimidating thing. “Sophie.”

“How do I know, you ask? Because I stayed up *all damn night* looking out the goddamn window! Sometime this morning they took off, and I’d like to know why. Who are they?”

Ace’s eyes lock onto mine with an intensity that would usually have me backing down. The old Sophie Harmon might have wilted under that stare, maybe even mumbled an apology for being too forward. But times have changed. It’s not just me I have to think about anymore, and this is some seriously scary shit. “Why were you at Men’s Central visiting Tank?”

I blink at his question coming out of left field. “Because I was,” I reply, a little too defiantly.

He lets out a frustrated sigh. “Why?”

“Why are people following me and watching my apartment all night?” My heart thumps so hard, it’s echoing in my ears. I want to lash out. To go off but that won’t get me anywhere. “Someone’s watching me. Someone also tried to run me off the road. Those two things have to be related, and since it’s never happened before, there are only a few reasons it could be happening now. And I want to know why.”

“Jealous boyfriend?” he offers with a shrug.

My nostrils flare, and I count backward from ten. “It’s not.” I pull out my phone, and Ace’s hand instinctively goes to his gun. “Jesus, Ace. I’m here for some answers. I’m not gonna hurt you.”

He lets out a long breath like he’s frustrated with me. Do I care? Hell no. I shove my phone in his face. “Do you know this car? Do you know who this is?” I watch him carefully as he takes in the vehicle and the plate, taking his time to consider before he answers my question.

“Doesn’t look familiar, and I can’t see a damn thing with that dark as fuck tint.”

“Same thing I said.” I realize this pissing match is getting me nowhere. Ace has answers, I know he does, but it’s all on a need-to-know basis, and I, apparently, don’t need to know.

“Look, I’m scared, and Nova told me the MC would take care of me.”

“We will. What do you need?”

Bullshit. “I need to know what the fuck is happening. People are following me. The clinic is destroyed. I don’t have a job, and I’m fucking pregnant! I can’t live like this.” I look around the clubhouse and see everyone, not even pretending like they’re not eavesdropping on our conversation. “Where’s Nova?”

“Nova got you pregnant?” His stupid questions are starting to piss me off. “He and Maggie are in Texas. Have been for a few days now.”

“No! Tank got me pregnant. That’s why I was there. Now can you just answer my questions?”

His expression darkens, and I take a step back even though a small rational part of my brain is screaming that he’s likely pissed off at Tank.

“Fuck. He was supposed to be watching Banger, not knockin’ you up.” His words come out on a low mumble, but we’re close enough that I hear every syllable.

I roll my eyes. “He kept an eye on Banger just fine. He’s alive and well now, isn’t he?” I refuse to be intimidated. “You see now why I need to know if I’m in danger? It’s not just me that I have to worry about anymore. I don’t know what the hell Tank’s plans are, but if his MC life is spilling over into mine, then I deserve to know.”

“You *deserve* to know?” Dix sidles up next to Ace, with a smirk on his face like I’m the enemy. “Deserve,” he snorts derisively.

“Yeah. I *deserve* to know whether or not my life is in danger because of your stupid bike club. I’m not asking for details, dammit. I need to know if you or just Tank has a problem with someone that’s impacting my life. It’s clear I’m not privy to the details of MC business, and honestly, I don’t want to know anything more than I already do. I just want to know if someone is out to get me in order to get to Tank.”

“Tank?” Dix shouts his name so loud I wince. “No shit. You and Tank?”

I ignore the shock on his face and turn my focus back to Ace. “You’re not going to tell me anything?” I ask, my eyes narrow to slits.

“Sophie. I can’t tell you anything, because, as of right now, I don’t know anything. I appreciate everything you’ve done for us over the past few years. Seriously. If you feel like you’re in danger, you are more than welcome to stay here. ”

Stay here? I shake my head because that’s not a real option. “I can’t.”

He shrugs. “Then I can’t help you. With the shit at the clinic, losing Nova and Tank, I have a lot to deal with right now.”

I’m angry. No, fuck that, I’m furious, and I just want to cry because I’m that chick, the one who gets so angry she cries.

“Fine. Don’t help me, then. Whatever. I’m out of here.” I hitch my purse up on my shoulder and look around the clubhouse one last time. Tank loves this place. He speaks so fondly about it and the people inside, but I don’t get it.

I just do not fucking get it.

I stomp to my car and yank open the door, dropping behind the wheel and letting the tears flow for a few minutes until I can safely drive. A knock sounds on the window, and it’s Shades. I lower the window and ask, “What?”

He slips an envelope inside the car, and it lands on my lap. “To help you get through the next few months. We really do appreciate what you’ve done, Sophie.”

I want to believe him, but I don't. I take the hush money because they owe it to me. "Thanks."

I start the engine with a grunt as Shades saunters back inside the clubhouse. I take off with the fury that only an emotional, hormonal woman can possess.

I go left out of the parking lot instead of right, just to be sure that no cars of any color are following me. Just when safety settles in, a car approaches from the rear too fast, and I tap my brakes to alert them that traffic is slowing down, but it doesn't do any good. I quickly get over to the right lane and make the next right to avoid being rear-ended by the speeding asshole.

The car makes the same turn and starts the dance all over again, barreling forward and advancing on me with purpose. My heart beats so hard I can hear it in my ears. The car slowly rolls up beside me. A man with tan skin and dark eyes sits in the passenger seat with an evil smile on his face, fingers pointing at me like a gun, which he clicks twice in a shooting motion before the car peels away. I pull over to the side of the street and just sit there, staring in shock.

Did that really just happen?

It did just happen, and I have no fucking clue why it happened. Ace refuses to tell me anything, and I'm scared shitless, and now I can't even go to Josie or my mom because I want them safe.

"Shit, I can't even go home."

Where can I go?

The police, duh.

The police. Yes. Sheriff Doherty.

I sit there until my hands stop shaking, and then I make the call. "Sheriff Doherty, please."

"Please hold." The woman doesn't wait for me to agree. She just puts me on hold with the relaxing music that's not at all relaxing. "May I ask who's calling?"

I roll my eyes. "Sophie Harmon. I'm a citizen of Angel Harbor. It's important, vitally so." The woman puts me on hold

again, and I let out a small scream.

“Ms. Harmon, how may I help you?” The Sheriff’s grizzled voice should relax me but it doesn’t. The sound of his voice has me rethinking this plan to talk to law enforcement. I’ve worked along the MC long enough to know that this isn’t the right way. “Ms. Harmon?”

“Sorry, yes, I’m here.” I suck in a deep breath and launch into today’s threat. “No, I don’t know who it is. Just like I don’t know who was following me last night and sat outside my apartment all night, or who was driving the blue car that tried to run me off the freeway.” My words rush out, and by the time I finish, I’m breathless.

“Okay.” His voice is calm and even because of course, it is. He’s been doing this for a long time. “Do you have any enemies?”

“I’m sure I do, but none I know of who might do something like this.” I pause, still hesitating because I think this is a bad call. But then I remember Ace, refusing to give me any information, and I admit to him about my *something* with Tank.

“I know he’s locked up, but that’s the only thing I can think of, then again, no one knew about us until today when I told Ace.”

“Ace?” He sounds a little too interested, but I push forward, a woman on a mission to stay alive. “Reckless Souls Ace?”

“Yes. I figured he would at least tell me if I was in some kind of danger, but he refused to tell me anything, and now I’m too scared to go home. Too scared to go to my mom or my best friend, so I’ve been sitting here on the side of the road for the past hour.”

Tears threaten, but I shake my head at them, as if telling them not to even think about showing up right now, the worst possible time.

“Do you have a description of any of the cars?”

“Nothing beyond what I’ve already told you. But I snapped a picture last night of the black car. I can send it to you.” He

rattles off an email address, and I type it into the bar and hit send. “Done.”

“I’ll look into this,” he says, sounding even more exhausted than I feel. “And go home, Ms. Harmon. I’ll beef up patrol on your block tonight. Maybe we’ll learn something we don’t already know.”

“Thank you. I’m not sure what I’m going to do,” I admit in a moment of weakness.

“Stop hanging out with outlaw bikers, for starters, Ms. Harmon.”

I roll my eyes and thank him again before ending the call, my heart now banging around in my chest like a wild animal trying to break free. Doherty’s words give me pause, and now I really wish I hadn’t talked to him. The last thing I want is to get the Reckless Souls in trouble, but Ace gave me no choice. “I should have kept my mouth shut,” I tell my rearview mirror.

Probably, but Ace should’ve told me the truth.

Both things are true, and they both piss me off equally. I might have fucked up by going to the sheriff, but Ace left me no choice.

He has his entire motorcycle club to think about. I get that. I’ve worked alongside Nova long enough to know about their priorities. Tank’s in jail and thinking about his freedom, also understandable.

It’s all just so *fucking understandable*.

It’s time for me to do something I rarely do, something that doesn’t come naturally to me. It’s time—beyond time if you ask Josie—for me to start taking care of myself.

No matter what happens to Tank or the Reckless Souls.

CHAPTER TWENTY

TANK

I owe the Reapers big time for having my back, and today's the day for payback. The Latin Mafia's been a thorn in their side, messing with the Reapers' flow of goods.

They think they're kings of this castle, and this morning, their golden boy got a taste of concrete and dust for his trouble.

My heart's pounding a steady rhythm, not too fast, a controlled sort of anticipation. My hands ball up, then stretch, instinctively getting ready to throw down. It's not about looking cool—it's about being ready for the shitstorm that's about to hit.

Riot's looking at me, eyebrow cocked, a smirk on his lips. "You look like you're about to shit your pants, Tank. What up, big guy?" His voice is all taunts and teases. "Tough-as-nails Navy SEAL gettin' nervous?"

There's no room for bullshit. "Fuck you, man. I'm a'ight." The Latin Mafia are nothing but a bunch of punks in my book. Annoying but not intimidating. "Just plotting the play," I shoot back because this is more than muscle—it's about mind games. "You ready?"

Riot's smirk doesn't waver as he glances over at the vultures from the Latin Mafia, huddled and waiting. "Always. We let them start the dance. My boys are tough, but it's about being smart—take a punch, but make sure it's the only one."

I nod and crack my knuckles, relishing that calming sensation that works its way through my veins every time I get ready for

battle. I clock the four Latin Mafia members against the wall ahead of us, another two lingering on the stairs to our left and three more strategically scattered throughout the rec area. “Got it.”

My gaze bounces around the room, watching everyone carefully to see who’s got hate and murder in their eyes. Who’s wearing a battle-ready expression, and who has no idea what’s about to go down?

Malice, the leader’s right hand man, wears a smile as he pushes off the wall. His long-legged gait is deceptively relaxed, but he clenches his jaw tight enough to shatter his teeth. I inhale in and out through my nose, while my eyes spot several other members begin to converge.

“Ready,” I whisper to Riot. “Incoming.”

The next few, hell, I don’t know—minutes or hours—pass in slow motion at first. Malice stops in front of me with a smile before pulling his arm all the way back and swinging a wild hook that lands on my left jaw. “Bitch-ass motherfucker,” he growls, smiling when I take a step back just for show.

“Speaking of bitches, you hit like a bitch.” Without telegraphing my next move, my fist comes out of nowhere to land a blow right under his chin, sending his head snapping back beautifully.

Before he can recover, I live up to my name, barreling forward like a goddamn tank, landing blow after blow until he’s flat on his back and begging for mercy. I don’t believe in fucking mercy, and I keep going until his bones crack and blood coats my fists.

Riot’s voice pulls my attention from Malice. “Tank, a little help!” and I stand, saying fare-fucking-well with a kick to his ribs before I turn and find two Latin Mafia fuckers on my guy.

“I don’t fuckin’ think so,” I growl and hop over a table of cards discarded in the poker player’s desire to get the fuck out of harm’s way.

Coming up from behind, I land two body shots on Riot’s attacker that’s gonna make it real hard for this asshole to shit

right for the next few days. His knees buckle, but not before his swinging elbow lands on my temple. I step back and let him fall before my foot connects with his ribs, his back, and ultimately his chin. “Asshole.”

I see Riot and the other Iron Reapers can hold their own now, but it feels good, too goddamn good, to stop. I catch another Latin Mafia member with bleached blond hair coming my way, a look of determination written on his face as if he has something to prove.

Perfect.

I turn to face him full-on, watching to see what he does. I didn't have to worry because the dick makes a beeline for me, swinging wildly before he's close enough to land a blow. He hisses, “You're dead, motherfucker.”

I smile and step forward, leading with my fist, but the kid isn't the wimp he appears to be and dodges the shot easily. Too bad for him I'm not just a SEAL but also trained in multiple forms of combat. So, he doesn't expect the hit that comes from my left hand cracking against his cheek.

“Too slow.”

He staggers like a drunk, hand cupping his jaw, his frown screaming payback. “You and your bitch are dead,” he snarls.

“Bad move.” I spit out the words like spoiled milk. I serve him two left hooks, a right jab, and the floor greets him like an old friend. He's got guts, I'll hand him that, swinging wild, clipping me a few times. But the moment he brings Sophie into this—shit gets biblical.

There's a flip that switches inside me, and suddenly I'm the storm, the fury, the goddamn reckoning. My fists are hammers, and this kid's nothing but a nail. Uppercut after uppercut, my jabs are my confession, my cross the final amen. The room blurs crimson, and the thud of my fists on his face is the only thing I hear.

There are no rules of engagement between these walls, and I unleash the feral animal in me, sending elbows flying when his buddies try to come to his rescue. There is no fucking rescue

for this asshole, bringing my woman into this. A knee or maybe a fist hits me in the back, and I turn, standing to face the shot caller on the inside with the tattoo on the side of his face.

He glares at me like he hates me which is fucking weird since I don't know this piece of shit, but I'm still in fight mode, and I don't give it too much thought. "You're fucking with the wrong crew."

"You're fucking with the wrong man," I tell him and get in his face, but the fucker is too stupid to realize he's about to go down. He stares me down, and I lean back, jerking my head forward until our foreheads collide in a cracking blow that drops him to his knees before he collapses face-first onto the cement floor.

A whistle sounds in the distance, followed by a familiar, intrusive buzzing sound. It takes me a minute to realize what it is, but the minute I do, I'm face down on the floor, waiting for the guards to do their thing. They go around and survey the wreckage left by me and the Reapers, picking up those in need of the infirmary before ordering the rest of us to our bunks.

"You just can't stay the fuck out of trouble, can you?" the guard, Davis, whispers in my ear as he yanks me off the floor.

"I was protecting myself," I tell him, barely able to hide my smile. "I swear."

