



these deadly  
VOWS

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USAT & WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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# **These Deadly Vows**

I've been kidnapped by a ruthless biker.

A killer who is at war with my father.

Vicious only wants two things.

Control of Chicago and me.

Forced into a marriage of contract to a man much older than me, I'll do whatever it takes to survive.

When he learns my secret, will these deadly vows save me or be my demise?

These Deadly Vows is book 1 of Black Rebel Riders' MC Chicago

# **Dedication**

To all of us who read these toxic fictional men and love every filthy second.



# Chapter One

## ADELINE

Knees shaking, heart beating a million miles a minute, I stare at the blood splattering my clothes and my hands. None of it belongs to me, thankfully.

“Drink this. It’ll help,” a female voice instructs, thrusting a glass of liquor into my hands.

I take a hearty gulp as she along with another woman strip my soiled clothing from my body down to my underwear.

“Hurry up. Wipe that blood from her face,” the one who offered me the drink barks at the other.

I blink, trying to memorize their faces, but I can’t focus. I’m minutes away from marrying a monster.

A man who lives up to his reputation.

### 3 HOURS AGO

“Happy Birthday, princess.”

“Thank you, Dad.” I touch the diamond necklace draped across my throat. “You shouldn’t have.”

“Only the best for my girl.”

“I love it.”

“Good. This party cost me a fortune.”

I narrow my eyes at him. Money has never been a concern for him.

His olive eyes that match my own in color soften around the edges. “It isn’t every day my favorite daughter turns twenty-one.”

“I’m your only daughter,” I tell him. Not that he needs the reminder. No. My father is well aware that there is no son to step in and fill his shoes. The day my father dies, this kingdom he’s built will crumble. His enemies will burn me and all he’s worked for to the ground so they can take over unless he marries me off to someone powerful enough to protect me and his legacy.

He’s not getting any younger. I worry about his declining health more than he realizes. He’s tried to shield me from the threats on my life. But I know the life I was born into. The mafia has a code. One written in blood. Family is everything. We bleed for our family, and we die for them, too.

“Roberto is here.” He squeezes my shoulders and kisses my cheeks.

“Ugh.” I don’t hide my dislike of the man my father has been grooming to take his place. Not only as the head of the family. My father assumes I will do as he wishes and marry him.

If only I had a choice.

But I'm a woman in a man's world. My father's word is golden until I'm married and become my husband's property. That's all daughters are in this life. Bartering chips. Pawns in a deadly game of life and death.

One wrong move and it's all over.

"Don't start. You know he's a good man, Adi."

"I don't love him." I will never love that creep. He has this way of staring at me with such intensity that I know he's undressing me with his eyes. It's vulgar and repulsive.

"I didn't love your mother the night I married her, but we grew to respect each other. Love has nothing to do with it."

"How can I respect a husband I don't love?" I hold back my tears, hiding my weakness. My emotions.

"You're making what's left of my hair fall out." He kisses my cheek again. "Now, be good and do as you're told. Roberto plans to propose. Don't embarrass him or me. He's worked hard for this. He's earned it. I'll rest easy knowing you're in good hands when I'm gone."

"Stop talking like you'll die any minute now."

"He understands the delicacy of your condition. And has agreed to certain terms that will ensure you're protected and that my legacy doesn't end with you. This is all for you."

"Right. All for me." This has nothing to do with me. It's all about his stupid pride. I don't know why he couldn't have

taken a second wife, one who could give him the sons he always dreamed of having.

He shoots me a faint smile as though he can read my thoughts and leaves my bedroom.

Leaving me with my morbid thoughts.

There's only one way out of my situation and I'm much too selfish to go down that road. This life is unfair. I can kill myself or get the fuck over it.

Still though, I sense there's something he's not sharing with me. I've snooped through his calendar. Gone through his desk. My father is thorough at guarding his secrets, but there's no hiding the weight he's lost over the past six months or that he doesn't have the same energy and vibrance.

He no longer holds meetings and defers everything to Roberto.

Everyone is waiting for him to take over, even if they don't voice the opinion. Not that they would. If word got out that my father is of poor health, his enemies would make their move.

I walk out onto the terrace that overlooks the gorgeous pool of our Sheridan Road home in Northern Chicago. Father rarely stays here these days. This house is mostly for show. For his private parties. I spent a lot of time here with my revolving door of nannies. None of them ever lasted long enough for me to form any sort of emotional attachment to them.

I suspect my father had relations with them and fired them once they became clingy. Once they wanted more from him.

He's married to the job. To the power. To the mafia.

Sure, women have tried to earn a permanent spot in his bed, but none of them were my mother with whom he loved wholeheartedly. Something rare. In this life, it isn't often we marry for love. Not girls like me, anyway.

We don't get a choice in who or even when.

We're groomed from the moment we enter puberty to be a loyal and obedient wife.

There's no being courted for marriage. No dating.

At least not without my father's permission.

That doesn't mean I haven't had boyfriends, but what I want doesn't matter.

Nope. Only the word of powerful men and a handshake is all that matters.

Trust no one and never be the one who loves someone more. Those are the last things my mother told me before she succumbed to ovarian cancer when I was seven.

I moved into the upper level of the cabana house when I was sixteen.

Determined to have a sliver of independence.

At least with Roberto, as sleazy as he may be, he respects that there's one thing I'll never be able to give him.

I suppose deep down I've always known it would come down to this. My being forced to marry a man I have no regard for.

Watching the fleets of cars enter the gate, I know it's time to make my grand entrance.

Outside of my bedroom, in place of my guard, Roberto waits to escort me to the party. I'm sure he overheard the conversation I had with my father. I've not made a secret of my distaste for him.

Other women see him and think he's hot, but I know him. He's a pig in Armani.

“Adeline, beautiful as always.”

I force my lips into a semblance of a smile. “Thank you,” I manage to mutter without the words coming out strained and rude. I didn't do any of this for him. The tight nude dress with a black lace overlay, giving the appearance that I'm naked beneath accentuates my curves in all the right places. Truth be told, I'm dressed for my own funeral. That's what having to accept his proposal is like.

Agreeing to the terms of my own death.

As soon as his ring is on my finger, the bastard will want to consummate the union. To cement his place as the next Capo.

“Would you like me to go down on bended knee, darling?”

Bile hits the back of my throat. “Don't be ridiculous.”

“I wanted to do this the proper way, but you refuse me at every turn.”

“Because I don't want this.”

“Pity, because despite your bitchy attitude, I still want you. And I intend to have you, Adeline.” He digs into his pocket and produces no ordinary ring. I’d know the diamond anywhere. My mother never took it off. Not even to bathe.

I’ve always known it would one day be mine. I hadn’t been foolish enough to dream that I would receive it from a man I could one day learn to love. I’ve always known it would boil down to this.

Giving myself to a silver-tongued devil.

Roberto slides the princess cut diamond onto my finger with vile thoughts of deflowering me blazing behind his devious eyes, no doubt. Too bad for him that’s a piece he’ll never have of me.

At least not willingly.

“Perfect.” His lips brush my knuckles, and it takes every ounce of self-control I have not to vomit on his designer shoes.

“Shall we?” He holds his arm out for me to take.

“Yes.”

He leans toward me with a sinister and knowing smirk. “Big night for both of us.”

“Maybe for you.”

“I don’t know why you fight it. I will enjoy breaking you in and teaching you to behave. Your father’s been too easy on you.”

I know he's baiting me. Hoping for a reaction. The sadistic asshole gets off on getting a rise out of me. I'm not giving him the pleasure.

"You smell divine."

*And you smell like shit.*

I keep the thought to myself.

He makes me physically ill. Bitterness burns at the back of my throat as he slides a hand to my lower back, guiding me toward the main house.

I bite back the hostility that churns in my stomach and steel my nerves for the night ahead.

The first of many with a man I hate by my side.



"Adeline, you look gorgeous. Spitting image of your mother. She'd be so proud."

"Thank you, Donatella." I air kiss her cheeks. My mother never liked her and for good reason. She was one of the first of many to offer herself up to take my mother's place before her body was cold.

I can't stand her fakeness, but maybe if Father had accepted, I'd have a brother who'd be becoming a made man right about



now. Then it wouldn't matter as much who I married as long as the family benefited in some way. I don't have the same luxury as some of my cousins. They have options and I would too if I wasn't unable to perform the most important duty of a wife.

When I was fourteen, I woke in the middle of the night in terrible pain. They thought it was my appendix but turns out it was a cyst that had ruptured and upon further investigation a tumor was discovered. By fifteen, I'd lost an ovary and a fallopian tube. At sixteen, I had some tests that came back abnormal. My father feared I had the same cancer as my mother, and he made a decision. One that took away my choice to ever be a mother.

I hated my father for a long time, but I know deep down that he did it out of fear of losing me the way he lost her.

“Are you okay? You've gone white as a ghost?”