"Yeah, well, lucky for you, the system was down for a regular reboot, and no one can say otherwise." He shoves me into my cell and laughs. "Today is your lucky day."

I have a feeling that Riot or one of his brothers have something to do with the faulty system, but I don't ask. I drop back onto my bunk and grin. "When's lunch?"

"Gonna be late while we deal with the aftermath of the shitshow. Lockdown for the next twenty-four, which means meals in your pod." He closes the door and moves on to the next door, giving the same talk.

I can't help the smile that crosses my face. The high of battle makes my skin buzz, and I know the Latin Mafia will think

twice about fucking with me or the Iron Reapers for a good long while. Oh sure, if they're behind the threats to the MC, then this isn't close to over, but for now, it's one less thing I need to worry about.

"Dude, that was some sick shit. Are you like a UFC fighter or something?" My bunkmate bends over the top bunk with wide, excited eyes. "That combo you did was some straight pro shit!"

I smile because, yeah, I know it's impressive because I worked for years to make it that way. "I've had some training."

"No one's gonna fuck with you ever again. First Olivera and now Malice and Crow and Gringo."

I sit up. "Gringo the asshole with the bleached hair?"

"Yep. Looks like a fucking Backstreet Boy to me, but what do I know?" He laughs, shaking his head in pure amusement. "I saw him hit you first, you know if you need witnesses or some shit like that."

The offer surprises me, and I nod my approval.

"Much appreciated," I tell him in an even tone like it doesn't matter either way. "What are you in here for?"

It's a cliché question, but what the fuck else am I gonna do for the next twenty-four hours?

"Nothing, just a little bit of dealing. Fucking cop picked me up not long after I got my stash, so they're trying to get me on intent to distribute."

I let out a low whistle. "That's gonna be some hard time."

"Nah. The fucker asked me to hand over my drugs before he read me my rights. I'll be out at my next court date and in my girl's bed by lunchtime." He's shaking his head, clearly not his first time in lockup. "What about you, man? You got a girl counting down the days until you're free?"

His question immediately conjures up an image of Sophie, smiling and laughing.

“Yeah, I do,” I admit. “In fact, I’m gonna be a dad, which is why I need to get the fuck out of here. Soon.”

“Holy shit, a kid? I can’t even imagine.”

I know what he means. “I can’t either. I mean, I thought that was way off in the future, ya know? But now that it’s here, I’m excited. Scared shitless but also excited as fuck if that makes sense.”

“Your girl must be fine as fuck,” he says in reply.

“She’s gorgeous,” I admit without giving away anything else. “The kind of woman you’ll slay monsters for.”

“Damn,” he says with clear awe in his voice.

I’m not sure that he cares one way or the other, but he’s a rapt audience, and with the adrenaline of the fight slowly fading, my thoughts are full of Sophie and my freedom. I thought after telling me about the baby that she might reach out more and keep me up to date on how she’s feeling.

But I haven’t heard a peep from her. Hell, maybe I’ve already fucked up things between us beyond repair. As long as I’m here, it’s easy for her to dismiss me, to dismiss us, which means I need to get in contact with Noelle.

Noelle is full of big promises of bombshell evidence to get me out, but it’s been almost a week since I’ve heard from her, and I can’t deny my cynical nature is getting the better of me. I’ll face whatever happens, but it all has a new sense of urgency now that I have a kid on the way.

After a cold lunch and dinner, and then a shitty night of sleep some guard is at the door with a weird look on his face.

“What is it?” The bottom falls out of my stomach at the thought that I’ll have to do even more time for yesterday’s fight. How can I take care of Sophie and the baby from inside here? I’ll have to tell Ace what’s happened between us so the MC makes sure she’s protected.

“Your hot as fuck lawyer is here to see you.” He wiggles his brows. “I put you in a private room.”

“Funny.”

Noelle is a beautiful woman, and if I'd met her a few months earlier, I might've tapped that, but right now, my thoughts are filled with Sophie.

"Well, get the fuck up. Let's go." He claps his hands and motions for me to get moving.

In one smooth move, I'm off the bed and at the door, eager as fuck to hear some good news from Noelle's mouth. I need it.

"Any word on more charges?"

"Nothing yet, but believe me, you'll be the first to know."

"Yeah, thanks, man."

"You wanna thank me? Give your sexy lawyer my number."

I laugh as he opens the door, where I find Noelle waiting. "I don't have your number. But I'll put you on my list of character witnesses."

The guard rolls his eyes and backs out of the room, his gaze lingering on Noelle's cleavage bursting from her green blouse. "Sounds like a plan."

"Noelle," I grunt. "I am so fucking happy to see you. Tell me you have good news."

Her stoic expression blossoms into a proud smile. "I have good news."

"No shit?"

"No shit. What happened to your face?"

I put a hand to the bruise on my jaw. "A fight. Don't worry, I won." I flash a proud smile because, yeah, that fight still feels fucking good.

Noelle rolls her eyes. "Hope it's not going to impact all the hard work I've done for you." She sighs, shaking her head. "I got you an emergency hearing, and it starts in an hour."

She pushes away from the metal table with a nod and knocks on the door. "I have a suit for you, but there's nothing we can do about your face, unless you're willing to put on some make-up?"

“I’m not.”

She grins. “Didn’t think so. Get dressed, and I’ll prep you on everything I have.”

“Sounds good.” I dress quickly, feeling hopeful for the first time since I took the blame for Nova. Hopeful that this will all play out the way justice dictates. Hopeful that I’ll be standing close enough to Sophie to smell her sweet scent before the day is over.

Forty-five minutes later, I’m standing beside Noelle in my monkey suit as Judge Angus Chandler addresses me and the court.

“You’ve served your country with honor, Mr. Rutherford and that means something in my courtroom. The prosecutor wants me to consider your previous conviction when considering the incidences that occurred since your stay at the county jail, but the exculpatory evidence your attorney uncovered must not be overlooked.”

I swallow because it’s still unclear which way this is going to go, and the first trickle of sweat pops up along my hairline. I simply nod to let Judge Chandler know that he has my full attention.

“This kind of evidence is the cornerstone of our justice system. You are presumed innocent until the evidence has proven your guilt. In this instance, the evidence has proven your innocence, so the murder charges are dropped with prejudice.”

My shoulders sink in relief, and I nod, but I sense he’s not finished speaking.

“You need to learn to control your temper, Mr. Rutherford, but having a short fuse isn’t against the law. The incident with Mr. Olivera is a clear case of self-defense, and the prosecutor has dropped the pending charges against you. For the incident yesterday, there’s no evidence to say either way, so I’m giving you the benefit of the doubt. Mr. Rutherford, you are free to go, and please let this be the last time I see you in my court.”

“It is, Your Honor.” I never want to even see a fucking courthouse ever again.

“Good.” He bangs the gavel, and that’s it. The nightmare is over.

I turn to Noelle with a shaky smile and possibly a hint of shock. “You are a woman of your word, Noelle. Thank you for everything.”

Her response is a tight hug, and I’m reminded there’s still good in this world. “The paperwork’s just a formality at this point,” she whispers, handing me her card. “You’ve got my number if you need it.”

I pocket the card with a nod. “Appreciated,” I say as we make our exit, the heavy doors of the courthouse closing behind us.

Getting processed out is slow and bureaucratic, but eventually, I’m out. Olly’s waiting in the van, his face split with a huge grin. As we hit the road toward Angel Harbor, there’s only one thing on my mind.

Sophie.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SOPHIE

I spent the past few days in a whirlwind of emotions, veering between tearful outbursts, cleaning frenzies, and gripping fear. But now, finally, I'm starting to regain my footing. Well, as much as I can, given the circumstances.

I can't explain the mysterious cars that seem to follow me or the unnerving prank calls that began a few days ago. Since I have no control over those things, I'm focusing on what I can control—myself, my home, and my baby.

Speaking of the baby, I throw on a pair of comfy maternity shorts I got with the money Shades gave me and an old T-shirt. My hair goes up in a messy bun as I turn up the volume on some girl power anthems. Today, I'm tackling the guest room.

As I scrub and dust, my mind drifts to thoughts of my baby. Will it inherit my features or Tank's rugged charm? Will it have his striking gray eyes and my dark, wavy hair, or perhaps the opposite? In the grand scheme of things, it doesn't matter. I just want my baby to be happy and healthy.

But practical concerns tug me back to reality. Finances are a constant worry. The money from the Reckless Souls won't last forever. Hannah's been urging me to get a job at the hospital, and she's right. Raising a child without a steady income daunts me, in fact, lately, it keeps me awake at night.

Thankfully, my health insurance is still active. I can't help but feel a small, albeit grateful, shiver of relief.

Just as I lose myself in these thoughts, the phone rings. My heart lurches with a mixture of anticipation and dread. An unknown phone number stares back at me from the screen. I swallow hard and answer hesitantly, “Hello?”

Silence on the other end. No background noise, just an eerie void.

“Hello?” I bark again. My annoyance seeps into my voice, but there’s still no response. I don’t give the mystery caller another second of my time and end the call with a frustrated grunt. And then I block the number.

Asshole.

The thought of moving to a new place briefly crosses my mind, but reality quickly sets in. Without a job, that’s not a feasible option.

“Back to the nursery,” I mutter to myself, trying to regain my composure.

I strip the bedding and snap photos of the furniture. Maybe selling these items will bring in some much-needed cash.

That’s a depressing thought, but I can’t let my pride get in the way of taking care of my baby.

I interrupt my cleaning frenzy to make some food even though I’m not all that hungry. The morning sickness hasn’t reared its head for a while, so now I’m hoping if I keep my tummy satisfied, it won’t come back.

A quick knock on the door sounds, and I freeze. I look at the door as if it’s going to fly open and attack me. It doesn’t, but a second round of knocking starts, and I reach for the bat I dug out of the closet weeks ago and creep slowly toward the door.

Who can it be? Josie always calls or texts before she comes over, and my mom has my spare key that she never hesitates to use, even though I insist she stop.

I pick up the phone to check for missed calls or texts from Josie or anyone else. *But nope, not even Nova.*

“Sophie!” The knocking is more insistent now, and my heart pounds in my chest loud enough to drown out my girl power

music.

“Open the door, Sophie! I know you’re in there!”

Tank? I must be losing my mind. Tank couldn’t possibly be at my door.

“Sophie, don’t make me kick this door down.”

Tank! Oh my God! It’s really him!

I rush to the door, hesitating just long enough to peek through the peephole. Sure enough, it’s him! My heart is about to burst. Could this really be happening?

“Open the damn door, Soph! It’s me, Tank.” I jump and squeak before I fumble with the locks and open the door.

The moment I fling open the front door, Tank’s face splits into the biggest, brightest smile I’ve ever seen, his eyes lighting up like stars.

“Sophie!” he cries out joyfully, immediately sweeping me up into his strong arms and spinning me around. I can’t help the giddy laughter bubbling out of me as he whirls me through the air.

When he finally sets me down, I feel breathless and dizzy. Tank crushes his lips to mine, kissing me deeply until we’re both gasping for air. We break apart wearing matching ear-to-ear grins, foreheads touching as we gaze at each other.

“I can’t believe you’re really here!” I exclaim a little breathlessly, unable to contain my excitement.

Tank tenderly caresses my cheek, his eyes never leaving mine. “There’s nowhere else I’d rather be, Soph. The moment I got released, I came straight here to you. I had to see my gorgeous baby mama.” His voice drops low and gravelly with emotion.

Slowly, almost reverently, he sinks to his knees in front of me. With a gentleness I didn’t even know he possessed, he spreads his big hand over my stomach. When he speaks, his voice is hushed and gentle. “Hey there, little one. I’m your dad.”

Watching Tank connect with our unborn baby makes my heart swell with emotion. But I still have so many doubts, so many

unanswered questions about where we go from here.

As Tank rises to face me, his eyes glowing with affection, I tamp down the concerns swirling in my mind. For now, I let myself get caught up in the dizzying rush of emotions...but inside, my thoughts churn like a storm-tossed river. Is this it? Can we make this work? Raise a child together?

Tank brushes his thumb over my cheek, and I shiver, desire sparking through me in spite of my questions.

“I’ve missed you, Soph,” he says. Before I can react, his mouth is on mine in a searing kiss that melts my doubts, at least for the moment.

When we finally break apart, breathing hard, Tank looks at me and says, “I want this. Us. Our family.”

For the first time in my life, I’m speechless.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

TANK

Walking out of County Jail and into the bright California sunshine as a free man made me feel fucking wonderful. Walking straight into Sophie's warm and welcoming arms? Nothing fucking sweeter than that.

As soon as her shock fades, I can tell she's excited to see me.

Sophie looks gorgeous as fuck in that thin t-shirt that highlights her round tits and hard nipples that tell me her mind is exactly where mine is.

But then I look at the way the t-shirt hugs not just her tits but her belly. Our baby. She's bigger than I expected and even hotter because of it. I take a step forward, hand shooting out, eager to touch my growing baby.

Our lips fuse together like long-lost lovers like we were more than just on the cusp of something before I went inside. We kiss like we've had a lifetime together before our time apart, and I hold her closer, deepen the kiss as my hands finally get to roam the curves that have been starring in my dreams for far too long.

Sophie whimpers, and her hands go to my biceps, gripping me tight as if she, too, is a little unsteady from this wild, hot kiss. Her delicate hands start to paw at my arms and chest as if she can't get close enough, and when I lift her in my arms, her legs wrap around me, bringing my cock right where I need it.

"Tank," she moans, straining to kiss my mouth, but her belly won't let her.

I stare at her pretty face. Those big brown eyes are bare to me today, no glasses to hide every emotion flickering over her face. “You sure about this, Sophie?”

She nods. “I’m sure. Are you?”

“Fuck yeah. I’ve been sure since the first moment I had you.” I didn’t realize it then, but every fucking day since, all the days we were apart made it crystal clear to me. I set her on her feet and push her against the nearest wall, one hand tangling in her hair and the other rubbing her belly.

Her brows furrow in confusion. “But in your letter—”

“I said what needed to be said at the time, Sophie. I didn’t know how long I’d be locked up or even if I’d ever be free again. I couldn’t ask or even expect you to wait for me, not when I didn’t know if that’s what you wanted.”

“It’s what I wanted, Tank. It’s what I want. You are what I want.”

“Thank fuck for that,” I growl and kiss the hell out of her, guiding her over to the sofa because I’m too damn hungry for her to wait.

I bend her over the arm of the sofa and strip her out of her shorts and t-shirt, kissing my way down her spine. “Even more beautiful than I remember.”

I hadn’t had enough time with naked Sophie before going inside, and this, her hard pink nipples, expanding waistline, and hips that fit my hands perfectly, is going into the memory bank.

“Tank, please,” she moans, wiggling her hips and ass right in my face.

My lips curl into a smile. “Arch your back for me, Sophie.”

Her brows knit into a frown, and she looks over her shoulder at me. “With this belly? You’re lucky I’m in this position at all, so get on it.”

“Okay, mama,” I tell her and sink to my knees. “This,” I whisper and kiss one round ass cheek and then the other. “Is,” I kiss the inside of her thighs, moving closer and closer to

where I need to be, inhaling the scent of her arousal. “Just where I want you.”

I lean forward until my breath fans her pussy, and she clenches before stopping me. “Soph?”

“I’ve been cleaning all day,” she says in a soft whisper, but her eyes are dark with arousal, and that’s all I give a fuck about.

“Do you want me to stop?” I don’t want to, but if that’s what she needs to be comfortable.

“No,” she sighs. “I want you right now. I need you.”

I don’t even answer, just dive right between those thick thighs until her sweet and tangy honey hits my tongue, and she pushes back to meet me stroke for stroke. I growl my pleasure because fuck me, she tastes like sunshine and sin, and it’s the perfect first meal after too many fucking months of lockup. I eat her pussy while she grips the sofa, pushing back, begging for more.

“Tank, yes!” She tosses her head back, shouting her pleasure as she rolls her hips, keeping up with the steady swipe of my tongue. “Oh fuck, I’ve missed you. Missed this.”

She’s so fucking wet, I know it’s true. Her pussy drips down her thighs before I slip two fingers into her already pulsing cunt. The sounds she makes has my cock straining against my zipper. My whole body is wound tight, but I’ve been dreaming about this moment for too long to rush it. I want her soft and sated from her first orgasm before I fuck her how I want to, how I need to.

“Oh, God, Tank. That feels so fucking good.”

“You’re so fucking wet, babe.” I slide my thumb and middle finger into her juices, finger-fucking her until her eyes drift shut. “You’ve been thinking about me, like this, eating your wet pussy until you can’t see straight?”

She nods. “And more.” The words come out breathless, and I smile at the way she looks, half-gone with lust and the need to come.

“This kind of more?” I swirl my tongue around her clit, sliding my thumb into her dripping pussy, fucking her in shallow strokes before sliding my middle finger two knuckles deep into her tight asshole.

“Oh. My. Fucking. God.” Her hips rock, taking me deeper with every back-and-forth motion. “Tank,” she shouts as her body goes tense for a long, silent moment. Then I suck her clit hard, and she bursts. “Fuck!” Her body shakes and shivers, her hands in a white-knuckle grip on the sofa as pleasure flows out of her.

I don’t stop my oral torture because I can’t. Every aftershock is a mini orgasm on its own, and she’s not sated yet. My tongue flicks over her clit, and her hips buck again and again before she pulls away. “Problem?”

“No, but if you don’t stop, I’ll pass out.”

“Oh, we can’t have that.” Sophie’s legs tremble, and a slow, sexy smile spreads across her face as she turns to me. Her eyes sparkle like she’s really happy to see me, and dammit, if that doesn’t cause a pinch in my chest.

“Your turn,” she says eagerly and reaches for my cock. Her hands go to my belt and then my buttons and zipper.

I watch the way the light hits her face as she sits on the edge of the couch, undressing me, the small smile on her lips, the look of determination in her eyes as she rips down my jeans and boxers in one quick move. She stands, taking my cock in one hand and clumsily removing my shirt with the other. “Bigger than I remember. Did you work out?”

My response is to make my pecs dance, and she laughs, but it fades as her eyes darken with desire. “Every fucking day.”

Her lips go to my chest while she strokes my cock, long, slow and hard. Her tongue flicks over one nipple and then the other before she heads south to my abs. I grip her arms to stop her. “What?”

“Later,” I growl and spin her away from me, lifting her so her knees are on the sofa cushions and she’s gripping the back of

the sofa. “What a beautiful fucking sight,” I growl and smack her ass.

“Ah,” she moans, arching her back to show off those plump pussy lips, pink and glistening with want for this under-loved cock. “Now, Tank.”

I grip my cock and rub it against her cunt until her juices run over it along with my hand. I push in slightly and growl. “Damn, Sophie.”

Sophie pushes back with a moan, and in one long, slow stroke, I’m balls deep inside my woman. The mother of my child. My hands grip her waist gently. It’s hard to believe there’s a life growing inside of her.

“Ooh, that’s good,” she sighs, already pulsing around me.

I don’t want this to end too soon, and I take her in long, slow strokes. Teasing strokes. Shallow and then deep, slow and then fast. “Fuck,” I growl when she tightens around me on purpose, gripping my cock like a velvet vise. “Sophie.”

“Fuck me, Tank. Please.”

I give her what she wants, what we both want, thrusting into her pussy, making her moans and cries grow louder by the second. I slap her round ass with both hands, gripping those cheeks while I fuck her deeper and deeper. “Mine,” I growl and slide even deeper.

“Tank, yes! Oh, fuck! Yes!” She pushes back, and I’m buried so fucking deep that I know I’m gonna lose my shit too soon. “Tank,” she cries out, this time a warning because her pussy is fluttering like hummingbird wings, strangling my cock in the most delicious vise I’ve ever felt. “Ahhh!” And then she falls apart, gripping the back of the sofa and pushing back, fucking my cock as her thighs shake and her whole body vibrates with her orgasm.

I’m half-mesmerized as she pushes against my cock, the sway of her ass as she pulls me deeper to prolong her pleasure. And then I feel that telltale tingling at the base of my spine, the tightening of my balls as hot lava flows through the length of my cock.

“Sophie, Sophie, fuck!” My cock explodes inside of her, my knees tremble as long, hot spurts of my release coat her walls, and she’s still coming around me, wet and tight and pulsing.

“Shit, fuck, I’ve missed that.” She falls forward, resting her forehead on the back of the sofa, our bodies still connected as the tiniest aftershocks pulse inside of her. She rises up and looks over her shoulder with the sweetest fucking smile. “I’m so glad you’re out.”

“Me too,” I tell her and step back until my cock slips from her body. Scooping her in my arms, I carry her to her bedroom, not stopping until we’re in her ultra-feminine bathroom with water pounding over us.

Inside the shower, Sophie attempts to drop to her knees because she’s hungry to use her hands and mouth to show me that she’s missed me. “Dammit,” she growls when she realizes she can’t. “Baby body,” she says, pointing at her tummy.

“Come here.” I step from the shower and help her dry off, leading her to the bed. “You want to suck me off? We’ll figure out a way to get those lips on my cock.” I smile down at her, my cock twitching hungrily for her.

She smiles wide, reaching for me in long, quick strokes that highlight just how much she wants my cock. She flicks her tongue over the tip, and when that pearly bed of pre-come makes an appearance, she licks it off and takes me so deep she chokes, but my girl keeps going, depththroating my cock in full porn star mode like she can’t get enough of me.

When a moan comes from the back of her throat, I’m about to lose my shit again.

I grip her hair to pull her away, but her hands grab my ass cheeks, keeping me right where she wants me as she swallows down every drop of come. I want to object, but it’s too good to feel anything but grateful.

After a few minutes—like a horny teenager—I take her again, laying her down on the bed. I stand above her while I pound us both into oblivion before emptying my balls again. Then, we lay together in bed for a recharging session.

We're both panting and smiling like fools because neither of us can believe our explosive last hour. My hand goes again to her belly, rubbing circles as our breathing returns to normal. "How have you been?"

She shrugs, a small but happy smile on her face. "Morning sickness sucked, but it's gone now. It's odd and amazing, slightly terrifying." Her sweet laugh hits me in the chest, and when I lean over to press a kiss to her round belly, she smiles.

"Don't give your ma any more trouble, okay?" I kiss her belly again, and her fingers tangle in my hair. It's an oddly sweet moment, tender in a way I don't even try to understand. When our eyes meet, it's affection and understanding and a little bit of something else I don't even want to think about as I fall asleep beside her, my hand resting on top of our baby.

For the next two days, it's just Sophie and me. I don't give her a second to breathe without me, and neither does she. I wake her up with my cock buried deep, and her eyelids flutter open, a moan the first sound from her mouth.

She rides me at the kitchen table—reverse cowgirl, fuck yeah—while I massage her gorgeous tits.

I take her on the sofa, devouring her sweet pussy so slowly she begs me to make her come, and I do...eventually. I fuck her long and slow on the living room floor until she snakes a hand between us to give her swollen clit relief.

She makes breakfast or tries to anyway while I bring her to orgasm with my fingers. She drips maple syrup on my cock instead of the French toast and licks off every drop along with my load.

Later, I grab the most beautiful tits I have ever seen and titty fuck her, making her smile as she begs me to come all over her tits.

It's the best forty-eight hours of my life, and I never want it to end. For the first fucking time in my life, I can see a future with a woman, and it has nothing to do with the fact that my baby is growing in her belly. Sophie isn't just hot and dirty;

she's also beautiful and sweet and kind and so fucking smart I don't know why she wants me.

For two days straight, we eat, and we talk, and we fuck on every surface of her apartment. It's just the welcome home I need, and she is just the woman I need.

It's a scarier thought than facing down terrorists or a pissed-off Commanding Officer, but just like every other challenge in my life, I'm ready to face it head-on.

I'm not exactly sure how to go about claiming a woman like Sophie, but I'm pretty sure that a fuck ton of orgasms is a good start.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SOPHIE

Having Tank here in my space, free from jail, is more than a dream come true. I'm in heaven, and it's not just because my limbs are limp and loose and satisfied from the orgasms. It's everything about this man.

The way he shivers and looks at me as his cock sinks into me with so much affection that my heart swells. The way his gray eyes sparkle when he listens to me talk, little laugh crinkles that form at the corners of his eyes, like he's just happy to listen to me talk.

I know what it means, and even though it's just what I want, it's scary as hell, too.

"How have you been feeling," he asks, leaning across the bed and placing one big hand on my belly.

I roll my eyes and release a heavy sigh because this is the talking part of being together, the true test of what our future might be. "I'm all right. I'm just tired and hungry all the time."

I smile and place my hand over his. "Are you really okay with this?"

He nods, a smile stretching across his face. "I'm more than okay with it, Sophie. I'm fucking thrilled. It's scary. I mean, what the fuck do I know about being a dad? But I'm looking forward to learning."

My heart swells so much I think it might burst. "That's how I feel, too," I admit in a whisper. "It was a shock at first, a big

one, but I'm happy about it."

"Good because I am, too." His words are genuine and the look in his eyes is enough to melt away my reservations about having a baby, having a baby with a biker, and all the other stuff we need to talk about.

"So," I sigh and run my thumb along the bruise on his jaw. "How did you do in County Jail?"

He sighs and pushes away, putting some distance between our naked bodies, leaving me instantly cold.

"I did all right. A couple of fights, but I'm in one piece, just a little bruised." It's an abbreviated version of his time in lockup, and I can sense he doesn't want to talk about it. But we have to if we're going to be honest with each other and build this relationship.

"Tank, are you sure you're all right?"

He nods. "There's shit that I'll have to deal with now that I'm out, but I'm fine. I'm here with you, and I'm good. Right now, I'm fucking great."

"That is good news. But," I nibble my bottom lip, unsure how to ask what I want to know.

"But?"

"But, what happened? Why were you arrested, and how did you get out?"

He sucks in a deep breath, sitting up and sliding closer to me. Tank gathers my hands in his, his gaze meeting mine head-on.

"I said I did something I didn't because it was the best thing for the MC."

"What? Why would you do that?"

He smiles, bringing one of my hands to his mouth. "Because I'm more expendable than the other person."

"You're not," I insist. "You're not fucking expendable, Tank."

"I'm glad you think that, but it's not about self-esteem, honey. It's a brotherhood and what it means to be in a club. Luckily,

Ace hired a kick-ass lawyer who doesn't like to lose. She found evidence, hard evidence that the judge couldn't deny, to prove it was self-defense. From me or the other guy."

I blink in shock. "So, is it totally over?"

"It is."

My body sinks in relief. "But what about the other guy. Is he going to prison?"

"No, Soph. He's not. But, that particular shit show is now in the past." He pulls me forward and brushes a soft kiss against my lips that is exactly the distraction I need. "Tell me something about you, Sophie. Something that's not serious but something I should know."

I smile. "First date talk?"

He nods. "We haven't had a first date. Yet."

"We kinda had a date at the bistro."

He chuckles. "I guess we could call it that. Wish we could have had more sunrise breakfasts before I got locked up."

"Well, you're here now, and I'd love to have an early morning breakfast with you."

Tank runs his thumb against my cheek and asks, "What else would you like to do?"

"Eat? I'm fucking starving. I want tacos. Anyway I can get them. Hard or soft. Corn or flour. Shrimp, steak, chicken, or fish, give it all to me. With extra salsa."

"Is that good for the baby? The salsa? Not too spicy?"

I roll my eyes. "A girl's gotta eat, and I have fierce cravings. I'll lay off the salsa. What about you, Tank? Are you a taco kind of guy or a steak and potatoes guy?"

"I'll fuck up a good steak, sure, but give me fried chicken and real mac and cheese any day of the week. None of that boxed shit, either. I want it cheesy and bubbly and a little brown on top, fresh from the oven."

“Noted.” I smile at him like a lovesick fool, feeling my heart double in size at the shared moment of silence. “Is your family in Angel Harbor?”

“No. My sister and my nephew are up in Sacramento. She’s doing really good these days, working at a cooking school.”

“Wow. That’s great. My brother and sister both live in Angel Harbor. He’s a single dad and works at the port. She’s, well, now she’s a social media girl, but last year she was a chef. She wanted to open up her own restaurant, but she found out how hard it is, so now she takes pictures of food for restaurants.” It’s nice, getting to know each other like this.

His expression is light, almost carefree, but I know our little forty-eight-hour love bubble is close to an end.

“Soph, I hate to say this, but I need to get back to the clubhouse,” he says almost with regret. “You want to come with me?”

Hell no is on the tip of my tongue, but I opt for diplomacy. “No thanks, I think I’ll just stick around here.”

His brows pull into a frown. “Why? What’s going on?”

I shrug. “What do you mean?”

“There’s something you’re trying like hell *not* to say.”

I sigh. “I went to the clubhouse when you were locked up, and, well, Ace is mad at me.” That’s a gigantic understatement, but that’s enough for now.

“What? Why?”

“Don’t know, maybe that’s something you can ask him about.” I inhale deeply and let it out in one long, slow breath. “Also, you should know that Nova and Maggie are gone, no longer in town. And the clinic was leveled.” My eyes slam shut as the image of the clinic appears in my mind’s eye. “It was a firebombing, but, thankfully, the place was empty, at least as far as the news is saying.”