I blink away the bad thoughts and memories. “Only hungry. I haven't eaten a thing all day. Wanted to make sure I'd fit into my dress.” I touch her arm lightly and grab a flute of champagne off a tray of a waiter passing us by.

My stomach churns and I know if I drink one drop, I'll throw up.

“Of course.”

I leave her to make my rounds. Putting on a performance like a prized show pony eager to earn my ribbon while Father and his associates are off making deals behind closed doors.

More like Roberto is using him like his personal puppet. Paying off officials. Greasing whatever palms necessary to keep business running as smoothly as possible to keep a foothold on our territory.

I smile and nod at all the appropriate times. I know my every word and move are being scrutinized not only by the wives, but by Roberto's lackeys.

I'll be forced to bend at his will after tonight.

I'll no longer be under the watchful eye of my father. I should consider myself lucky that he waited until now to force the issue.

My cousins were married off at eighteen to fulfill their duty to the family. Bearing more soldiers for the never ending war to control the streets of Chicago.

Had life unfolded differently, I'd be married off to someone in New York or Las Vegas. To secure an alliance between families. Instead, I will marry the devil I know.

I wish Carla were here, but she just had to go to Italy on spring break. I envy her. I wanted to go with her, but my father needed me here.

It's all led to this moment.

## Chapter Two



**LORENZO**

**FIFTEEN YEARS AGO**

“I’m proud of you, son. With this union comes many great things. For the organization and your place at the head of the family when the time comes.”

I nod at my father as he puffs on his cigar, proud as a fucking peacock. What he doesn’t say is I’ll be King of his empire the second he takes his last breath.

My marriage to Victoria has been arranged since I was five. The day she was born, our fathers signed a contract, brokering peace between our families. I wish her old man could be here to witness the big day, but even more so, he’d be proud to know that she carries my son. The heir to both our fortunes. He’ll be the prince of Chicago. Everyone will love him, but they will also fear him.

“You’d better wake up Santiago.” He shakes his head. Things got a little wild at my bachelor party last night. “I’ll go see if Tori is ready to make an honest man of you.”

“We both know there’s nothing honest about me.” I grin and the palm of his hand whips across the back of my head in a flash.

“You come from my loins. Don’t be disrespectful. Today is a joyous occasion.”

A dark shadow passes over the windows of the church like a bad omen. My gut tightens. A bead of perspiration forms above my top lip.

“Don’t be nervous. Tonight will be the biggest celebration Chicago has ever seen.”

“I’m not nervous.”

“Would be a fool if you weren’t. Don’t think your mother hasn’t noticed the five pounds your soon to be wife has packed on.”

I stare at my shoes and purse my lips. My mother. God love her. She still believes that Victoria is a virgin. Hell, I claimed her innocence on her sixteenth birthday. It was a struggle to hold off till then. We’ve always had chemistry. That’s why we had to push the wedding up. Victoria told me she was three months pregnant six weeks ago.

I couldn’t keep it from my father. He and his men know every move I make.

My father leaves and I slap Santiago’s cheek.

“Wake up. I’ve got a wedding to attend.”

My dearest friend in the world scowls at me, then breaks into a wide smile.

The bastard is still drunk. He pulls a vial from his pocket and sniffs before offering it to me.

If I go out there loaded, my father will be the least of my worries. Victoria will never let me hear the end of it. She wants today to be perfect, and I intend to give her the fairy tale. The wedding she's always dreamed of.

I shake my head as the rapid sound of machine guns fills the air along with screams. My blood turns to ice as ringing sounds in my ears.

Santiago and I take off out the door as the footsteps of the guests in attendance echo through the hallway as they flee.

Armed soldiers shoot everyone in their path, but all that matters is getting to her. To my soon to be wife and our unborn child.

Santiago jerks me back into a room and presses his back to it.

“Get out of my way.”

“I can't. You know my orders.”

“Step out of my way before I break your fucking neck,” I seethe as a rage I've never felt before courses through my veins.

I don't want to kill my best friend, but I will if he doesn't move.

More gunfire erupts and I grab Santiago by the collar of his shirt, easily overpowering the brute due to his nasty hangover.

“Fuck.” I mutter as his mouth opens and blood pours out.

His body jerks as another bullet pierces him through the door.

I can die with him, or I can live to fight another day.

I watch the light snuff out of his eyes and take a deep breath.

I’ve always known death would come for me, but not today. I take off my family ring in a hurry and shove it on his finger. Let them think they’ve won.

That I perished with the rest of my family.



### SOMETIME LATER

I down my shot and motion to the bartender for another. “Keep ’em coming.”

The man shakes his head. “You won’t find what you’re looking for at the bottom of that glass.”

“The fuck would you know about what I’m looking for?”

He smiles at me through his beard. “More than you know.”

“Whatever, man.” I’m not interested in hearing his sad story. We’ve all got one.

He looks around the bar and leans in close. “Heard you were dead,” he mutters casually. “But I don’t believe in ghosts.”

“You must be Merc.”

“You want to know who had the cake to put out the hit on you and your old man.”

“I have my suspicions.”

“But you don’t know who, and dead men can’t make moves. The answers you seek are damn expensive.”

“I’m good for it.”

“You mean you were. That stash of cash you pulled from the family vault will run out before you ever get close enough to knowing the who. Wiped your whole famiglia out. How’d you manage to escape before the church blew?”

“Just lucky I guess.”

“Or cursed, depending on how you look at it. Do you drink moonshine?”

“On occasion. I don’t see what that has to do with what I’m after.”

“I can help you, but you gotta do something for me.”

“What’s that?”

“Do you ride?”

“Had a Ducati.”

“Where you’re going, you’ll need a Harley. I know a guy.”

I bet he does. A man like Merc has friends in many places.

Mostly low.



### **PRESENT DAY**

I stare at the torn and wrinkled photo of Tori that I keep in my wallet and wonder what she'd think about what I'm going to do. Would she be proud or repulsed?

Today has been fifteen years in the making.

Marco stole the life I should have had. Stole the future of my child.

Tonight, I take what is rightfully mine. This city and his daughter.

All the key players have gathered in one spot as they once were on what was meant to be the happiest day of my life. Lambs waiting for the slaughter.

I've paid my dues.

Paved the road back to Chicago in blood.

Worked my way up the ranks in one of the most notorious motorcycle clubs.



I swore an oath to my men and them to me.

Revenge will be mine.

Rolling up to the gate knowing my brothers have my back, adrenaline pumps through my veins.

It was easy enough to buy our way onto the guest list and duplicate the invitations.

I've been planning for months. Staking them out. Learning routines. Getting people in place right under Marco's fucking nose.

His newest housekeeper. His daughter's driver. The chef catering for tonight's party. All of them are on my payroll.

They'll never know what hit them. Once I'm through the gate, I park and wait.

Right about now, all the guests should be going out to the back patio for the firework display. Dinner, dessert, and drinks laced with sedatives have been served. Not enough to kill them, but to do what the drug was made for. To put them all to sleep. Everyone but my targets.

Some of my men are already inside posing as staff and security. Marco likes to indulge his men and hires out for occasions such as this. No phones or weapons were allowed past security. A mistake on his part. One he'll never make again.

I check the time on my watch and exit my vehicle once I've sent out the mass text. One word.

**Now.**

I can't wait to see the look on the smug bastard's face when he realizes I'm alive.

That after all these years, he didn't get away with what he did.

One by one, his guests and men will drop like flies and those who don't won't be spared.

No one is leaving here the way they came.

I'm storming his castle and stealing his princess.

My men come out from the shadows, having been transported in earlier in the back of a catering van armed and ready with silencers on their weapons if we need to put anyone down.

Marco Ricci will bleed for me.

I waltz through the bastard's front door.

"Can I see your invitation..." the elderly man wearing a damn penguin suit pauses, unsure how to address me. I flash the butler my invitation right before I stab him in the throat with my favorite knife, striking a major artery, leaving him to bleed out on the marble foyer.

There are always casualties in war, and I spare no one.

You can either be on my side or get the fuck out of my way. And if you're in my way, you're dead. Like the old fuck on the floor. In the dining room, guests are already passing out face first in their desserts. A woman wearing a ridiculous poofy

purple dress with blood running out of her nose opens her mouth to scream, but Capone snaps her neck before she utters a syllable.

We take out anyone still standing until I reach Marco.

The bastard is sitting on the upstairs terrace smoking a cigar and indulging in hundred-year-old scotch as I knew he would be. The man is predictable. A creature of habit.

I remember seeing him here on this very terrace before I was a made man. He offered me a puff of his Cuban and laughed when I gagged so hard I nearly puked.

He doesn't even go for his gun when I step up behind him.

"Pour yourself a drink," his gruff voice calls out as he waves his cigar toward me.

"That would be a bad idea, considering I have drugged it."

He coughs and studies my face. No recognition evident as our eyes meet. "Do I know you, son?" He's much older now. Pale and balding. His skin droops around his eyes, showing how poor his health truly is. I know the bastard thinks he's dying from colon cancer. The mind is a funny thing. If you tell someone they're dying, they'll do one of two things. Give up or fight like hell.