Tank’s hand shoots out, gripping my shoulder as he pulls me close until my face is pressed against his chest. “Are you all right?”

I shrug. "I'm working on it," I admit honestly. "It's just another thing to deal with, you know?"

He nods. "I get it. Honestly."

He didn't because he couldn't, but I let the intention of his words be enough. "Thanks, Tank. But really, I think it's more important that I stay here. I don't have a job, and I need to focus on finding a way to support myself, not hanging out at the clubhouse."

He freezes, an unreadable expression on his face. "I see."

"No," I reach out to him. "I don't mean it like that. It's just that there's a lot I have to deal with here, and you should, uhm, go on without me and take care of your business."

Hurt shines in his eyes. This is the last thing he wants. Hell, it's the last thing I want after the past two perfect days. But as much as I want Tank and the life we could have together. I can't bury my head in the sand. Not now.

"You sure you don't want to come? I can smooth things over." His eyes swim with uncertainty, which confirms my answer.

"I'm sure. They weren't exactly welcoming to me when I needed them, and I need to be able to rely on myself right now."

It's the only way I'll know if I can do this on my own. Testing myself so that if I'm in similar circumstances where people aren't there for me, I'll know I can take care of myself.

"And that's all?"

I divert my gaze, wondering if I should let him know about the cars following me. I want to, but the truth is that Tank already has a lot on his plate, and I still have no proof that it has anything to do with him. I'll see if the problem persists. If it does, then I'll talk to him about it. Until then, I'll keep it to myself.

"Yep, that's all." It's just a harmless lie, one to keep the peace.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

TANK

Ace stands at the head of the table, a small smile on his face that doesn't do a damn thing to hide his displeasure. When Church ends, I'm sure we'll have words, but for now, he welcomes me with open arms.

"Let's start today by welcoming back our brother-in-arms, Tank. Glad to have you back, man."

I smile and accept handshakes and fist bumps from my brothers, all happy as fuck to see me.

"It's so fucking good to be back." I can't even describe just how good it feels to be back with my brothers, back where I belong. "Did you fuckers miss me?"

Dix laughs, clapping me on the back before he wraps me in a half-handshake, half-hug greeting. "We missed you like jock itch, brother. Did you find a pretty girl in lockup?"

I laugh and shove at his chest, rolling my eyes. "No one as pretty as you," I joke. Then, all the patched members gather around the table, and settle into the seats designated for each of them.

Church has officially begun.

Ace's gaze turns serious as he looks around the table, taking in every detail of every single brother in attendance. "First order of business. I have some fucked up news."

The room falls silent at his words. "Mouths shut, ears open," Dix drawls slowly, his tone deadly serious. His gaze meets

Ace's and they communicate silently for a long minute before the Prez turns his attention to the room at large.

"I spoke with Riot, and he heard back from his brothers locked up in the federal prison system." Ace's jaw clenches tight, a sure sign of tension he's trying really hard to hide. "You won't even fucking believe who was behind the clinic bombing."

"Latin Mafia?" I guess since those assholes came after me in lockup and because I'm pretty sure, even if I can't prove it, that theirs were the voices I heard in the hole.

"Nope. Wanna guess again?"

"BTD?" Banger offers.

"Nope," Ace says and looks around the table. A stern look on his face. "Arturo motherfuckin' Rojas."

"What the fuck?" Dix is up and on his feet instantly, his frown dark and deadly. "How the fuck is that possible when he's on twenty-three-seven lockdown?"

Ace lays a steady hand on the VP's shoulder. "We all know how easy it is to buy a prison guard, and the federal system isn't special in that regard. But that's not all."

"What the fuck else could there be?" Coop is on the edge of his seat, worry on his face, no doubt agonizing about his wife and daughter.

"Ghost from BTD is still in contact with Arturo." Ace shakes his head.

"Ghost? I thought we were done with him, especially now that Nova and Maggie have skipped town?"

"That was our hope, too," Ace starts, scrubbing a hand over his face. "But that hot shot Maggie gave to Simone the night she left the clubhouse killed the bitch. It was ruled an overdose, and they Narcan'd her, but they couldn't save her. Ghost is furious and vowing to end the MC. He knew Valentina's brother hooked them up when he called out Viper." Ace nods toward Banger. "So he's got it out for us, and Rojas has the men and the money to make moves. Even if he is locked up."

“It’s a good thing Nova and Maggie are safe in Texas,” I say with a bit of heat to my words. I’m hot because no one bothered to tell me any of this while I was locked up.

“It is good,” Ace growls. “Shades, get a hold of Nova and Gunnar and let them know to keep their eyes peeled for any sign of the Bloodthirsty Devils or any other gangbangers who get too close in that tiny as fuck town.”

“Opey is a small town,” Banger says with an air of authority. “But Stone says it’s on the drug corridor now and not too far from the border, so unfamiliar faces aren’t all that unusual. Maybe he should be in here for this?”

“That’s not how it works,” Dix growls, suddenly furious, and we all know why. If Arturo is out for revenge, it won’t be long before his focus falls on Dix and Valentina.

“Maybe not,” Banger agrees. “But right now, intel is the priority, right?” He looks around the table, his brows dipping into a scowl. “Right?”

“I’ll talk to him,” Ace promises. “Meanwhile, we need to solve the Rojas problem.”

“I hate to be the one to say this,” Preacher begins, “but we need to consider a permanent solution to the Rojas problem. Is that even possible with him in federal lockup?”

A hushed silence fills the room at Preacher’s words. He’s the most reluctant to end a life, and he’s never the one to suggest it.

“I agree,” I say in solidarity with my brother. “We need to end that old fuck, the sooner, the better. I’m pretty sure he’s also working with the Latin Mafia.”

“It seems likely,” Ace agrees. “If that’s the case, we need to go on lockdown immediately. Women and children stay at the club around the clock, and the prospects will watch them constantly.” The entire room erupts in groans because lockdown isn’t just a headache. It’s stressful as fuck, and too much togetherness, even for family.

Ace reads the room and says, “I know, lockdown is a bitch but it needs to be done until we put down Rojas.”

“You think his reach extends that far?” Shades flips his sunglasses on top of his head, eyes crinkling with a worried expression.

“I think a man with his means has access to the outside world. It’s a fuck of a lot more than the Latin Mafia and Bloodthirsty Devils. Who knows who else is on his payroll?”

Banger grins as an idea comes to his head. “We need to get a guard in that prison on our payroll,” he says. “Think you can get some intel so we know who’s ripe for a bribe—or a threat?”

Ace nods. “That can be arranged.”

“We need to find out,” I say. “And soon.” And I need to figure out a way to get Sophie to the clubhouse while we’re on lockdown because her safety and my baby’s safety is *my* priority.

Ace nods, looking around before his eyes come to a stop on Coop. “We’re down a doctor, meaning we need someone who can stitch us up and shoot a gun. Think you can handle that?”

Coop nods, his expression serious, a look that he wears often now that his family is growing. “I got it.”

“What about Sophie?” I ask without thinking. “She has the skills to get the job done, and she’s been stitching up the MC for years, right?” I already know the answer, but I’m trying to gauge what the fuck is going on between her and my brothers.

All eyes swing to me, and suddenly, I’m wondering if I should’ve gotten more details before offering up Sophie’s medical skills. What the fuck did I just do?

“You sure she’ll do it?” Ace asks without hesitating.

“I’m sure she will. Eventually, of course. She mentioned that she stopped by for help and didn’t get it.” My gaze never wavers as I watch my Prez.

“She got the help she needed, not the intel she felt she was owed.”

For years, it’s been instilled in me to follow orders, to do as I’m told, but this time, that training fails me. “What the fuck is

that supposed to mean?”

“It means I gave her the help she was promised but not the info she requested. End of story.” He stares me down, silently daring me to question him further. “Be sure,” he says like an order. “I got a call from Doherty. He had a long conversation with her about people following her and trying to run her off the road.”

“What?” I was with her for the past two days, and she hadn’t said a word. Did that mean that she doesn’t trust me? Instantly, I want to rush back to her, but right now, I can’t. “She didn’t say a fucking word.”

“I’m not surprised,” Ace offers, his voice calm and even. “She was pretty upset when she left here, and that’s when someone followed her home and sat there all night, never mind the phone calls.”

Phone calls? I stand, eager to rush back to my woman. “I have to go to her, make sure she’s safe.”

“Because she’s having your baby?” Dix asks the question rather than Ace.

“Yeah, that’s part of it.” The other part is my and Sophie’s business as soon as I get around to telling her just how important she’s become to me.

“For now, I need to get to her and bring her ass over here.” I wait for Ace to give me permission to leave Church, and he doesn’t. My arms and legs are tingling with worry while I hurry up and wait.

“Finding someone to get rid of Rojas is our top priority.” His gaze turns to me. “Find out if we can rely on Sophie to help first. Your personal shit comes second.”

“Got it.” She’s pissed, but I know she’ll do the right thing for the MC because she’s a good person who won’t let innocent people get hurt just to prove a point. “Can I go now?”

“You have two hours,” Ace says in a low voice. “And Lucky is going with you.” At my frown, he shrugs. “Lockdown.”

Fucking lockdown.

There's nothing I can do about it. Ace made the order. All I can do is get my woman and make sure she's right where she belongs.

At my side.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SOPHIE

After spending the most incredible weekend with Tank, I'm floating on cloud nine. I'm in a bubble of happiness that no one and nothing can penetrate. Not my current unemployment, my swollen ankles, my constantly full bladder, or anything else that comes my way.

Despite my precarious situation, I'm happy. I'm confident as I run errands that nothing is possibly going to ruin my love high.

Shit. *Is this love?* I can't deny that I'm feeling a big case of the *loves*, but that's for me to enjoy...and talk to Tank about later. He accepted my refusal to come to the clubhouse with him pretty well, but I'm not naïve enough to think that's the end of us talking about it. Something odd is going on, and I'm sure we'll eventually have to talk about it in a real conversation.

But for now, there's plenty of adulting to do. My first stop is yet another doctor's appointment to check my blood pressure and make sure everything is progressing as it should with the baby. It is, and I walk out of the medical building feeling great. The baby is a healthy weight, everything looks normal, and I have an envelope in my purse that says whether we're having a girl or a boy.

I can't stop smiling as I slip behind the steering wheel and head to the pharmacy, and then the grocery store, because feeding a giant of a man like Tank for two days straight pretty much emptied my fridge and my cabinets. It's no big deal. I

plan to stock up again just in case he finishes his MC business early and drops by to say hi.

Or something.

The store is almost empty, aside from a few old timers stocking up on sale items, so I take my time, reading ingredients to make sure I get the most nutritious choices for me and the baby. The money Shades gave me has come in handy, and I'm grateful as hell for the assistance.

"Honey, can you grab that can of peaches for me?" An older woman smiles at me with her request.

Part of me wants to ask her if she's insane, you know, belly and all, but the shelf isn't that tall, and she's a few inches shorter than me, so I smile wide and reach for the can. "The unsweetened ones taste more natural," I tell her and grab those, too, before I keep shopping.

"Thank you, dear."

"No problem," I smile over my shoulder, skipping the canned fruits and vegetables in favor of fresh and frozen options. I grab frozen spinach and a bag of frozen fruit when I notice a man with dark hair and tattoos staring at me. I do my best to ignore him, but his gaze is like a kettlebell on my shoulders, heavy and pervasive, following me as I turn down the next aisle of frozen goods.

My heart pumps like crazy in my chest as I turn into the snack aisle just to get away from his terrifying gaze. Every turn takes me further away from him, or so I think.

"Oh!" The man is right there when I turn into the chocolate aisle, his glare dark and menacing as he grips the edge of my shopping cart. "Excuse me," I say as I attempt to go around him, to end my time in his presence immediately, but he steps in my path again and again. "I said, *excuse* me."

"What's your name?" he asks easily enough, but it's odd, and I frown, shaking my head.

"None of your business. Now, excuse me." This jerk is starting to piss me off as much as he's scaring me, and I nudge my cart

forward, hoping to show him that while I might be afraid, I'm also a little crazy.

But his hands grip the cart again, hard enough that it's impossible to move in any direction. He stares at me and a chill runs down my spine. "Sophie Harmon. Be careful. Your boyfriend is gonna die."

My heart stops at his words, but I square my shoulders, trying not to pee myself in the middle of Sprouts. "I don't have a boyfriend."

His lips curl into a creepy grin. "Sure you don't. Be careful out here. It's not safe for a woman in your condition." He stares at my belly long enough that it's difficult not to see it as a threat, and when he walks away, I stand there, terrified and dumbfounded.

Instead of finishing my shopping as well as other errands, I leave the cart in the middle of the aisle and haul ass—as much as a pregnant woman can—out of the grocery store. I speed-waddle across the parking lot, not stopping until I'm in my car, and lock it up tight.

"Aaaah!" I let out a long scream that does fuck all to relieve my stress and fear before starting the car and racing home.

Who was that, and what did he want? I don't have any answers, but I know his words are threats, and that man scares the hell out of me.

I pull into the parking garage with my heart still racing, pausing only for a moment to wonder if I should've gone to Tank at the Reckless Souls clubhouse. I hurry to the elevator. I'll call Tank as soon as I'm safely locked away inside my apartment.

Turns out, it's not at all necessary because the man himself is leaning against my door when I step off the elevator. Curiosity is my first thought, but right on the heels is relief and joy at seeing Tank's big body, his dirty blond hair that looks a lot darker since he damn near has a buzz cut.

When he looks up and notices me, his beaming smile sends lightning bolts of lust pulsing through my body. Something

about his presence makes me feel calm and settled, safe.

“Tank. What are you doing here?”

His gaze is equal parts happiness and annoyance, neither of which I understand completely. “I’m here to take you to the clubhouse with me. Now.”

I shake my head. “We’ve already talked about this,” I remind him. “And I really don’t like your tone.”

He grins, but there’s very little humor in it. “I’m sure you don’t, but I don’t like hearing from my Prez that someone’s been following you and putting your life—and our baby’s life—in danger. Were you ever going to tell me about it?”

I sigh, feeling guilty as I push past him and unlock my door. “You just got out of jail, Tank, and there’s so much going on with your MC that I didn’t want to bother you.”

“Bother me?” He grips my arm and turns me to face him. “It’s no fucking bother to know you need me to protect you, Sophie. Goddammit, if something happened to you, I would never fucking forgive myself.”

I believe him with my whole heart, but it doesn’t change how I feel about going back to the clubhouse. “I don’t belong there, Tank. Nova’s not there, and he’s the only reason those guys treat me halfway decently.” I keep shaking my head, thinking of my last visit to Reckless Souls headquarters. “I’ll be fine here. I have a gun, and Josie checks on me every day.”

“Sophie,” he sighs heavily, taking my hands in his, kissing the knuckles on each hand. “I’m not asking.”

I sigh. His commanding tone is kind of dreamy, but it’s also annoying as fuck. I slide my hands from his grasp, shaking my head as I put more distance between us. “Yeah, well, I’m not going with you. End of story.”

Tank laughs, and the sound is rich and deep. I’d almost forgotten his beautiful and contagious laugh. “Wouldn’t it be great if that was the end of this?” He shakes his head. “What you don’t seem to understand, sweet Sophie, is that’s my baby you’re carrying. Our baby and I won’t let you or our baby get hurt when I can prevent it, which I can. So get your beautiful,

sexy ass in gear because we're heading into lockdown, and we need to get back ASAP."

"No." I fold my arms across my chest, determined and defiant. "If you need to go, that's on you. But I won't be locked down anywhere."

Tank's stare is like a drill, trying to bore right through my defenses. "Soph, I can't find these fuckers and keep tabs on you at the same time. Not when some creep's out there following you."

I bite my lip, looking anywhere but at his piercing gaze. "Tank," I start, hating how my voice wavers.

"I mean it," he cuts in, and his voice is like gravel mixed with authority. "We're not having this out right now."

"I'm not trying to pick a fight," I snap back, but then I'm spilling everything, about the creep at the store, the threat against his life. It tumbles out in a breathless rush.

"Fuck," he swears, his face setting like concrete. Anger rolls off him in waves, almost tangible. "Sophie, just... pack. Please."

I stand there, frozen at his tone that leaves no room for arguments. It's kind of hot, which is all kinds of fucked up, but I instinctively bristle at his command. "I can't." My words come out quiet and shaky, and I hate it.

"Why not?"

"Because they treat me like shit, Tank. The baby and I don't need that kind of stress." Tears well up in my eyes, and I'm so hormonal I can't do anything about it. "I went to them scared and full of questions, and it was made abundantly clear to me that I'm an outsider. After all the years working for Nova at the clinic, they acted like I'm not welcome anymore. I'll feel better if I stay here. I promise I won't go outside again."

His broad shoulders fall, and he presses his forehead to mine while his hands cup the sides of my face. "I'm so sorry, Sophie. I really fucking am. It kills me to know you weren't treated right, but I need you to trust me. Not my brothers, just me. Can you do that?"

I do trust Tank more than I realize until this very moment. “I trust you, Tank. But I don’t feel comfortable there. Why can’t you stay here with me?”

“Look,” he starts, and there’s a weight in his sigh that tells me this is serious. “Shit’s going down that I can’t tell you about yet. But believe me, you’ll be safer at the clubhouse. I gotta have my head in the game. You get that, right?”

I let out a sigh because, yeah, I get it. But that doesn’t make it any easier to swallow. “I do, but—” How can I argue when I know he needs to be laser-focused for whatever bad-news-biker drama is about to go down?

“I’m up for a little... *persuasion* if you get my drift,” he says, his voice dropping to a husky, melt-the-polar-ice-caps tone.

Can’t help the grin that splits my face because, damn, the man knows how to short-circuit my brain. “Persuade away,” I tease, the heat lighting up every nerve ending.

His smile’s all the warning I get before his lips claim mine, fierce and sweet and reckless. And just like that, any semblance of logic I’ve got left flies out the window.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

TANK

“Are you convinced yet?” I devour her mouth until her hands grip me, and her body shudders. “How about now?” I ask softly as I kiss my way down her body, slowly peeling her out of every stitch of her clothing until her plump tits and swollen belly are revealed to me. “So. Fucking. Beautiful.” She’s soft and angelic, like the fancy paintings you see in museums and shit.

“Touch me, please.” Her whispered plea hits my ears, and suddenly it’s like a wild animal takes over.

I take one step closer, bringing our bodies as close as they can get without merging. I drop my mouth to a hard nipple while my hand finds her pussy wet and swollen, already pulsing for my touch. I take my time, teasing her clit, and her opening until she’s trembling and making incoherent sounds.

“Tank,” she moans, bucking her hips against my touch.

I know what she wants, but Sophie needs convincing, and that’s just what I’m going to do.

“You like that?” I fuck her with my fingers in long, slow strokes meant to heighten her arousal. “Right. Here.”

“Oh, Tank. Yes, right there!” Her head falls back against the door with a loud thud, and when I move to her other breast, teasing that hard nipple with my lips and teeth, she shouts my name again. “Tank!”

I smile against her tits, licking and sucking back and forth, keeping up a steady torture that has her wild with desire. My thumb swirls her clit, and she tries to grab my wrist, but the belly is in the way.

“Tank,” she growls.

I smile again and pull back. “Is this what you want, sweet Sophie?” I add another finger to her dripping pussy, and apply more pressure to her clit, pumping and circling fast and hard until she’s flying apart, body trembling against the door.

“Yes, just like that...yes!” She rides my hand until her orgasm is complete, smiling up at me. “Damn, Tank. That was perfect.”

You’re perfect. The words are on the tip of my tongue, and not just those words either. The other words, three far scarier words hover on the edge of my lips. *I love you.* “Be mine, Soph.”

She lets out a squeak of surprise when I scoop her into my arms before settling against my chest as best she can. “I am yours,” she purrs.

As I lay her across the bed, undress, and snuggle up behind her, I know it’s true. She is mine, without a doubt, but it doesn’t feel like it’s enough. “Mine,” I growl as I slide into the bed behind her.

“Yours,” she shoots back with a sultry smile.

The ache in her voice is enough to undo me, and I slide into her from behind, one hand gripping her meaty breasts and the other gripping her hip while I fuck her long and slow, until there’s no doubt in the fucking world who she belongs to.

When Sophie comes, it’s like a nuclear bomb exploding, wild and reckless and beautiful to witness. I don’t stop until every last drop of pleasure is wrung from her body, and she’s limp and smiling at me like a woman in love. “Damn, Tank.”

I smile, and my hips start to move again, faster and deeper until I find my own pleasure, wrenching one last orgasm from her exhausted, beautiful body. “I love you, Sophie.” The words sneak out, but I realize that I mean them. Every word.

She lets out a small huff of laughter. “That’s just the incredible sex talking,” she says, patting my jaw and brushing a soft kiss to my lips.

I can’t deny her words sting, but I’m not giving up, not until she’s mine. Hell, not even then. I’ll never give up. “It’s not the sex,” I tell her. “But don’t worry, you’ll see.”

Sophie yawns in reply, turning and preparing to sleep.

“Sophie, we need to talk.”

She blinks and her big brown eyes are full of questions. “What’s up?”

I cup one side of her face and run my fingers through her hair, smiling down at her because she’s my whole fucking world. “I need you to come to the clubhouse with me. I know you don’t want to, but you trust me, so do this for me. Please.”

“Tank,” she whines.

“I’m serious. I can’t do what I need to do if I’m focused on whether or not you’re safe here alone. I can’t afford to be distracted, wondering if the woman and baby I love are safe. It’s a recipe for me or one of my brothers getting hurt. Or worse.”

She freezes as if she just heard me, shock in her eyes. “You love me?”

I smile. “Fuck yeah, I love you. But I need to know you’re safe, so I am one hundred percent focused. You don’t have to like it, babe. You can even be a bitch to everyone if you want. Just stay there until I come back to you.” I kissed her mouth, her throat, and then her collarbone, making her shiver beneath me. “I’ll take the first fifty diaper changes.”

She brightens at that. “Yeah?”

I nod. “Hell, yeah, I will. Just come to the clubhouse and stay there. Please?”

She lays a hand on my face, and I turn, kissing her palm and her wrist, all the way up to the crook of her arm. “Tank.” Her tone is a mixture of lust and pleading. Her resolve is

weakening, even if she doesn't want to go, she's thinking about it. For me.

“Say yes, Sophie.”

By the time she answers, my hands and mouth are on her tits, driving her wild, making her hips gyrate and her hands searching for something to hold on to. “Yes, okay, Tank. Yes.”

“Good girl,” I tell her and then give her another orgasm before we head to MC headquarters.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SOPHIE

“Thanks for coming with me, Josie.” I squeeze her hand tight as we settle at a table in the clubhouse where all the women and club whores gather with food and drinks. And babies.

“No problem. It’s kind of like a field trip to the zoo, seeing all the animals in their natural habitat.” She laughs, looking around with wide eyes as if we’re on some safari. I backhand her arm. “Ow, what the fuck?”

“Stop it. These are people.” Rude people, apparently, but still. “And we’re guests here.”

Josie rolls her eyes. “Reluctant guests. You called me, remember that. Something about not wanting to be behind enemy lines on your own?”

Yeah, I called in a favor to my best friend, and because she’s the absolute best, she dropped everything and showed up at the clubhouse with her own duffel bag. “And I appreciate it, but let’s try not to make things worse.”

Josie rolls her eyes. “Oh, come on. They’re not even paying attention to us. No one has come over to even say *hey, welcome to lockdown. If you need anything, just let me know.*” Her gaze scans the room, scorn on her face as she shakes her head. “We’re here because Tank swung his dick, and you said yes. These chicks aren’t our friends, but I don’t care. You do.”

“You’re right.” I shouldn’t care, but I do. Most of these women were nice to me when they came to the clinic. Now,

though, since Dr. Nova's gone? It's like I'm trash or something. "Whatever. I don't care."

"You do, but it's part of your charm." She flashes a wide, teasing smile that makes me feel a little better. "Have you talked to your parents about everything?"

"Yes and no. They saw the clinic on the news and called. Mom wanted to come over to check on me, but I told her the police didn't know who did it or who was the target, and it wasn't safe right now." I hate lying to my parents, but I would hate it more if something happened to them because of me.

"At least it kept them away, but you know you can't keep the baby from them forever, right?"

I glare at my best friend. "Yeah, I know. I'm hoping that showing up with an adorable baby in my arms will make them forget everything else."

Josie laughs out loud. "Solid plan. I approve."

"Thanks," I say, trying to hold back a smile, but I fail.

"So, why is everyone here?"

"Lockdown," I answer easily, ignoring the pinch that even minutes later, no one has come to say anything to us.

"Why?"

I shrug. "Tank didn't say. Just that they needed to take care of some shit, and he couldn't focus on what needed to be done if he was worried about me." I tell Josie about the guy at the grocery store, and she doesn't take the news well.

"What the fuck, Soph? You know that means they were following you, right?"

I nod. I hadn't thought of it at the time, but on the drive home, it came to me. "I know. But I didn't want you to worry." I feel like I've been saying that a lot lately.

Josie takes my hands, forcing my gaze to hers. "You know that normal people in regular relationships don't have to deal with this shit, right? There's no danger lurking around every corner, and I mean this sincerely as fuck. Are you sure you want to

bring this constant level of worry into your life? Mine? Your family's?"

I nod because, again, it's something I have been thinking about. But there's something else on my mind. "Tank told me he loves me." How can I possibly forget that when I've been looking for a good man to love me for most of my entire life? And here he is, larger than life, beautiful and kind, and sexy as hell? And he wants me.

Just me.

"Shit," Josie moans.

I laugh. "Thanks?"

"No, I mean, that's great, and I'm happy for you. Over the moon. But I know it means that you love him too, and I'll have to resign myself to always worrying about you."

I squeeze her hand back. "Thanks, Josie. For being here, and for being the best damn friend a girl could...oh!" A tight ball forms in my belly, and it isn't anxiety or heartburn. It's something else.

"Soph, what is it? Talk to me." The panic in Josie's voice does nothing to stop the worry from sliding down my throat and settling in my belly.

The pain passes, and I sit up, taking several deep breaths until I'm sure it's gone. "Nothing. Probably just Braxton Hicks." It has to be since the baby isn't due for another few weeks.

"Are you sure?"

Not at all. "Yep." I smile a little too brightly, nodding as if nothing is wrong. "Pretty sure." The baby makes a liar out of me as another wave of pain grips me, and I double over. "Fuck!"

"Sophie!" Josie is out of her chair and at my side in an instant. "Breathe, Soph. Like me, like we practiced." She inhales slowly and lets it out even slower. "Follow my breathing."

My eyes slam shut as another contraction hits me mid-inhale. "Josie, something is wrong. It's too early."

“Plenty of babies are born a few weeks early.” She laughs when I glare up at her. “Now, breathe.”

I breathe deeply, but almost every breath is interrupted by another contraction. “We have to go. Now.”

Fear flashes in Josie’s eyes, and it’s quickly replaced by a look of determination as she helps me to my feet.

“Yep. All right. Let’s do this.”

She hooks one arm around my back, and together, we head to the door.

Another contraction hits, which draws a few eyes. If I wasn’t in so much pain, I might have laughed at the irony. “Just keep,” she says. “Going.”

Josie nods, and we inch toward the door when a guy slides between us and the exit. “Lockdown. You can’t leave.”

I recognize the guy as Diesel. He came to the clinic quite often. “We have to. Please move.” Sweat forms on my forehead, and my stomach is clenching so hard it’s difficult to stay on my feet.

“Sorry.”

Josie sucks in a breath, poking him in the chest with every syllable forming in her mouth. “Get your big ass out of the way before I move it for you!”

I almost smile because Josie is like a baby bulldog, always up for a fight no matter how big her opponent is.

Two women join Diesel, and I recognize the bitchy no-longer-pregnant-woman with the baby in her arms. Gia, with tattoos and vibrantly colored hair, says, “What’s going on here?”

“Baby,” I spit out just as another contraction hits.

Gia steps forward, glaring at Josie. “You know you’re not going anywhere. We’re on lockdown.”

“Yeah, well, we’re not asking,” Josie tells her with more than a little attitude.

“I’m not asking either,” Gia growls.

Josie snaps back, “Fuck you, girl. Sophie is in labor, and we’re going.”

The next contraction isn’t as bad as the previous few, but they are coming faster. I stand up tall and face the women who have done nothing to make me feel welcome here.

But I have bigger concerns. “I’m in labor, and my contractions are coming fast and hard. If anything happens to my baby, there’s nothing I won’t do to make you pay. Nothing.” The effect of my words is ruined by another contraction, but Josie has my back.

She pushes between Gia and Diesel, pulling me along. “Stay inside, and stay safe,” she throws behind her as we head toward her car. Two minutes later, I’m in the reclining passenger seat as my best friend breaks every speed law to get me to the hospital.

“Josie,” I whine. “It’s too soon. It’s too soon, and I’m not ready. And Tank isn’t here.” I’m scared, but I don’t need to say that to her. She just knows and reaches over to squeeze my hand.