Marco chose the first option, proving what a spineless coward he truly is.

I could tell him the truth. That I paid his doctor to give him some bullshit test results.

However, I want to watch him continue to suffer.

I smile sardonically. “Something like that. My father knew you well. Was one of your closest friends from the old country. Was engaged to your sister before she killed herself.”

His eyes crinkle at the mention of his sister. Few know the story of his family’s shame.

“That was a long time ago.” He stares at me harder. His eyes widening as he likely remembers me younger with less ink and without a scar ruining one side of my face. “So you survived, after all.”

“So you admit it?”

“I did what I had to.”

“Then you’ll understand what I’m about to do.”

He knocks back the last of his drink, ignoring the fact that I told him it’s been drugged.

“And my daughter? Is she—did you?”

He can’t even say the words.

“Alive for now.”

“What do you want?”

“To see this. The look on your face. To hear the fear in your voice as you wonder if I’m going to rape your daughter in front of you before I send you to Hell.”

His face pales as more fireworks go off with a resounding boom.

*Thwack.* I punch him square in the jaw and kick him in the stomach, sending his chair toppling over. “Get up.”

He struggles to get to his feet.

Fucking pathetic.

I unzip my jeans, whip out my dick, and piss on him.

“Tie his ass up,” I order Capone.

“Fuck, man. Couldn’t you have waited to piss on him after?”

I shrug. “Handle it. I’m going to find his daughter. Don’t worry, Marco. I won’t make her choke on it just yet.” I laugh as he attempts to lunge for me, earning him a kick to the face from Capone’s boot.

## Chapter Three

# ADELINE

### EARLIER THAT SAME NIGHT

“I’m pleased to announce that I’ll be gaining a son. Adeline has accepted Roberto’s proposal,” my father announces as I knew he would.

“To Roberto and my daughter.” He raises his glass, and everyone sings their congratulations. No one notices that I don’t join in on the celebration. All I want is to disappear. Go off the grid somewhere. Dye my hair and change my name. No matter where I attempt to run to, they’ll find me.

Roberto would follow me to the ends of the Earth to get what he wants. He’ll stop at nothing.

I smile when prompted, careful not to allow my true emotions to slip and expose the cracks. Not that anyone here cares what I desire. They aren’t here for me even if they brought a birthday present. It’s what is expected. Not bringing me a gift would be an insult.

More trinkets to donate. At least someone out there benefits from the efforts made.

I have nothing to celebrate.

The party moves to the back of the estate for the fireworks. I use the distraction to escape to my room.



Kicking off my shoes, I then unzip the back of my dress, allowing the fabric to gather at my waist. All I want is this day to be over. To escape this nightmare, even if it is only in my dreams. Though sometimes even they aren't my own. If Roberto and my father could control them, I know they'd damn sure try. All my life, I've been a prisoner of this life. A sentence given the day I was conceived.

At least I will never pass on the burden.

I rub the pad of my finger over the diamond ring I wear. Is this what my mother wanted for me? Would she welcome my fate with open arms? I suppose she always knew this would be the case. I'd never been allowed to marry for love. Only duty and to honor my family. Some honor. To spread my legs for a disgusting man I loathe.

"Sneaking out on the celebration so soon?" Roberto's smooth voice cuts through my thoughts like a knife through

butter.

I had hoped he'd been too busy gloating to notice my absence.

I cross my arms over my chest.

“No need to cover up on my account. By the end of summer, you'll be my wife.”

“Don't remind me.”

“Why do you make things difficult?” He steps closer, running a finger along my cheek.

“If you don't mind, I've had a long day.” I swat his hand away.

The fireworks boom in the night sky at a deafening level. Father had to get a special permit for the display.

“You're missing the big show.”

“The sparks out there can't compare to the ones I could make you experience.”

I curl my lip and shimmy the rest of the way out of my dress. Might as well adapt to being seen by him. Under normal circumstances, he wouldn't be allowed in my room without permission. Without a proper guardian. Now that we're engaged, and hands have been shook, there is no looking back.

This is my reality.

A life with Roberto until his luck runs out and an enemy makes a move to take one of us out. The party tonight wasn't about me or celebrating my birthday. It was to secure the



foothold this famiglia has on the city. To be certain that the top associates remain loyal when my father passes the torch to Roberto.

“You know you’re beautiful, Adeline.”

I roll my eyes at his cheesy line and go into the bathroom to wash off my makeup and change into my pajamas, hoping that he takes the hint and leaves.

I jump at the loud booms of the fireworks popping off in rapid succession over Lake Michigan, signifying the grand finale. I’ve never been a fan of loud noises. The night my mother died, there was a thunderstorm. As though Heaven was angry and weeping so strongly for her loss that our house shook as she took her final breaths.

Since that night I’ve always hated rain, but especially thunder.

Back in my room, Roberto is fingering the undies in my drawer like a pervert.

“What are you doing?”

His callous gaze meets mine. “Deciding what color I want you in on our wedding night. I’m thinking white.”

“Black would be more suitable. Considering it’s my funeral.”

“Keep behaving like this and I can arrange it. I don’t need you nearly as much as you do me, sweetheart. Your old man isn’t for this world much longer.”

“He’d cut out your tongue if he heard you speaking so ill of him.”

Roberto wraps my hair around his finger and tugs as he gets in my face. “We both know he’s not physically capable. You can either rule by my side or be buried next to him,” he grits the words against my lips as though he’s kissing me without making contact.

“I hate you.”

He lets go of my hair and grabs me by the shoulders, giving me a shake so violent that my teeth rattle. “You can hate me, but that doesn’t change the circumstances we’ve found ourselves in. I’ve wanted you since you turned eighteen. I knew you’d be mine, Adeline. Might as well accept that you’re my woman now.”

I gather spit in my mouth and hock it right between his eyes.

Anger flashes in his features as he throws me down on the bed, holding me in place with his weight as he goes for his belt.

“Get off me,” I scream in his face.

“Shut that mouth or I’ll shut it for you by ramming my dick down your throat. Seems you need taught a lesson about how a wife is supposed to behave.”

“We aren’t married yet.” I spit at him again.

The back of his hand whips across my face with a sickening thwack that sets my skin ablaze as though I’ve been struck by the hot side of an iron.

I wiggle against him, clawing and scratching at his arms as he yanks my pajama shorts down my thighs. I roll to my belly in the struggle, forgetting that he can just as easily rape me from behind. Hot tears roll down my cheeks as I struggle to break away from this sadistic monster.

“The more you fight, the harder I get.” He rubs his erection against my ass as proof that my thrashing beneath him gets him off.

I kick and scream, but no one will hear me over the sounds of the party.

I wrestle my way to the floor. I’m no match for Roberto or his strength. He pins my arms over my head with one hand while I continue to buck my hips. The coppery taste of blood seeps into my mouth from my split lip.

“Hold still, you fucking stupid cunt.” He grunts as I get one hand free and poke him in the eye.

His weight presses down on me with such force he may as well weigh a ton.

The lights go out, bathing us in darkness.

“What the fuck?” the bastard curses. Something wet splatters across my face. His body drops against mine and I stare into his surprised, dead eyes.

I open my mouth to scream as more blood leaks from the corners of his mouth and into mine.

I seal my lips closed and shove against his shoulders when his body is rolled off me.

I expect to see one of my father's men, but instead I find a man I've never laid eyes on before.

"You're welcome," a deep, gravelly voice cuts through the tension and my shock. I look over at a very dead Roberto and back to the bloody hand that's outstretched for mine.

"Th-thank you." I accept his hand, too stunned to say much else in the moment.

Motionless, I stand before this avenging dark angel while he puts my soiled clothing back in place.

"Did my father send you?"

A chuckle erupts from his throat. One that holds no humor.

"Answer me," I demand on a shout, fighting the urge to stomp my foot like a child. "What are you doing here?"

"You aren't asking the right questions," he mutters.

"Why did you save me?"

"All in due time. We've gotta go."

"I'm not going anywhere with you. Where's my father?" I stare at this brutal man as the moon burns bright, casting a glow around him well enough that I can see he's a biker, judging by his black leather vest covered in patches.

"Alive, if that's what you're asking. For now, at least."

A cold shiver moves down my spine and I shudder at what his words imply. He's not a friend of my father. That much I know. I've overheard conversations about territory disputes. Is that what this is about?

“Are you going to kill me?” I manage to spit out in a whisper, though I’m not as afraid as I should be.

I don’t know this man. But I have enough sense to know he’s dangerous.

“Not yet. Not until I get what I want.”

“And what is that?”

“Your father took something from me. I’m here to reclaim what’s mine.”

I nod. I guess that’s fair enough. Maybe he will find what he came for and leave without further damage. There is one silver lining. This stranger did solve my Roberto issue. Now I no longer have to marry him.

“What did he take? Maybe I can help.”

His lips lift as if he may smile. I’m not sure what’s so amusing about the offer. “Everything, Adeline. He took everything.”