“You *are* ready, Sophie. You’ve been ready for this for years. You don’t need Tank, and you don’t need me, but I’m here.” *And he’s not* remains unspoken between us.

I’m ready, I say to myself no less than a dozen times as we rush toward the hospital. I call Tank six or seven times, but he doesn’t answer. The calls roll straight to voicemail, which means his phone is off. *He’s busy*, I remind myself. *Busy doing some shit he can’t tell me about.*

I shove away that thought as Josie rolls into the ER parking lot. I help her fill out my paperwork, and then it feels like only seconds pass before a nurse wheels me off to the maternity ward and preps me for childbirth.

Holy shit, this is happening.

“Josie.”

“Right behind ya, Soph!”

My best friend is here with me, not my baby’s daddy.

Did I just royally fuck up my life?

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

TANK

We arrive back at the clubhouse, feeling totally fucking dejected. Hours wasted, and we haven't tracked down any of the motherfuckers who thought they could come after my woman and scare her without blowback. "That was a fucking bust."

Ace nods, gripping my shoulder. "We'll find those fuckers. Wild Man is already on it."

I nod because I have no doubt about that, but I know I can't make Sophie stay here for long. "We have to hunt these motherfuckers down before they wreak more havoc on our lives."

"We will," he assures me, but I'm only half-listening as I pull out my phone and frown.

"What the fuck?" I rush inside the clubhouse wondering what's happened, and why I missed so many calls from Sophie? "Where is she?"

Kenna rushes up to Ace, sparing me a glance. "Sophie and her friend left. She's in labor."

"Kenna," Ace says sternly. "What happened?"

Her gaze locks with mine. "She went into early labor, and her friend took her to the hospital."

Gia adds, "They left a while ago, so you should probably get to Angel Harbor General right now."

“I have to go,” I tell Ace as I rush toward the door. Sophie is probably scared and pissed off at me for not being there.

“It’s too dangerous,” Ace growls, shaking his head. “There are too many threats out there for you to roam the city on your own.”

“I’m hardly gonna be *roaming the goddamn city*, Ace. I’m going to the goddamn hospital where my woman is having a baby. Same as your woman, not all that long ago,” I remind him. His expression doesn’t change, which pisses me off. “Look, I know what the risks are. If it was anything other than the birth of my child, I wouldn’t go. But you know I have to.”

“And if the Latin Mafia or Bloodthirsty Devils catch up with you on your way there? If Rojas uses this as the perfect time to strike back at us, then what?”

I shrug. “Then that’s a risk I’ll have to take.”

The last thing I want to do is disrespect my Prez or my MC, but he needs to understand. “I’ve missed so much of the pregnancy, and she’s had to go through it all alone, without *any* help,” I remind him angrily. “She’s been scared, threatened, and alone because I was locked up. Now that I’m not, I have to be there. I fucking have to.”

“Stone. Olly. Go with Tank to the hospital.” He turns to me with a serious expression that morphs into a smile. “Congratulations. Be safe.”

“I will, brother. Thanks.” I spot Olly and Stone, nod, and walk out of the clubhouse with my heart pounding in my chest. I’ve faced down terrorists, warlords, mass killers, and even a few bombers during my time as a SEAL. But a tiny little baby?

This has me scared shitless.

Olly and Stone flank me on either side, and I’m the tip of the spear as we haul ass to the hospital.

The minute I pull up to the hospital, a strange calm settles over me. Like in battle, I take a deep breath, let it out slowly, and prepare for the next greatest challenge of my life. *Fatherhood*.

The nurse looks up with a wide-eyed, worried expression as I stalk to the round desk between us. “How may I help you?”

“I’m looking for Sophie Harmon. She’s in labor.” I tap my fingertips on the desk nervously, and her expression immediately softens.

“Ms. Harmon arrived nearly an hour ago,” she says as her fingers fly over the keyboard. “She’s in room five-twelve. If you hurry, it’s says *labor in progress*.”

I stare dumbfounded at the woman.

“Go,” she says with a smile. “Now.”

“Right. Thank you.” I turn right and then left in confusion.

“Just follow the blue lines. They’ll take you to the fifth floor and right to five-twelve.”

“Right. Thank you. Again.” I move through the halls of the hospital, following the damn blue lines onto the elevator and then off. The fifth floor is a hub of activity, moans, cries, and wails from various rooms. The sound of new babies crying mixed in with encouraging words from nurses, boyfriends, and husbands soothe me until I’m standing in front of room five-twelve.

“You’re doing great, Soph. Just a few more pushes.”

Few more pushes. That means she’s close. The baby is almost here. I open the door and see Sophie lying on the bed with her legs in the air, a blue sheet protecting her modesty while Josie grips one hand.

“Tank,” she sighs. “You’re here.”

“Yeah, sorry I’m late.” I run a hand through my hair and smile at her. “Room for one more?”

“Absolutely,” says the masked doctor parked between her legs. “Get him dressed,” she orders one of the nurses. “We have a few more pushes before you get your baby, Dad.”

Before I know what the fuck is happening, I’m being wrapped in some thin tissue paper type of robe that a nurse ties behind me, and she shoves me to the side of Sophie’s bed.

“Hey,” I whisper to her, tucking a strand of dark hair behind her ear. “You all right?”

She nods, sucking in a deep breath, releasing a loud groan of pain as another contraction hits her. She reaches for my hand, gripping it tight as fuck until her contraction fades. “Fuck. It hurts, Tank.”

I look at Josie and then the nurse. “Is that, uhm, normal?”

“Perfectly,” the doctor assures me with a kind smile. “Okay, Sophie. We’re going to give it a good long push, take a break, and then your little girl will be here.”

“Girl?”

Sophie nods, squeezing my hand with a smile. “We’re having a baby girl, Tank.”

“Holy shit, a little girl.” My legs nearly buckle at the news, and I grip her hand. “A baby girl?”

“Okay, Mama. One big push.”

The next few minutes pass in a blur of colors and sounds. I stand beside my woman, letting her crush the bones in my hand while she brings our daughter into the world. I feel useless as fuck while Josie whispers encouraging words.

A loud cry rips through the room, bringing me back to the here and now. The first sound my daughter makes is a loud announcement of her entry into the world.

“Tank!” Sophie is near tears from the bed. “That’s her, our little girl.”

My throat tightens, trying to swallow the emotion down as the doc lays our little miracle on Sophie’s chest.

“Want to cut the cord, Dad?” the doc asks with a smile, knowing she’s handing over a life-changing moment.

I hesitate, but more out of awe than anything. My hands are more used to grit and grime than scissors meant for something so delicate, so precious. Sophie gives me a nod. “All right,” and I say, “where do I cut?”

“Just here,” the doc directs. I take a second, thinking, I can face down a rival gang, but this... “It won’t hurt her?”

“No, it’s fine,” assures the nurse, ready to jump in if I fuck this up.

With a careful motion, I cut the cord, my daughter’s lifeline to Sophie now a symbol of her first step into independence. Applause goes around the room, but all I hear is the steady beat of newfound responsibility.

“You did good, Dad,” Sophie murmurs, the warmth in her voice melting any uncertainty.

I stand there, a half-smile playing on my lips, as emotions threaten to upend the calm I’ve fought to maintain. Deep breaths, Tank. I can’t fall apart now, not when my baby and my woman need me to be strong.

The nurse comes over with a pink bundle of baby and asks Sophie, “Mama, you ready to meet your baby girl?”

“Absolutely,” she sighs, holding out her arms.

As I watch Sophie cradle our daughter, an intense love surges through me, raw and real. Her tiny fingers, her perfect toes—it’s all surreal. “She’s beautiful.” I don’t know how I push the words past my lips because my voice is shaky. Emotional.

“She really is, isn’t she?”

I nod, reaching out to run a finger down her soft skin, her dark, downy hair. “Gorgeous, just like her mother. You did a great fucking job, Soph.”

She smiles up at me with her heart in her eyes. “*We* did a damn good job, didn’t we?”

The baby opens her eyes and they collide with mine as if she knows exactly who I am, and I can’t help the tear that slides down my cheek. How could something so small cause such love and loyalty and protectiveness in me after just a few minutes on this earth? I don’t know, but what I do know is that there’s no dragon, no villain, no evil I won’t slay for her. “Hey, baby girl, I’m your daddy.”

“Hold her,” Sophie encourages, and that’s the last of my resolve crumbling as I hold her tiny body in my arms. I stare at my little girl, letting her know that nothing in this world will ever hurt her, nothing will ever tarnish her innocence.

“She’s perfect,” I say, and my voice cracks.

Sophie sighs. “She’s a perfect blend of the two of us, aren’t you, Hope?”

I look down at her. “Hope?”

She nods. “Yeah. It came to me last night. She gives me hope. For us. For our future. Is that okay?”

I nod. The room just got a little bit brighter. “Hope.” I roll it around on my tongue. “Hope is perfect. Right, Hope?” I can’t prove it, but I swear her rosebud lips curve into a small smile. “She’s on board.”

Sophie yawns. “I’m okay,” she insists.

“You’re more than okay, Sophie. You’re a certified badass, bringing our daughter into the world the way you did. But you’re exhausted, and you need to rest.” I grip one shoulder and give her a gentle shove against the pillows. “Hope and I will be right here.” I lean forward and kiss her forehead. “We’re not going anywhere. Ever.”

“You came through,” Josie says sometime later, arms crossed as she leans against the door frame. “Good. I’m glad.”

I know a threat when I hear one, but I’m not offended. I’m happy as fuck Sophie has someone like Josie looking out for her. “I came as soon as I heard,” I tell her.

Josie walks into the room with the authority of a best friend and says, “Just be good to her, to both of them. And don’t let your MC shit put her in danger.”

“I have no plan on letting that happen.” Hopefully, Wild Man will have some news about that soon. “They’ll both be safe with me. You will, too,” I tell her with a smile. “Whether you like it or not.”

Josie points at me. “Don’t make me like you, Tank. Keep my girl happy, and we’re good.” She smiles down at Hope, her

expression what Sophie calls *gooey*. “She’s adorable.”

“Hope, meet your Aunt Josie.”

“Hope?”

“Hope Rutherford,” I confirm with a proud smile.

“Nice to meet you, Hope. Auntie Josie will be back tomorrow with tons of things for you.” With another kiss for Hope and a lightning-fast hug for me, Josie leaves the hospital room, not sparing a glance at Olly and Stone.

I settle in the plush rocking chair set up in the corner, holding Hope while she sleeps soundly against my chest. Ace texts me a few times, but I ignore the messages, content to stay where I am with my girls.

This is it, this right here in this room is everything I need in the world. Fuck, this is my whole world.

I feel like a blubbering fool, like a fucking punk crying like the little girl in my arms. Hell, she cries less than I have over the past few hours, but I just can’t fucking help it.

“I’ll always keep you safe,” I whisper to Hope. “Daddy will make sure the whole world is yours.”

It’s a promise I damn sure intend to keep.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SOPHIE

“What’s all this?” The hospital room looks like it’s been visited by the cast of a cooking show with food piled on every available surface.

“I thought you might be hungry,” Tank says easily. “But I didn’t know what you were in the mood for.”

This man. My heart clenches at the shy expression on his face, like he’s unsure of himself. It’s so unlike the big bad, former SEAL I know and love. “Thank you.”

“Anytime,” he shrugs. “How are you feeling?”

“Good. Not as tired as yesterday,” I admit. “My boobs are a little sore. It took Hope a minute to latch on.” But once she did, the sight of her feeding the way nature intended brought me to tears.

“Want a massage?” He wiggles his brows, a playful smile on his handsome face.

“I’d love one, but we’ve got weeks to go before we can see that massage to its inevitable conclusion.”

“Just a massage, Sophie. For now.”

I let out a swoony sigh at his offer. For the past seventy-two hours, Tank has been nothing short of perfect, keeping me fed and relaxed. He even massaged my legs and feet because he said the stirrups looked uncomfortable. He brushed my hair and even helped me get in and out of the bed. “What did I do to deserve you?”

“You were just you, Sophie. I love you.” It’s the second time he’s said the words to me, and my heart soars, my soul calls out to this man as if he’s the one made just for me. “Eat,” he orders in that sexy, commanding tone.

“I can’t. My vagina hurts. Every time the baby latches on, I get cramps, and I want to scream. I feel like I’m having another baby. That shit hurts.”

“I’m sorry, babe. Anything I can do to help?”

“No, just let me bitch about it,” I say and pick at some fruit. Tank’s so good with Hope, already protective as hell even with the nurses.

When I woke up in the middle of the night, he was whispering something to her I couldn’t hear, and my heart nearly fell out of my chest. Pretty sure my ovaries exploded.

Tank looks at me with a wide smile so full of love I can’t breathe.

“Josie stopped by earlier this morning with a shit ton of things for you and the baby.” He smiles, nodding to the stack of gift boxes in the corner.

“I love you.” I blurt the words out with a bite of cantaloupe still in my mouth. It’s not how I pictured telling this man I love him for the first time, but nothing about our firsts have been perfect. We fucked for the first time in a supply closet instead of a rose-covered bed. He was in jail when I told him we were having a baby. It’s only right that I have no make-up on, a hospital gown and fruit in my teeth when I tell him I love him.

His expression brightens and then a gorgeous, heart-stopping smile spreads across his face. “I love you too, babe.” He leans forward and pulls me close for a kiss. “And I love your cantaloupe kisses.”

I laugh and shove him playfully, sighing at the normalcy of us being together like this. Like a family.

A knock sounds on the door and when it opens, it’s Stone. He flashes a wide smile at me, and it fades as he turns to Tank.

“We need to get back ASAP. Got some info from the Reapers.”

I watch Tank’s expression go from calm and easygoing to tense, like someone had just flipped a switch on his emotions. “Got it.” His gaze is fixed on the door until it closes completely. “When you’re good to go, we have to get back to the clubhouse.”

I frown. “Doc says we’re okay to leave today, but I don’t know what time. And we can’t go to the clubhouse. We have nothing there for Hope.”

He sighs. “There’s enough there to make it through a few days. If we need more, we’ll get it. Lockdown is still in effect,” he tells me with regret. “Has been this whole time, but I’m here with you.”

I hate the implication of his words, but I understand them. I know the MC is important to him, and I nod. “I get it.” I don’t like it, but I get it. “How long until we have to leave?”

“As soon as the doctor says you’re good to go, we go. Olly is downstairs with the van for my precious cargo.” He brushes a soft kiss to my lips. “Thank you for understanding.”

“Thank you for being here with us.”

“Always.”

FOUR HOURS LATER, I’m sitting in the middle row of the van, with Hope strapped into her car seat beside me. “Does it feel weird for you when you’re not on your bike?”

Olly, sitting in the passenger seat, says, “I told him I’d drive.”

Tank scoffs. “Not with my baby and my woman in here.”

I hear from the back seat, “Told you, man. That’s his kid.” Stone.

Tank looks at me through the rearview mirror with a smile. “Of course not. It’s just freer on the bike.”

“You just seem a little stiff,” I say and reach forward, patting his broad shoulders. “You nervous?”

“That’s a fucking understatement.”

“Language. We have little ears listening now.” I hear Olly and Stone chuckle.

“Sorry. Just not used to driving around with someone so damn tiny.” He grunts, but his gaze softens when he takes a look at the car seat even though he can’t see our daughter.

“You’re a good daddy,” I assure him. “It’s very sweet. And sexy.” If Tanks keeps acting this way, it’s going to be a long six weeks—or more—until I get the all clear to get naked with him. To celebrate being in love and being a family.

“Sexy, huh?” He wiggles his eyebrows, a move that never fails to make me laugh. “I’ll remember that,” he laughs as he turns into the parking lot to the Reckless Souls MC headquarters. Again.

I frown at the sight of Josie’s car. “Why is Josie here?”

“She’s your friend, right?”

I nod, keeping it to myself that she hates his MC. “That’s not an answer.”

“Isn’t it?” He smiles again before slipping from the driver’s seat and jogging around the van to open the sliding door. With quick fingers, he frees the car seat from its anchor and grabs our baby.

“No,” I say. “It’s not,” I answer and accept the helping hand he offers.

“I thought it was,” he says, clasping our hands together as we make our way inside.

My heart is racing, and my stomach does anxious backflips. This is something I have to get over. Tank and I love each other, and we’re planning a future together, which means I can’t hate his family. I have to find a way to make this work.

“Good?”

I nod eagerly. “Yep. Just great.”

Tank steps inside first, holding the door open with his back and motioning me to come inside with a strange smile on his face.

The first thing I notice is that it looks like a party is going on. “I thought this was lockdown?”

“It is,” he responds, lips parted into a proud smile. “Look around.”

I do and see pastel streamers and bells, a banner that says *Baby Shower* and baby decorations everywhere. Then my gaze drops lower to the throne with the word *Mama* scrawled above it, the stack of gifts on a long table against the wall. Two long tables of food and my best friend wearing a huge grin. “What’s going on?”

“It’s a baby shower,” Josie says loudly. “Duh.”

My heart is so full that I can’t respond. “I don’t know what to say. Why?” Why would these women put together a baby shower for me and Hope? What happened in the past week? “I don’t get it.”

Kelsey and the girls come over to me. “We didn’t welcome you the way we should have, and we’re sorry for that,” she says, rubbing her pregnant belly. “That’s not who we are, I swear. So, with a little bit of help from Amazon Prime, we were able to put together a party to celebrate you and baby Hope.”

Tears slide down my cheeks. I’m overwhelmed by this level of apology. Josie steps up beside me and Tank is on the other side, Hope now resting in his arms. “Uhm, thank you, ladies. This is more than I could’ve asked for.”

“This is who we really are,” Kenna says to me with a baby boy on her hip. “You caught me on a bad day, and it’s no excuse. I’m sorry. We’re family and we have to look out for one another, and that family now includes you and Hope.”

It’s still totally unbelievable because they don’t know me, not really. But here they are, showing me an act of kindness and celebration. “Thank you. I mean it, this is just wonderful.”

Letty steps forward with an apologetic smile. “Congratulations on your beautiful baby girl. Can I see her?”

I nod, swiping the tears from my cheeks. “Of course. She’s perfect.” And that one small act seemed to shift something between me and the rest of the women.

“I made you a cake,” Maven says with a beaming smile. “Tank says you worry about that killer figure, so I made it with beet sugar. Let me know how you like it. I’m always looking for new items to add to the menu.”

“Thank you,” I tell her in a shaky voice, hugging her to cover more tears. Where in the hell are these hormones coming from when my pregnancy is over? “Sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Kelsey assures me. “I cried at the drop of a hat for about three months after I gave birth.”

“I still cry all the time, and Ryder’s almost seven months old,” Kenna adds with teary eyes.

“Damn, girl.” Josie laughs and wraps her arm around me. “Now you’re part of the biker bitch mommy brigade. Do you guys have jackets or something?”

The women laugh, and Kenna taps her chin. “No, but I like the idea of the Mommy Brigade and matching jackets. I’ll look into that.”

Kelsey rolls her eyes. “See what you started?”

Josie shrugs. “That’s me, mistress of chaos. Sorry, not sorry.” She grabs me by the waist, leading me to the throne, but not before tossing a sash across my chest. “Ready to be the center of attention for the next few hours?”

“Not at all,” I grumble to myself. “I’m a hot mess.”

“You’re my hot mess, and you look beautiful,” Tank assures me, kissing my cheek before he disappears with the rest of the men. Whatever they’re up to weighs heavily on my mind.

The baby showers got all the trimmings, but beneath the streamers and the congrats balloons, I wonder what it really means to bring a child into this biker world.

CHAPTER THIRTY

TANK

“How’s fatherhood?” Shades smiles at me from his spot at one of the picnic tables behind the clubhouse, legs crossed at the ankles and a shit-eating grin on his face.

“Great. Perfect,” I answer with a wide smile. “Terrifying as fuck.”

“Ain’t it?” Coop agrees with a smile just as wide. “Amazing, too, though.”

Ace nods. “It’s like Basic Training, terrifying and exhausting, and you wish you hadn’t done it, but then you’re grateful as fuck that you did.” He’s shaking his head as though even he can’t believe the shit coming out of his mouth.

“That’s it exactly,” I agree. I haven’t been a father all that long, but every decision I make is about what’s best for my girls. “What did I miss?”

And that one question flips everyone back to MC business mode. Wild Man is there with his laptop open on the table and a cigarette hanging from his lips. “Thanks to your friend Riot and crew, we’ve got intel on the motherfuckers who went after Sophie. With their help, I managed to retrace the steps and track down the vehicles to their starting point.”

I’m holding my breath, full of anticipation and annoyance. “And?”

Wild Man grins like he’s enjoying teasing me. “Patience, man.” I lunge forward, and the pretty motherfucker smiles

again. “Calm down, dude. It’s the old man, Arturo Rojas. He’s been working with the Latin Mafia since he’s been locked up. They followed Sophie after she tried to visit you in County and passed the info along to him.”

“Son of a bitch.” Sophie and Hope will never be safe until the old man is dead and buried. “I thought we were getting rid of him.”

Ace nods. “It’s not as easy as we thought. The good news is we now have a guard in our pocket. And he’s not cheap.”

“And the bad news?”

“Rojas has been meeting with his attorneys regularly, making it pretty fucking impossible to get to him.” Ace lets out a long, frustrated breath. “We have to pay someone to do it. Riot has a couple lifers on the inside, but...” Ace draws out a long sigh.

“But?” I ask.

“It’s gonna cost us,” he answers. His tone is at odds with his demeanor. This shit has to be done, and we all know it.

“So? Money’s the only thing we have right now.” Between the money we made working with Rojas before we took him down, Morgan International, and all of our other businesses, we can fucking pay someone to kill that motherfucker.

Ace shakes his head as if I just don’t get it. “Do we really want another MC handling this for us?”

“If it’s only gonna cost us a little bit of cash to know that fucker is dead? Fuck yeah.” Dix looks at Ace like he doesn’t recognize him. “He’s not just a problem for Valentina and Sophie. He’s a problem for our existence. As long as Arturo is alive, he won’t stop trying to take us down.” Dix’s jaws clench tight, his dark gaze almost begs Ace to consider this.

“Looking at the federal inmates in with Arturo now,” Wild Man says, excitement in his eyes. “It’s a big ask, but the Iron Reapers have two lifers in the same facility and one in Arturo’s cellblock. What are we willing to give him?”

“Whatever the fuck is necessary,” Ace growls as if he’s found a new resolve. “Dix is right. Who knows who the fuck Rojas

will team up with next? He's priority number one. Once that's in place, we'll hunt down the Latin Mafia and get rid of them one by one."

Ace's words bring me a sense of relief. Sophie and Hope will be safe. "I'm down for that shit." The only way Sophie will feel safe is if those assholes no longer breathe the same air as she and our daughter.

"Shades, let's see what's reasonable to pay before I talk to Riot's Prez. Preacher, as the Chaplin, I might have you visit the lifers and make the ask. Discreetly. This isn't the kind of shit even the Iron Reapers can say on a phone call."

Preacher nods. "Just tell me when."

"Maybe we'll get Noelle to go with you?" I ask, chuckling cause I think I'm so funny.

Dix laughs. "Don't tell Gia. Killing an attorney isn't good for business." Everyone laughs because Noelle is a shark in stripper's clothing, and no woman in her right mind would be comfortable with her man taking a road trip with the woman who has both beauty and brains.

"Gia will be fine," Preacher grumbles. "Don't worry about us. Just keep an eye on Valetina. No way Rojas is coming after Sophie and leaving his only daughter who betrayed him alone."

Dix sobers immediately. "Fuck."

We all laugh, but Ace brings us back around to club business. "The help from the Iron Reapers isn't free."

"Yeah, we're gonna pay 'em off, right?" I say because what the fuck else do they want? I'm grateful for Riot's help, but nobody takes advantage of my MC. "What else do they want? The fight at County helped us both out so that debt should be square."

The fight with the Latin Mafia helped them keep control of the drug trade going in and out of the jail.

Everyone goes silent. Repaying a debt is something that always has to be done because you can't let fuckers have

anything to hold over you. It's a matter of honor as much as trust.

"What's the price?" Banger asks in a low, worried voice.

"The money is for the man on the inside doing Rojas. We still owe them for the intel on the Latin Mafia." Ace sighs and looks at each of us, a sure fucking sign he doesn't like what he's about to say. "There's a mayor in Tig Heights making life difficult for the Reapers. He's trying to use them to prove he's tough on crime or some shit, but he's happy to let it go for a price. And that price keeps going up. They need him to be dealt with. Permanently."

"We don't do murder for hire," Coop growls, clearly disturbed by this turn of events. "We're protectors."

"And if doing this protects the MC, what's the problem?" I understand where Coop is coming from, I really do. "Rojas isn't a threat that will ever go away. What we did to him and to his cartel, that's some generational feuding type of shit. Every breath he takes puts someone we care about at risk."

Dix nods. "I hate to say it, but I'm with Tank on this one. Valentina and I can't walk the streets safely if this asshole's still taking up space." He shakes his head, the threat to his wife one that lingers in his mind constantly. "It has to be this way."

Coop doesn't like it, but he nods. "We're just gonna put two in a mayor? Fine, just know the blowback will be on us, not the Iron Reapers."

"I feel like I got a few extra lives," Banger says with a cocky grin. "I'll do it."

"Everybody, just think about it for now. We'll talk about it again in a week and vote then. Just remember, this is about getting rid of Arturo Rojas for good."

Rojas is a constant threat that won't ever go away, but murder for hire? That's some shit that'll get us all locked up for life. The mood in the room is heavy, too heavy considering just on the other side of the door, the women are celebrating a new life. My daughter. Hope.

“I need a fucking drink,” Shades says, breaking through the tense silence and drawing a few laughs around the table.

“You and me both, brother.” Dix claps him on the back and turns to Ace expectantly, waiting for him to dismiss us.

“Dismissed,” he says and bangs the gavel with a reluctant smile. “Get outta here and go celebrate. Don’t forget to raise a glass to Tank.”

“Gonna raise the whole fucking bottle,” Lucky grumbles as he pushes off the wall and leaves the room. His stress is palpable—all of ours is. It doesn’t matter about the party atmosphere going on outside the door because we all have a decision to make.

Which of us will pull the trigger on that mayor? Who’s most capable of doing it without drawing heat on themselves or the MC?

“Fuck,” I groan and push away from the table, standing slowly, but the minute I’m on my feet, my legs move faster, eager to get back to my girls. As soon as I see Sophie, the storm inside of me calms down. It settles into something manageable because it never quite goes away. They are mine, and there’s nothing I won’t do to keep them safe.

Even if I have to pull the fucking trigger on Rojas myself.

“Hey, man.” Lucky appears beside me, handing me a beer with a smile on his face. “Congrats.”

“Thanks, brother. Means a lot.”

“I get it. There’s nothing I won’t do for Aria. Hell, I might even volunteer to take out the mayor myself. It could be fun.” The crazy fucker is smiling like he’s talking about going for a long ride on PCH.

“Fun? We have different definitions of fun.”

“Come on, brother. This is like prepping for a mission again, except the objective is clear, and there’s no political bullshit to wade through. It’s the dream mission, don’tcha think?”

“Maybe,” I concede. “But my baby girl just got here. I don’t want to even risk leaving her now.”

His smile fades. “Understandable. But I’d love to have you at my side to take care of this.”

“I’ll do it,” Stone says, a sly smile on his face. “Won’t be the first motherfucker I’ve smoked and surely won’t be the last.”

Lucky’s eyes light up. “Yeah?”

“Fuck, yeah.”

They do the handshake, fist bump, one-arm hug thing and laugh together, walking off into the proverbial fucking sunset.

Better them than me, I think before I make my way over to my woman and my little girl. “Hey, beautiful.”

Sophie turns to me with a huge, happy grin. “Hey yourself, handsome. Everything okay?” There are about a zillion questions swimming in her dark eyes, and I simply nod in response.

“One step closer to being okay, babe.” I pull her close and press our lips together, at least until Hope starts to stir between us. “Somebody’s jealous.”

Sophie laughs, and we both look down. “I don’t blame her.”

I lean forward and press my lips to her delicate skin, inhaling her sweet, clean scent. “Don’t be jealous, sweetheart. You’re daddy’s favorite girl.” I flash a wink up at Sophie. “And you’re my favorite woman.”

“Better be.”

Damn, I love this woman so fucking much. It’s scary at times, but right here, right now, surrounded by my brothers in arms, my family, it’s every-fucking-thing. “Always.”

“Good,” she whispers against my lips. “Is it too soon to go home?”

“Yeah, babe. We’re stuck here for the foreseeable future.”

“You know this really sucks. I just want to go home to my own bed. With you. And Hope.”

I kiss her forehead. “I understand. We’ll get there soon enough.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

SOPHIE

The more time I spend in the Reckless Souls clubhouse, the less surreal, the less threatening it all feels. They're no longer this elusive monolith that I can paint with the same brush, not the women or the men. Kenna, for example, is as bitchy as ever, but it's because she cares. These people are her family, and she is fiercely protective of them. But her sister Kelsey is totally chill, nice and sweet with a shot of steel going straight down her spine.