The room temperature seems to drop as he stares at me, waiting for me to connect the dots.

“Let’s go.” He wraps a bloody hand around my upper arm, and I have too much self-preservation left in me to attempt to fight him. He took out Roberto in seconds. What would he do to me if I resisted?

A demand for ransom will be made.

My father will pay to ensure my return.

Covered in Roberto's blood, I'm thrown into the back of an SUV that blends in with the other cars lining the driveway. Duct tape over my mouth and plastic ties secured around my wrist and ankles. I'm a Dateline Friday Night Special Report in the making.

The man stealing me from my room snaps a photograph with my own cell phone. I'm assuming to send as proof of life to my father to start negotiations. I'm lucky to be alive.

I can only pray that this man keeps me that way by the time this is all over.

There have been other attempts to kidnap me in the past, none never made it this far.

No one has ever made it past the gate.

Now I'm being driven through it.

Taken captive by a man I have no reason to trust.

This has always been a possibility.

That someone far stronger or smarter would make their move.

All I can do is lay here and accept my fate.

There's no escaping.

There is no cheating the stars.

I try to get into a comfortable position, but there is no comfort in being abducted.

If my mouth weren't covered in duct tape, I'd demand he at least tell me where he's taking me.

You'd think having committed murder and kidnapping someone, he'd be driving like a bat flying out of Hell. Not obeying every traffic law.

The murderous maniac doesn't spare me another glance until we arrive at our destination.

Our destination is an underground parking garage.

The left back passenger door flings open, and a hand grips my ankles. "I'm going to cut these," he gives the plastic ties a jerk, "don't get any bright ideas," my abductor warns.

I doubt I'd get far, presently. Pins and needles are shooting up and down my arms and legs from my awkward and cramped position. I'm not sure if I can even stand. The tight binding has cut the blood supply off to my feet.

The moment the blade of his knife slices through the plastic, instant relief floods my senses.

Sliding my ass to the edge of the seat, the asshole sits me upright as he continues to cut the ties securing my wrists.

"This will hurt," his voice comes out softer, almost as if he cares about inflicting any pain. His rough, calloused fingers brush my cheek. There's a gentleness as he proceeds peeling one corner of the tape. He yanks quickly. The adhesive rips from my skin loudly, breaking the skin on my lip.

I flinch and let out a hissing sound.

His thumb swipes across my lip, smearing the blood to my ear as he studies my face.

“Prettier up close,” he murmurs.

I jerk away, creeped out that he’s been spying on me. How long has he been planning this and how did he go undetected for so long? There’s no time to think about it because he slides me out of the vehicle.

“You good to walk on your own?”

I nod and immediately my knees give out. He catches me before I plant face first on the cement. I stare into his dark eyes, unable to read his mood.

He glances away first, putting an end to our staring contest. I lean against him for support, hating that I need to. He grips me at the elbow, forcing me into a nearby elevator as more blackened out vans and motorcycles roar up, pulling into their designated spots.

A sea of mean ass bikers meets my terrified gaze as I shake my limbs and wiggle my fingers as the doors close. I regain my feeling and ability to stand without support. Only now do I get a better look at my captor. Dark slicked backed hair with a square scarred jaw. He’d be a handsome devil if he wasn’t an enemy who may possibly murder me.

The elevator stops on the twentieth floor and opens to a bilevel penthouse apartment.

The first thing I notice is the view. The second is that we’re not alone. There’s armed men and three women all staring at me clad in nothing other than my bloody pajamas.

These bikers have money to afford a penthouse like this.



I know because my father owns two.

When I think about bikers, I've always envisioned the underbelly of the city. Not luxury.

"Take her upstairs," my kidnapper barks, and the next thing I know, I'm being escorted to the second level of the apartment.

Knees shaking, heart beating a million miles a minute, I stare at the blood splattering my clothes and my hands. None of it belongs to me, thankfully.

Entering the room, I realize what this biker wants from me.

## Chapter Four



I exchange my leather cut for something I've not worn in fifteen years.

An Armani suit.

Tonight is a special occasion.

It's my wedding night.

Have to look the part.

I stare at my reflection in the mirror, touching the scar on my cheek.

Events from the past flood my thoughts.

The way Victoria's eyes lit up when she showed me the positive pregnancy test.

How excited she was to go cake tasting for our wedding.

The way she'd always demand an I love you before I left the room, even if I would only be gone for a couple of minutes.

I imagine how gorgeous she must have been on our wedding day, dressed in white in a gown fit for royalty. Her dark hair shiny and straight. The nervous butterflies that must have been fluttering in her stomach at the thought of announcing her pregnancy to both of our mothers.

She'd planned to tell them after the ceremony before we left on our honeymoon and our life truly began.

The life I was meant for.

I was never supposed to be President of Black Rebel Riders' MC, but here I am.

Rings on my fingers and the blood of my enemy staining them. I lit him on fire for the fun of it, but quickly put out the flames. Couldn't have him dying without witnessing me making his daughter my ol' lady out of spite. Thankfully, she's a pretty little thing. A bit young for my taste with fifteen years separating us. At least at twenty-one, she's not jail bait.

I watch as she marches down the stairs on the verge of tears doing this all for the love of a man who doesn't deserve her loyalty. A man who gave her to a piece of shit like Roberto.

I may be a killer, but I'm leagues better than that sick ass mother fucker. I had Rash tailing him. Dumb ass had no clue he was being watched. Spotted him getting pegged on more than one occasion by some old bitch. Donatella something or another.

Everyone has their kinks, but I can't imagine this angel before me would have ever been able to stomach it.

I glance toward the balcony, loving that no one can stop me from taking her for myself.

I'm going to corrupt Marco's princess. Defile her. Use her.

She licks her lips like a temptress, and I know I'm going to enjoy breaking her in.



## ADELINE

“Drink this. It’ll help,” a female voice instructs, thrusting a glass of clear liquid into my hands. I stare ahead over her head at the wedding dress spread out on the bed.

“Ghost gave explicit instructions.”

So that’s his name.

I take a hearty gulp that burns my throat as she, along with another woman, strips my soiled clothing from my body down to my underwear.

“What is this?” I gasp.

“Moonshine,” the shorter one says, as though I should know.

“Hurry up. Wipe that blood from her face,” the curvier of the two snaps at the other.

I blink, trying to memorize their faces, but I can’t focus. I’m minutes away from being forced to marry a monster.

A man who lives up to his name.

Ghost.

He crept into my room undetected like one.

Maybe they should call him Stealth or Demon.

My mind flashes to his face and that scar that runs the length below his right eye and jaw and I wonder how he earned the ugly mark.

I’m betting it was well deserved.

I’m being used to declare war on my father.

What his crime was remains to be revealed.

All I do know is if I want to live and for my father to live, I have to say two words.

I do.

At a midnight wedding.

The women then shove me into the shower, where I’m not allowed the privilege of modesty as they scrub me clean, erasing all remnants of the last few hours. As though Roberto wasn’t murdered while attempting to rape me.

Not that I’m sad about his demise.

I'm too freaked out about the next half hour of my life to process all that has happened.

What happens if I refuse this man who rescued me from one hell to toss me into the flames of a much scarier inferno.

"There's not enough time to wash her hair," one of the women fusses.

"An updo," the other counters.

I'm pushed and pulled in several directions as they dry my body and redress me in dainty white lace. I move on autopilot. Raising a foot or arm when prompted. The slinky, white satin wedding gown is pulled down over my head and shoulders, fitting me like a glove. I step into the matching heels.

Is this really happening or am I having a bizarre dream? Maybe I blacked out during my fight with Roberto. I pinch myself as the women secure my hair on top of my head. A few loose, blood-stained tendrils of my golden hair frames my face.

I'm not wearing an ounce of makeup, but it isn't as though it matters what I look like as long as I say those two words. Two words that cement this new future. Married to a man I don't know.

A biker, of all people.

Downstairs he waits for me in the living room of the penthouse, having traded his leather for a suit. I must confess, the sight of him in a suit with his dark hair slicked back makes for a sexy portrait, but the style doesn't quite fit him. I

wouldn't think a man like him would own something I won't say expensive, because motorcycles aren't cheap. Classy, I guess, is the correct choice.

His icy gaze rests on my lips and I lick them on instinct, wetting them in anticipation of this kiss of death. Either way, my life was already over from the moment it began. What a great inheritance my father and mother passed onto me. Generation after generation, this tradition of the mafia has played on a loop, until me. The legacy my family built will die with me.

It ends here with these deadly vows.

I glance around the room and my gaze catches something on the balcony.

A person. A man strapped to a chair.

An audible gasp rips from my throat and I choke on my own spit as an outdoor light flickers on, shining a spotlight on my bloody and beaten to a pulp father.

I step forward, intent on going to him when those rough fingers dig into my arm in a painful grip. "Not yet, princess. He's here to witness our union. That is, as long as you play your part. If not. Your old man will end up like your pal, Roberto." Ghost loosens his grip on my arm, exchanging it for my chin to direct my attention to a covered platter on a nearby table.

A chubby biker with a name patch that reads Butcher winks at me and lifts the lid.

Bile shoots up my throat, nearly coming out of my nostrils as my gaze lands on Roberto's severed head. If I didn't know better, I'd think it was a Halloween decoration, but I'd know those haunting brown eyes anywhere.

I hated Roberto, but I can't stop the moisture that gathers in the creases of my eyes. The tears aren't for him. They're for me.

I've always known I live in a cruel world. Seeing the brutality up close and so damn personal almost has me wishing he was the monster about to receive my hand in marriage. Almost. Sure, I've seen or heard things, but my father did his best to shield me from the savagery of it all.

To a point. Moreso when my mother was alive. Probably at her request. As I grew older, it became harder for him to hide men leaving his office with a broken nose or missing a finger. But never was there a severed head.

I stare back at where they hold my father hostage. His head could all too easily be next, but I need to know why. No one goes to such violent ends for an insult or territory disputes.

Not even men like Ghost.

"When you said he took everything from you, what did you mean by that?"

He cups my cheek, moving in close, bending his head to meet mine. Liquor tainted breath caresses my lips before his mouth descends.



Instinct tells me to jerk my head away to prevent his lips from touching mine, and yet I wait with anticipation laced in my veins for his next move.

“Fifteen years ago, your father ordered a hit. Made a power play. My pregnant fiancé and my father were gunned down on the church steps on my wedding day. And if that wasn’t enough, he blew up the church, killing everyone inside.”

“Everyone but you,” I return in a horrified whisper. “And now you’re back like a ghost risen from the dead to reclaim what he stole.” I look back at my father. His life hanging in the balance, and I see the truth in his eyes. He looks at this tattooed and scarred biker before me in his fancy suit and he knows Ghost will kill him and likely me, too.

“Don’t pity either of us, princess. I’m afraid you’ll be collateral damage once this is over, and I have what was meant to be mine.”

“What do you want from me?”

“A son,” he proclaims coolly.

A strangled chortle escapes me. I don’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“Is that all?” He has no clue how wrongly he’s chosen.

I can’t give him what he desires, but if I confess that information now, he’ll have no use for me.

I glance back at my father once more, hating him for what he did to me as a teen. Hating that he brought me into this dangerous game. Yet I can’t bear the thought of him dying.

He's all I have. My only true family.

“Can I negotiate the terms of our agreement?”

He scratches his chin. “I'll consider your demands.”

“If I marry you and agree to produce a child, you'll let my father live. Once the child is eighteen, I get to walk away.”

“Your father already negotiated.”

“And?”

“He wanted you out after the child was born, all parental rights relinquished to me. But if you want to stick around longer, I can arrange it.”

I swallow back any smart remarks. None of this matters. Once he learns my secret, I'm dead anyway. I'm only prolonging the inevitable.

“Let's do this then.”

The biker holding a bible steps forward, and I burst out laughing at the absurdity of this whole scene. My father tied to a chair, Roberto's head on a platter, and a holy biker.

What's next? A whore on a unicorn.

“Something funny, princess?”

“Nope.” I make the motion of zipping my lips, locking them, and throwing away the key.

The biker officiating has a chaplain patch making him official. He's an older man. Older than the man I'm to marry.

“Get on with it, Goat.”

Great. I'm being married by a man named Goat. Perfect.

"Family. Friends. I use both terms loosely." I can feel the heat of his gaze hitting me when he says loosely. "We've come together tonight to witness the union of our Prez and Adeline."

"Speed this along," my husband to be gripes.

I don't know where to look other than my shoes. If I see Roberto's head again, I may faint. If I glance at my father again, I may be tempted to push him over the edge myself. If I focus on my husband's brutal yet handsome face, I might be tempted to pretend I'm enjoying this. At least he has nice eyes.

Goat rushes through the formal vows and I murmur my I do. My compliance seals the deal.

Not that any of this would truly ever hold up, considering I'm being forced under duress. However, men like Ghost and my father tend to get what they want. Money always talks. Greed rules this city. Along with violence.

So much violence.

I stare up at my husband and his cold gaze lands on me.

Neither of us wants this.

Not truly.

I'm sure there are women who'd happily give him a child.

Knowing his history with my father makes it all odder. Why does he want to marry the daughter of an enemy? Why not kill me to make my father suffer the pain of my loss?

At least with Roberto, I knew he found me attractive. That maybe a part of him. A small sliver of his heart held a place for me, even if misguided. Ghost, though, looks at me with malice.

There's no love or lust in his gaze as his eyes bore into me.

“You may now kiss the bride.”

Ghost leans in close once more. His arm snakes around my back as he jerks me into his hard body. My pulse spikes as anticipation floods me.

His mouth descends, and I close my eyes, expecting his lips to press to mine. They barely brush my cheek. I wasn't expecting a grand kiss that would sweep me off my feet, but the cheek is like an insult.

His mouth hovers near the edge of mine and I wonder if he's going to go in for the kill and seal the deal with a real one, but he only inhales deeply and continues to stare at me.

He has this weird look on his face like he wants to kiss me but is afraid to.

I lean forward and pucker my lips in permission, and I have no idea why I'm doing it.

I'm surprised by the softness that greets me. The warmth of his tongue traces the seam of my mouth, pressing firmly, seeking entrance between my lips.

I open to him, afraid of what will happen if I deny him this kiss. One I hope will be our first and last.

Kissing my husband is foreign, yet our lips move in tandem. His tongue glides along mine with a controlled finesse that has me ready to submit to his every wish. I wasn't expecting him to be such a skilled kisser. His grip on me tightens and momentarily I forget that I hate him.

That he hates me.

For this moment, we're lost in each other.

In our kiss.

In our embrace.

Until someone clears their throat and the reality that I'm wed to a man that hates me sets in.

There's no applause.

No congratulations.

No celebration.

Ghost releases me so harshly he practically shoves me away, as though he's both surprised and disgusted that his lips touched mine. "Say goodbye to your father."

"You said you made a deal."

"This is me keeping my word. Until you uphold your end."

He means a son.

Something I can never give him.

I rush onto the balcony as orders are given to dispose of Roberto's head.

"Fa-father," I release the endearment with a choked breath.

His eyes come to mine, full of regret.

My father knows my burden.

My secret.

He did this to me.

“I don’t know what to do,” I whisper while I remove the gag from his mouth, not caring if the defiant act earns me my husband’s wrath.

My father releases a shaky breath as blood dribbles down the corners of his mouth. I’ve never seen him so weak before. Defenseless. He wears the look of defeat. He’s done.

He’s given up.

There’s no fight left in him and the sight has me ashamed.

All his talk about family and loyalty.

Where are all his men now?

Why aren’t they storming the building to get us out?

How did a gang of bikers infiltrate our family deep enough to take not only me, but my father?

“Adeline,” he croaks. “Apple of my eye. I wanted a better life for you.”

I shake my head. That’s not true. If he wanted a better life for me, he would have let me go. Sent me away even. Instead, he promised me to Roberto and now I’m married to a biker named Ghost. Who knows what his true intentions are?

He's not bound by the law of tradition, where a man's word means everything.

I can feel Ghost's presence behind me. "Your father has asked for an honorable death in exchange for your life and his territory."

His words penetrate, but a numbness spreads through my limbs and my heart.

"Promised him, I'd take care of you. Show you more kindness than he ever did my famiglia."

Ice coats my spine. His bride and unborn child. Slaughtered by my father.

I may as well die here with him.

Ghost will never treat me with any true kindness or hold me in any regard.

I could give him ten sons and he'd still despise me.

Ghost slides a knife into my palm. The cool metal rests heavy in my grasp.

I glance up at him. I could easily attack him, but the way he holds my stare tells me he knows I won't. That if my father instilled anything in me, it was honor.

"Straight through to the heart, princess."

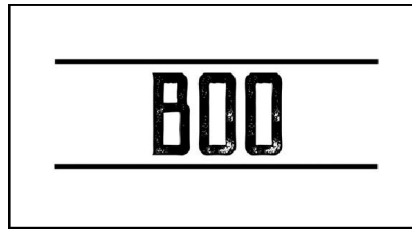
I shake my head, but Ghost circles his rough digits around my wrist.

My father nods for me to do it.

I suck in a tearful breath as my husband pulls my arm back and drives the tip of the knife through my father's chest. Not once. Not twice. Not three times. Seven total.



## Chapter Five



“Do you think he really went through with it?” Stray asks me as she cuts the V in her tee deeper to expose more of her cleavage. She’s been showing off her new tits any chance she gets since her breast enhancement surgery healed. They look great, but I’m tired of seeing her nipples. Like we all get it. She has tits now.

I shrug and refresh my lipstick. I doubt Ghost married some uppity spoiled brat. I can’t picture him serious with anyone, let alone married. He’s not the relationship type. I know that better than anyone. I’ve been fucking him for the better part of three years.