Some of the others I don't know what to think about, but since the baby shower they are slowly coming around. Valentina is a bit stand-offish, but she doesn't mean anything by it. Growing up in a cartel family has to take a toll on her. Letty is a sweetheart, and Gia is a tough girl, but no one is openly hostile.

Not anymore.

A shadow blocks out my sun a heartbeat before Kenna's voice sounds. "How's new motherhood going?"

I look up at her with her lopsided blond ponytail and tired hazel eyes, and I see myself when I look in the mirror each morning. We have more in common than either of us wants to acknowledge.

"Rough, but I'm adjusting. You?"

"Same," she sighs. "Ryder is finally getting his schedule down, but I'm always tired. And hungry."

I laugh at that. “Breastfeeding burns a ton of calories. I’d suggest increasing your calorie intake.”

Kenna cocks a brow at me. “While I’m trying to get rid of the last of this baby fat?” She scoffs. “And I was ready to apologize.”

I smile. “I thought the baby shower was the apology?” She glares at me, and I laugh lightly, careful not to wake up Hope.

“Seriously though, an extra three to four hundred calories will help, at least until you’re done breastfeeding.”

Her hazy gaze studies me, as if she’s trying to see if I’m full of shit or not. “Okay. Thank you.”

“No problem. Was there something else?”

Kenna opens her mouth like she has more to say but decides against it. She sighs, peeking over my shoulder where Hope is sleeping on my chest. “Are you planning on getting a job at the hospital now that the clinic is closed?”

“Yes. I mean, I think so. It’s too soon to think about it with Hope being so young. But eventually, I plan to return to nursing, and Angel Harbor General is the smart choice.”

Hannah is already working there, and she loves it. I know what she’s getting at and turn to face her. “I’m not trying to steal club money or whatever you’re thinking.”

Kenna laughs. “Oh, no. I wasn’t thinking anything like that.”

“Sure.” She’s protective, and since she’s the President’s Old Lady, she has to be. I get it, even if I don’t like it.

“I wasn’t. It’s just...never mind.”

“Kenna,” Ace’s deep voice sounds behind us, drawing gasps from both of us and a sleepy hiccup from Hope.

She turns with a smile for her man, and when I turn, I can’t help but smile at the picture the big strong biker makes holding his son in his arms. “Yes?”

“I told you I’d have this conversation with Sophie. Not you.”

Her cheeks blush, and her lips tug into a teasing smile. “I know, and I wasn’t *having a conversation*, just merely checking in on a new mama. That’s part of what I do. Right?”

Ace bites back a smile as he walks forward, handing the baby off to Kenna. “You’re fine, Kenna. But this is what *I* do.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’re lucky I find you so irresistible.”

“Of course you do. We’ll be inside in a bit.” I have to admire a man who dismisses his wife without making her feel dismissed. That was smooth. Then he adds, “Love you.”

“Love you back,” she says and carries her son back inside.

I don’t say anything. I simply wait for Ace to say whatever it is he has to say. Our last few interactions didn’t go how I wanted them to go, especially given that now our lives are all tangled up together. “How are you feeling, Sophie?”

“I’m fine. Tired but in a good way, thanks. How are you?”

“Same,” he laughs, shaking his head as he casts a sweet look down at Hope. “There’s something I want to talk to you about.”

“Okay.” I nod and press a kiss to Hope’s head, more of a comfort to me than to her. “What about?”

He sighs and takes the seat Kenna just vacated, resting his ankle on his knee. “A job.”

His words shock me. “A job,” I say flatly. “Doing what?”

His brows knit together in confusion. “We need a medical professional to have on call when we need her. Stitching us up and shit like that. I know it’s not exactly what you were doing with Nova, and it’s probably not what you had in mind when you became a nurse, but this is the kind of job best kept in the family.”

His words echo in my mind. *In the family*. I think about his offer carefully. A job with the Reckless Souls might mean that I can spend these precious first few years with Hope.

I’ve done what he’s asking me to do before, much of it right at Nova’s side, stitching up knife wounds, bullet holes and

setting broken bones. “I can do it,” I tell him hesitantly.

“But?” His gaze rests on my face as if he can see the gears churning in my head. “If this is about before, the stuff when Tank was locked up.”

“It’s not. I’m not one of you, and therefore, not privy to personal information. I was just scared.”

He nods. “You *weren’t* one of us, now, you are. Now you’re fucking family, Sophie and that shit from before? It’s dead and buried.”

I nod, unsure what else to say about that. “Thank you for saying that, Ace, but that’s not the *but*.”

“What’s the but?”

“Well, there’s a lot I can do as a nurse. I saw some pretty traumatic injuries at the clinic. And I’m very good at what I do. But what I can’t do, at all, is write prescriptions. So if you need anything we don’t have, I’m not your girl. You’ll need a doctor for that.”

“Yeah, okay. I’ll get with Nova to see how we can remedy that.”

“Okay, then. I’ll do it.” It’s a job so that I can make a living and show Hope that even if she has a man like Tank in her life, it’s important to be able to take care of yourself.

“Great. Thank you, Sophie.” He stands, shoving his hands in his pocket. “The pay is good. I won’t take advantage of you.”

“I know,” I smile up at him. “I know you’re a good man, Ace. Things were just a little heated and emotional before, but I know taking care of this MC is a big responsibility. I’ll help in any way I can.”

“Thanks.”

I nod. “You think Tank will be all right with this?”

Ace frowns. “It was his idea to ask you. Had me do it so you’d know we all agreed.”

Dammit, I love that man. “Okay, then.”

“Okay.” He nods and heads toward the door.

“Oh, Ace!”

He stops and turns. “Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

He flashes a friendly smile. “No, Sophie. Thank you.”

And then he’s gone, leaving me with just a little more hope for my future than I had when I walked into the clubhouse. “You hear that baby girl? Mama’s got a job.”

I got the man, the baby and the job.

I got it all.

EPILOGUE

TANK

“I’ll be back soon. Promise.” I whisper into the phone just outside the FBI building in Los Angeles, my head on a swivel just in case. Banger and Wild Man are inside talking to Agent Stiles about those BTM fuckers who tried to kill him. “How’s Hope?”

“She’s fine,” Sophie whispers. “Finally asleep after someone smothered her in his big broad chest and then left before she was fully asleep.”

I smile. My little girl loves nothing more than cuddling with her daddy. “Not my fault. On driver duty this morning,” I tell her without telling her anything else. Ace’s orders, not because we don’t trust the women but because today’s mission is strictly need-to-know.

“You’re being safe?” The worry in her voice has the unique ability to make me feel one hundred feet tall and like a cared-for little boy.

“Always, babe. Gotta get back home to my girls. I promise.”

“Okay. I don’t want to distract you; I’ll see you when you get here.”

“Okay. Tell my girls I love them.”

“Girls?”

“Yeah,” I say. “You and Hope.”

“Love you, too,” she sighs and ends the call before I can tell her that I love her even more.

I keep my head on a constant swivel because that’s why I’m here, but also because there’s static electricity in the air, charged like some shit is about to go down. I can’t describe it. I felt this way too often in the SEALs right before a mission, a kill shot, a raid. The same tingling that reminds me to stay on my game.

Alert.

Focused.

Ready.

It’s weird as fuck being out here in the wild without my *kutte*, but Ace and Dix thought it was a smart move not to broadcast our cooperation with the Feds in case any allies or enemies spotted us, and word got out. I lean against the black SUV casually, looking left and right. For anyone watching closely, I look like a driver waiting for a passenger. Nothing more.

But the tingling intensifies, and I push off the truck, taking in my surroundings a little more carefully, noting the couple strolling down the street hand in hand. They smile up at each other and talk softly, ignoring everything around them but one another.

There are a few old guys in the park across the street sitting at a covered table playing chess or checkers, taking a beat to watch the women jogging in tight, brightly colored clothing.

Cars line both sides of the street, almost none of the meters are expired and there’s a lull in traffic, except for a dark blue sedan that I chalk up to lost tourists based on the out of state plates.

“Goddamn, that was rough!” Banger’s voice sounds, and I turn to face the building again. He’s shaking his head and wearing a lopsided grin. “Stiles doesn’t fuck around. I’m surprised she didn’t ask me how long my dick is.”

“Don’t worry,” Wild Man says, clapping Banger on the back. “He was about two minutes away from whipping it out to show her anyway.”

“She acts like I’m still some young gangbanger.” He’s shaking his head, his smile is there but fading, anger darkening his gaze. “Like this is some long con, or maybe I brought the shit on myself.”

“She’s just making sure you don’t make her look like a fool. Tough for women in a job like hers,” Wild Man offers with a sympathetic shrug. “For what it’s worth, I think she believes you.”

“Yeah?” That one word makes Banger look like the kid he’d been when he ran with the Bloodthirsty Devils.

“Yeah, man. She was just pushing you hard to make sure you were believable. Cops do it all the time.”

I watch Banger carefully for a long minute to make sure he’s all right. “It couldn’t have been easy, reliving all that shit.”

“Fuck no, it wasn’t. But,” he sighs. “It’s done though, and hopefully the Feds will help us eliminate those fuckers sooner rather than later.” He lets out a long, slow breath with the weight of the world on it. “Let’s get the fuck out of here!”

“Let’s stop at *For Goodness Cakes*,” Wild Man says. “I need some sugar. And a few pastries, too.” The teasing glint in his eyes makes us laugh.

My laughter fades as I round the black rental and stop to watch the same dark blue sedan roll back up the street. “Guys,” I bark and nod toward the street.

“Jumpin’ at your own shadow?” Banger shakes his head and slips in behind the passenger seat, slumping down and closing his eyes, the first real sign of the effect that remembering the shooting took on him.

I stare at him for a long minute before I slip behind the steering wheel. “Not fucking likely, brother. That’s the second time that car rolled up this street.” I start the engine, and Wild Man jumps in beside me.

“They’re probably lost with all the fucking one-way streets around here.”

“Maybe,” I say absently, but I don’t believe that shit, not for a second. I’m not a man who leads with emotions or gut feelings. Fuck that, I use instinct and mine tells me that something is up. “Just stay alert. Did you get what we needed?”

“Not yet,” he says with a smile, pulling the tablet from the glove compartment and tapping something out on the screen. “In about two minutes, I’ll go back in to pick up the leather bag I *accidentally* forgot, and then I’ll have what we need.”

I wrap my hands around the steering wheel until my knuckles turn white, my jaw clenches, and my gaze bounces to all the mirrors.

“Chill out, brother. We’ll be out of here in three minutes, and I’ll buy you a Maven Cake for your troubles.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I grunt, still unconvinced.

Wild Man’s watch beeps, and he darts from the car, slowing his stride as he climbs the steps to the FBI building and back inside. I know he’ll flash that smile that makes women swoon, apologize in his charming way, and then some guard will walk him through the metal detector where he can get his bag.

It’s fucking wild the way he’s able to charm his way into just about anywhere, and today I’m glad for it.

“All right, fuckers, let’s go get some sugar.” Wild Man’s focus is on the tablet screen as soon as his ass hits the seat. Banger leans over the back of Wild Man’s seat, and I’m straining my neck until it aches to see what’s on the damn tablet. He laughs and looks up at me and then Banger. “Either of you know what you’re looking at?”

“Intel,” Banger says, the *duh* at the end of the sentence is silent. “I’m calling Ace. He won’t want us to sit on this.”

“There it is,” Wild Man’s voice buzzes with excitement. “Rojas has a court date coming up in a few weeks, and some of the agents are taking bets on whether or not he’s taking a deal. If so, what he’s going to say?”

“You think he’s taking a deal? That seems unlikely.” He seemed like the type of old school gangster who’d rather die

than rat out his friends.

“The only thing that makes it okay to be a rat is if it’s in pursuit of vengeance.” Wild Man taps his screen. “He’ll be in lockup for just a few hours before court, which means they’ll move him into a holding cell about twelve hours before that.”

“That’ll be the perfect time to hit ’em,” Ace says. “We got a guard and a Reaper on the inside. I’ll make some calls.” The call goes dead, and a quick silence settles inside the car.

“That fucker is so dead,” Wild Man says almost giddily.

“First the old man and then Ghost,” Banger growls from the backseat.

“Sounds like a plan,” I agree before flipping down the turn signal and turning the wheel, ready to merge into traffic. But the sight of that same fucking blue sedan stops me. It’s parked on the opposite side of the street, and the driver’s door opens. Ghost steps out. “Guys, check it out.”

“Motherfucker,” Banger mutters, shaking his head in disbelief.

My hand goes to my piece at my side. “What the fuck is he doing here, and how did he know we’d be here?” I refuse to believe it’s a coincidence.

My gaze lasers in on Ghost, and his shit-eating grin like he’s gotten one over on us. He leans against the car, arms folded and legs crossed at the ankles, looking like he doesn’t have a care in the world. Then the fucker waves with one hand, rapping his knuckles against the window with the other.

The passenger door opens, and all I can see at first is a crop of dark hair, shot through with silver, and when he turns, I see the scar on his face. The one I left on him. “Un-fucking-believable.”

Banger taps my shoulder. “You know that crackhead?”

“Yeah. Manny Olivera, one of the Latin Mafia. Whooped his ass in County.” And now that motherfucker is free. “This, none of this shit is a coincidence. You think both of them are in Rojas’ pocket now?”

“I think the enemy of my enemy is my friend exceeds all other points of war, and that’s exactly what’s going on. War.” Three enemies united against us.

Me and my brothers.

Our women.

Our families.

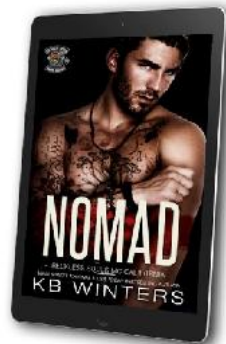
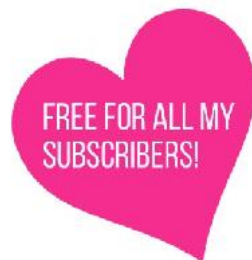
My woman.

My daughter.

These sorry-ass motherfuckers won’t know what hit ‘em.

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THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Thank you so much for reading my books! It means the world to me and I appreciate all of you!

If you can leave a review, or even tell your friends, I'd be honored.

Thanks to all of my beta readers, ARC readers and [Facebook](#) fans. Y'all are *THE VERY BEST!*

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I love you all.

Hugs!

KB xoxo



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KB Winters is a Wall Street Journal and USA Today Bestselling Author of steamy hot books about Bikers, Billionaires, Bad Boys and Badass Military Men.

Just the way you like them.

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