“Someone’s salty. It’s not like he won’t still have you on the side.”

I don’t need her to remind me.

“How does this look?” She flips her red hair over her shoulder, pushing her chest out.

“Desperate.”

Her mouth drops. “Fuck you, bitch.”

“At least I’m up front about it. I don’t sugarcoat, sweetheart.”

“Whatever. We all can’t have the club Prez licking our ass.”

“Not just my ass.” I smirk and she laughs. “Come on. We’ve got work to do.”

That fucking dickhead Axe better have stocked the coolers like I told him to. Asshole thinks he doesn’t have to lift a finger because of who his daddy is. He’s no better than a prospect but walks around here like he owns the damn place.

When Stray and I get out to the bar, he’s behind it replacing one of the kegs.

“Hey, Axe. Need any help?” Stray squeezes her tits together and I roll my eyes.

“Nah, but thanks, sweetheart. I appreciate the offer.” His gaze lingers on her chest.

I guess she’s getting that attention she’s so desperate for.

“Well, you know where to find me if you do.” She deflates and goes into the back to grab the clean glasses.

“Why don’t you put her out of her misery and fuck her already? Or is it that you want to fuck one of the brothers instead?” I grab his dick and give him a squeeze.

“Don’t start with me.”

“But you’re just so fun to toy with.” He grabs my hand, bending it back as I pout at him. “Come on. Show it to me.”

“You wouldn’t know what to do with it.”

“Ghost doesn’t complain.”

“That’s why he’s marrying that chick he’s obsessed with.”

“He’s not obsessed with anyone.”

“Not you, maybe, but her. I wouldn’t be so sure.”

“Who is she anyway?”

“Careful, you sound jealous.”

“Puhlease. I don’t get jealous.”

“Keep telling yourself that when he fucks her in front of the whole club.”

“Whatever. I don’t care.”

He chuckles and I throw a dirty towel at him.

Jerk.

What would he know about how Ghost feels? Nothing. If this information was coming from Capone, his right hand and club Vice President, I might take stock in what’s being said. Axe though. No way.

I roll my eyes at him and finish getting setup for tonight, making sure the club’s signature moonshine that was sent as a gift to Ghost is on display. The special anniversary blend was sent from the national President personally. Rebel Black.

I’ve never had a proper introduction, but I’ve heard plenty of talk about him.

Club members funnel in through the doors.

Time to get to work and push thoughts of Ghost actually being in a relationship out of my mind.

He doesn't love her.

He can't.



“She’s so pretty,” Taco murmurs in my ear as we watch Ghost and his new wife make their grand entrance.

It’s true. Whoever the bitch is, she’s beautiful. A blonde bombshell. Thin waist, nice rack. Is she wearing my shorts? What the fuck is she doing in my clothes? All I see is red as he draws their clutched hands to his mouth to kiss her knuckles.

She’s wearing a wedding band.

He actually went through with it.

He married her.

The unobtainable bachelor.

If I wasn’t seeing this with my own eyes, I’d never buy into it.

I hate her and I don’t even know her.

I don’t need to.

Ghost is mine.

He's been mine for three years.

Sure, he has been with other women, but I'm the one he always comes back to.

Taco and Stray don't even try for him. They know better.

And after tonight, this bitch will learn her place too.

I don't like to share, and I'm not about to start now.



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# ADELINE

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The sound of the knife hitting the cement patio rings in my head. My father sits slumped back. Blood dried to his chin. All life drained from him.

I thought I'd want to scream. To cry. To punch my husband right in the face, but I'm clinging to that numbness. To feeling nothing at all. Because if I let in the pain, I'll never escape it. I won't survive the weight of what I just did.

Carved out my father's heart for his enemy. If he were still breathing, he'd tell me he dug his own grave by the choices he

made. A violent end for a violent man. This was the life he chose. Not me.

Ghost offers me no comfort. And like the night my mother died, thunder booms in the distance. I hope it's a sign that they've found each other on the other side.

I smile at the thought. That somewhere in the universe they're dancing again. I imagine them how I last saw them at one of their many parties. When I'd sneak out of bed and peer at them below. Peeking between the banister slats to witness him twirling her around the floor in one of her fancy dresses. She loved dressing up. Loved how he only had eyes for her.

I thought they were the fairytale.

I'd sit on their bed and watch her sit at the vanity to do her makeup. Making note of every product and every step. Down to how many dabs of perfume she wore and where she placed each one. Counting how many seconds she'd rub her inner wrists together. Precisely three seconds. No more, no less. She was beautiful, and I wanted nothing more than to be her.

To grow up and fall in love with a man who would love me that intensely.

That we'd only have eyes for each other like my parents.

Then the curtain was drawn back, and I learned that most of it was all lies built on the bones of men my father murdered.

Only when the rain pelts my skin, washing away the blood of my father along with my sins, do I turn my back on his

lifeless body. I walk into the flames of Hell with my head held high.

I did what he wanted. Gave him an honorable death at the hands of the one person other than my mother he loved most in this world.

Me.

The daughter he never wanted because he was never granted the love of a son.

I was his burden and now I am his end.

In every end comes a new beginning.

Some would call this tragic, while others might say it's poetry in motion.

That it's life.

The way things are supposed to happen.

I don't know what I believe.

All I can do is focus on taking my next few breaths without crumbling. Because if I think about anything else I may take a run and go at the balcony so I can find my mother in the next life.

So I can ask her if this is the life she wanted for me.

I already know the answer to that question.

No. Which is why I need to fight for one she would have wished for me.

The bikers. The members of Ghost's club gaze at me with respect. Not that I care what they think of me.

Ghost owns me now.

My prints are on the bloody knife used to kill my father and likely Roberto.

There's nowhere to run.

No one to turn to.

I'm on my own.

No one is coming to save me.

I square my shoulders and stride to the bar to pour myself a drink consumed by hate for what I've been forced into.

A marriage of contract to the most powerful criminal in the state. For he now holds the better part of Chicago while I'll inherit my father's fortune. Making me richer than God on one condition.

I produce a male heir to carry on the legacy.

I know that will never come to fruition, but my husband doesn't.

Amber colored liquor burns down my throat. Once again, I'm splattered in the blood of another. Wordlessly, I go up to the bedroom to shower and change into something clean.

Scrubbing my skin raw won't erase what's already transpired. All I can do is try to survive this nightmare. This new reality.



I know nothing about being married to a biker. There's no handbook. No one who gives a damn to explain the way this world turns.

With a towel secure around my torso, I return to the bedroom to find something to sleep in. Not that I think I'll be able to stop my mind from racing. In one of the dresser drawers, I discover a white tank top. It will serve the purpose. In another drawer are new, skimpy underwear with the tags attached. I help myself to a pair and wonder if these things are here for me or if they belong to someone else. Not that it truly matters. I'm in need and this is what is available. My search for pajama bottoms or shorts leaves me frustrated.

The bedroom door swings open, and Ghost enters the room. His eyes land on my nipples protruding through the tank.

Heat flashes in his stare as he takes in the sight of me in the barely there scrap of lace someone in this place considers underwear. He stomps toward the closet as he discards his suit, leaving it in a crumpled pile on the floor.

No underwear. I'll give him one thing. The naked view from the back isn't a hardship to appreciate. I'm not sure of his age. Only that he is older than me. He has a nice ass and beautiful swirls of ink across the expanse of his back, along with the club's emblem. A skull with a crow sitting on top of it.

He shrugs a dark tee over his head and pulls on a pair of jeans before throwing a denim pair of cutoffs my way. "Put these on."

"Why?"

“Party. Downstairs.”

“I’m not in the mood to celebrate.” I want to attend another party like I want a hole in my head. Happy fucking birthday to me. When I blew out my candles, this wasn’t what I wished for. Not exactly. But I guess this is what people mean when they say God has a sense of humor. He must be laughing his ass off at the hand he’s dealt me.

“I didn’t ask.”

Reluctantly, I pull the denim over my hips. I’m not ready to test his patience further than I have. Not yet. My emotional wounds are too fresh. Too much has transpired tonight, and his tone is full of venom.

“Some of the guys will move your shit in tomorrow.”

I lick my lips and choose my words carefully. “I was thinking I could live at my house still. You could come visit to consummate things. That way, I’m not in the way of things here.”

Ghost chews over my suggestion. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you? The second you get a taste of freedom, I’ll never see you again. That’s not going to work for me, princess. You’re my wife and it’s important now more than ever that we’re a united front. I’m not your family’s only enemy. I simply got to you first.”

His words are harsh, but they penetrate.

With my father gone and me tied to Ghost, he’s inherited all the problems that come with being at the top. Everything that

my father owned becomes mine the second his death is announced, well it all goes into a trust until I provide a son. I don't know how that delicate situation will be handled.

Ghost will gain all of my father's territory by proxy because I'm his wife as long as he earns the respect of the famiglia with the birth of a son or at least the promise of one. In a way, it works like the succession of royalty. I'm an only child, therefore the role goes to my husband and then to our son when that time comes. Only that's not going to happen.

This is all too much.

I stare at the silver infinity wedding band on my left ring finger. The weight of the meaning behind the design is far too great. He intends to keep me.

Forever or until death parts us.

He pauses, staring down at my bare feet. "You'll want to wear shoes for this."

My only option is the heels I wore with my dress. I look ridiculous.

My husband is back in his leather vest and all business as he escorts me to the elevator. He stops me from entering, placing a palm to my stomach, almost as though he's imagining me pregnant already. "A few things I need to set straight. This is my kingdom, and you'll do as I say. Don't talk back to me or my men. You show them the respect they deserve, and they'll return it tenfold. You're to be seen and not heard. You're my ol' lady. You'll be expected to behave a certain way."

“You mean be submissive? I know the code of conduct. I imagine the mafia’s code of honor is far stricter than whatever restrictions you plan to put on me.”

“Then we understand each other, and you’ll appreciate we have our own way of doing things. I know the traditions of your world. You forget it was once mine until your bastard of a father got in the way.”

He grabs my hand, jerking me into the elevator, and hits the button for the fifth floor.

“Does the whole club live here?”

“Some of us.”

“What will you do with my father?”

“Don’t worry about that. A meeting gone wrong, or we’ve been dating in secret and tonight after the engagement announcement we eloped. Roberto murdered your father in a rage, and he was taken out.”

“All you’re missing is a bow.”

“It’ll stick. Do you what you’re supposed to, and the knife disappears.”

The elevator stops and we walk into exactly what I imagined a biker bar would be. Loud music, smoke filling the air, and topless women on display.

This wretched biker threads his strong fingers through mine and brings my knuckles to his lips as a man in love providing comfort would do. The act bewilders me. It’s kind and another

move that proves to be out of character for him, like earlier in the parking lot.

He's putting on an act with his sweet gesture of kissing my knuckles. Surely, no one here believes for one second that this is a joyous occasion of wedded bliss.

As soon as we take one step forward, someone shouts, "Prez!" slapping a palm on his back.

Men surround him while the women hang back, appraising me. One pretty redhead smiles at me while the rest sneer and roll their eyes. It doesn't take long to figure out who has fucked my husband and who wants to among them. Especially the brunette with a bob cut and a septum piercing. She's eyeing me up and down and then some.

Guess she didn't get the memo that I'm not here because I'm truly madly deeply in love with this man I am now forced to call my husband. I'd rather be anywhere else. I've lost my father and Ghost expects me to wear a smile and pretend we're a happy couple. The second worst day of my life is the best of his. He's got what he wants. The power and soon the money that comes with it.

He could pick any woman in this crowded room to give him a child, but he only has his eyes on me. The look I've been dreading shines back at me. Hunger. Lust.

Ghost tightens his grip on my hand and tugs me further into the bar. The excitement filters back to a normal level. The women return to gyrating their bodies. Cigarettes are lit and liquor flows. My dotting husband pulls me down into a booth

in the back. His arm slides around my shoulders, keeping me close.

Making sure I don't bolt for the door or the nearest ledge.

The brunette with the nose piercing puckers her black lipstick-stained lips as she pours him a drink. "Hey Ghost."

"Get my Ol' Lady whatever she wants." He dismisses her with a flick of his wrist.

She smiles at me, but I can sense the hurt under the surface. It's not a pleasant feeling when the guy you like blows you off, even if it is for his wife. Not that I condone crushing on married men or being a cheater. "What are you having?" her voice comes out sharp and snappy.

Ghost squeezes my knee in warning as though signaling to me that I'll be judged by what I order. Like I care what his fuck buddy thinks of me.

"Vodka and cranberry juice with lime."

"Coming right up." She saunters off, swaying her hips like she hopes the movement will hypnotize Ghost into following her.

"Is she going to spit in my drink?"

"Who?"

"That woman."

"Boo? Nah. No one is going to fuck with you."

Her name is Boo. Heat flares across my cheeks and flashes across the back of my neck. And he thinks she won't spit in

my drink. What does a ghost say? It says boo. I shouldn't care that her nickname (surely, it's not her real name) pairs with my husband's road name. I watch her actions behind the bar as she makes my drink, tracking her every move until she slides the glass on the table. The tumbler sails across the black tabletop and Ghost catches it, preventing the tumbler from landing in my lap.

“Oops.” the bitch puts a hand to her lips and blows a kiss before she traipses back to the bar.

“What a warm welcome. I'm sure we're going to be besties and painting each other's toenails in no time.”

“Ol' Ladies don't exactly fraternize with the whores, princess.”

“Are there any women here you haven't had your dick in?” I automatically regret speaking when he runs a fingertip along my collarbone.

“There's at least one,” his husky voice drawls in my ear in a hum that sends a shiver through me.

I clear my throat and scoot away from him as he lets out a low chuckle. The scar on his cheek flexes with the movement, and I want to ask how he earned it. My fingers ache to touch the raised skin.

“You know I'm going to fuck you, Adeline.”

His words stop all thoughts of touching him.

He's right. I know it's coming. He'll want to claim his prize and plant his damn seed.

“Are you on birth control?”

“Are you?” I counter trying to take his focus off the main thing he wants from me. I can’t tell him the truth. Not yet.

“Not sure if your father ever told you about the birds and the bees, but it doesn’t work that way. I’m safe if you’re worried. I have a question for you, though. I know the traditions. Are you untouched?”

He wants to know if I’ve remained pure. A virgin. Tradition is that a mafia bride is a virgin. A gift to her husband and a sign of respect and loyalty.

The morning after and sometimes even on the same night, grooms make a big deal about showing off the bloody sheets. To prove the union is a successful one.

I find it all barbaric.

If I were smart, I’d have found someone to do the deed when I had the chance.

Of course, father prevented that. I had armed guards and a private tutor when I wasn’t attending an all-girls’ school. The closest I ever came to second base was getting felt up over my clothes by one of Carla’s brothers, who was the world’s biggest dork.

Such a flipping nerd that my father didn’t worry about his being around when I was allowed at Carla’s for a sleepover. Dante and Carmichael were older and too busy screwing half of Chicago to pay attention to me, but Leo was always around. He’s now an accountant. I should have leveraged for Father to



allow me to marry him. He's living a quiet, boring life in the suburbs with his wife and two dogs. And no one gives a shit that they haven't had children.

I suck down the juice and liquor through the straw and Ghost signals for a refill for me. I'm going to need the liquid courage to go through with this. If I'm lucky, I'll pass out or puke before we get that far.

The party rages on around us. More men come by the table to pay their respect while others keep their distance. I don't know what to make of any of it. In some ways, these bikers are like my father's soldiers, except they wear denim and leather in place of suits.

“What was with the suit?”

“Tradition,” he clips the one-word answer and draws my face closer to his as rock 'n roll belts in the background.

His dark eyes burn into me, right to my lips, and I just know he's going to kiss me.

I'm not drunk enough for this yet.

“C'mere, princess.” He shifts me, pulling me into his lap to where I'm straddling him. His erection presses straight into my crotch. “Arms around my neck. Now we have some business to attend to.” His fingers stroke my jaw. That small glimmer of tenderness from before is back in his expression.

“What's that?”

“I'm going to claim you. The famiglia has their traditions, of course, but the club has some as well.”

“Like what?” I squirm as the snake in his pants jerks.

“I’m going to fuck you. Right here.”

I don’t hide the horrified expression spreading across my features.

My jaw drops as my eyes widen.

I gulp.

“Right here?”

He can’t be serious.

“Are you ready to take my cock?”

*Not even close.*

## Chapter Six



**GHOST**

The blush blooming on Adeline's cheeks deepens in color with every teasing jerk of my cock as she straddles my lap. I've not been with a virgin since Victoria. I'd forgotten how easily embarrassed they are. My new wife already hates me for what I've done and what I forced her to do. She's really going to despise me when she learns what the rest of the night entails.

"I need another drink." She pushes off me and I let her go for now.

Soon, though, I'll be spreading her legs on this table to take what's rightfully mine.

I watch her as she struts to the bar, the denim shorts hugging her ass like they were tailored to every curve. Fucking Boo keeps giving her mean ass glares. I don't know why the bitch cares that I took an ol' lady. It's not like I'm going to stop fucking her because Adeline is in the picture. Neither of them means shit to me other than what I need from them. Once Adeline has my son and comes into her inheritance, my use of her will be finished. Boo is like any other whore who comes

through our door. She's got a nice rack along with a fine ass and she likes to fuck a lot.

Bitches like her are a dime a dozen.

There's no shortage of women I could have married either, but none of them came with the wealth and power to rival Adeline's. She has what her father stole from me.

"What the fuck?" I mutter as Adeline throws her hands up and starts taking her shorts off. By the time I make my way to the bar, she has the shorts off and is throwing them at Boo.

All innocence erased from her face. My virgin bride turns on a heel, one hand on her hip. "I'll do what's asked of me, but I won't wear your whore's hand-me-downs." Her arms move in a flash, as her words register in my head, to jerk the tank covering her tits over her head.

"Stop," I growl. It's one thing for my men to see her wearing tight clothes, but my Ol' Lady's body is for my eyes only.

My wife has more sass than I gave her credit for. She flings the tank top at me. "Are these her's too?" She shoves two fingers under both sides of the string bikini underwear that barely covers her ass.

"You're acting ridiculous." I shrug off my cut and hand it to Capone, who is laughing his ass off at her temper tantrum along with some of the other brothers.

"Don't stop her. I'm enjoying the show," Rash says, and I punch him in the mouth, cutting my knuckle on his teeth.

“Shut the fuck up.” Yanking my tee over my head, I pull it down over hers, forcing her arms through the holes. “Didn’t your daddy ever teach you to have some fucking self-respect?”

“Screw you, pal.” Adeline wrenches her arm back and attempts to punch me, her fist barely connecting with my chest.

“What’d she say to you?” I grab her by both wrists as she squirms against me.

“Said she was glad her shorts fit my fat ass.”

“And that was enough to set you off. Jesus, princess. You’re married to a biker. Better get some thicker skin.” I pull her against my chest, remembering she’s been drinking when I catch a whiff of her breath. I don’t know what her tolerance is.

Fucking Boo has probably been double pouring her liquor. I’ll have a word with her later. Right now, I have a point to make with both my men and my wife. I won’t tolerate her disrespecting me in front of them. Weakness isn’t something I can afford. I’ve worked too hard for this.

Emotions and love make you weak. I know Adeline has been through a lot in the past few hours, but if she’s going to make the damn cut, she has to be tough and not let some smart-ass remarks from a whore trip her switch.

I don’t even know why she cares. This isn’t a love match.

“Go to hell.” She tries to hit me again.

“Only if you’re coming with me, sweetheart.” I hoist her over my shoulder, keeping her in place with one hand as she

kicks and screams. Ignoring her pleas, I carry her across the bar, all eyes on us, to my table. Using my free hand, I sweep the empty glasses to the floor, ignoring the glass shattering and crunching under my boots as I lay my bride on the tabletop to drive my point home.

Adeline will fall in line and do her duty to me and this club. I'll get what's mine, whether or not she wants to give it.

She stares up at me with hate evident in her olive-green eyes.

“You want to flaunt your ass in front of the club and act like the whores, I'll treat you like one.”

“What are you doing?”

“I'm going to fuck that attitude out of you.” I jerk my button open and zipper down.

“Go ahead and do it then, tough guy,” she whispers with tears threatening to fall, but it's too late to stop this. There's no turning back or I will appear weak to my men, and I can't have that. No amount of tears will warrant any sympathy from me. I'm a cold-hearted bastard.

Gripping the side of her dainty underwear, I pull them down to her knees as I spread them apart, doing my best to shield her naked lower half. I'm like a deranged animal, as the hatred for her father and the drive for revenge boils and pumps through my veins. I loom over her, nipping at her neck as I line my cock up with her virgin heat.

“You're a bastard,” she spits the word at me as though it's an insult. I know who and what I am. The parts of me that cared

died fifteen years ago. I muffle her cries with my palm capped over her lips as I drive into her without warning. Her nails dig into my back as I take her virginity. Adeline bucks her hips against mine, but she's as powerless to stop me as I am to quit. Her tight warmth is at war with my thick length as I surge deeper in. My eyes roll back in my head at the sensation. I go at her fast and hard. The quicker I get off, the faster she will become pregnant, and I can claim all that was lost.

She can fight me, fight the pull, but we both know that her tight cunt is greedily squeezing my cock. Her words say she hates me. The way her body writhes against mine tells a different story.

Adeline is only pissed that she's enjoying the feel of me splitting her in two.

I pump her full. Each thrust is rougher and faster than the last. I get a handful of her blonde hair, pulling her head back, exposing her neck to me. I shouldn't be enjoying fucking her as much as I am. That pain radiating in her eyes makes me want to end her suffering, and yet I can't, and I won't. The urge to choke her overwhelms me. To wrap my hand around her throat. To end all of this now, but I've waited fifteen years for this.

To know that the man who killed my woman and unborn son is suffering in the pits of Hell and died knowing that in the end, I won. That his daughter is mine.

Mine to fuck.

Mine to possess.

Mine to breed.

Mine to kill.

My feisty Adeline. She gives as good as she gets. Clawing at me, leaving marks, drawing blood.

Her fists pound at my chest, but I don't stop. She needs to know her place and who she married.

I'm not a good man.

Any good that was ever in me perished.

I'm the monster her father forced me to become.

"Be a good little slut and take it," I growl at her. "This is how whores get fucked, princess. You want hearts and rose petals, you'd better rethink your behavior."

"I hate you so much."

"That why you're on the verge of getting off?"

I rub her pulsing clit and her mouth clamps shut as she shudders beneath me.

My dick twitches inside her as I get off. I pull out and tuck back into my pants, then jerk her underwear back into place.

More tears stream down her face, and I can't bear to look at her.

I know I'm an asshole. Her first time should've been gentle. Only that's not who I am or what this is about.

"Escort her back upstairs," I order Axe. "And stay there. You're on guard duty." It's about time the fuckhead makes



himself useful. There are no free rides here. I don't care who his daddy is.

Asshole is a real pain in my ass.

Adeline slides off the table, glaring at me as though looks could kill. Luckily for me, they can't.

## Chapter Seven

# ADELINE

I know Ghost wants to break me, but I'm a Ricci and we don't bow. Not easily. He may have gotten my tears and my virginity. My dignity is debatable. He fucked me raw and full of hate. I expected no less.

He's soulless and heartless.

Crude.

Despicable.

A man without honor.

A criminal.

And yet a sick and animalistic part of me enjoyed the act of him defiling me. Deflowering me and shredding all my innocence with his brutality. My body betrayed me, and the bastard knew there was a side of me who got enjoyment. Pleasure in the pain.

Then there's that bitch. His whore. The smug satisfaction she wore when informing me I was wearing her clothing. I'd never

felt such rage. Such hatred for another woman. I've never been jealous. Never have had a reason to be. There's something about her that rubs me wrong.

The way her gaze lingers on my husband a little too long makes me want to claw her eyes out of her head. I'm not a violent person by nature, despite my upbringing. Yet every time I look at her, all I have are cruel thoughts of all the ways I could kill her.

At least I'm able to return the smug expression as Axe escorts me back to the elevator. He doesn't speak to me, and I hope he doesn't. I'm in no mood for making conversation. He's handsome in that rough bad boy way. Dirty blond hair that reaches his shoulders. Tattoos along his neck and sleeving both arms. His facial hair is surprisingly neat and trim compared to his unruly appearance.

I step into the elevator with him. His presence sucking up most of the air. There's an arrogance about him as he watches me from the corner of his eye while pretending he doesn't even notice me.

The ride up is awkward and filled with a tense silence. Neither of us wanting to make the first attempt at being polite. He's pissed about being my babysitter and I'm simply mad at the world. The muscle in his jaw tics as we pass floor after floor.

The second the elevator doors open back to the penthouse, I dart to the bedroom upstairs, shutting the door behind me and locking it. The first thing I do is rush to the bathroom to kneel

at the porcelain throne. Bile burns at the back of my throat. I choke on my tears as the scenes of the night loop through my thoughts.

Roberto attempting to rape me and losing his head. My being forced to marry Ghost. The way my father stared at me as I plunged the knife into his chest. My bastard of a husband fucking me in front of his club.

The humiliation coats my inner thighs.

A cold sweat clings to the base of my neck.

Dry heaving, I have nothing on my stomach to throw up. Nothing but liquor.

I shove two fingers down my throat and force myself to vomit, needing to purge myself of the memories.

My shame.

Shame for what I did.

Shame for what is to become of me.

A biker's whore.

A violent shudder ripples through me as I arch my back and retch until all that is left is foaming spit. I flush the toilet and drop to the tile floor on my ass. Shivers dance across my skin and I fling off the tee I'm wearing.

A knock on the bedroom door has me wanting to scream. I can't even mourn in peace.

"You all right in there?" A gruff voice questions. One I'm assuming belongs to Axe.

Wiping my eyes, I pick myself up off the floor.

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine.”

Like he really cares. I know my husband sure as hell doesn’t.

“I said I’m good.”

“If you need anything, I’ll be downstairs.”

“I won’t.” I wait for the sound of his boots moving away before I return to the bathroom.

I’m too tired for another shower, but I force myself to urinate and brush my teeth. Luckily, there’s a spare brush in one of the drawers that hasn’t been opened.

I’m too exhausted to care if the sheets are clean as I flop down on the bed and yank the covers up my naked torso. I curl up in the fetal position and beg sleep to claim me as I close my eyes. I toss and turn, trying to escape the thoughts of my father.

Unable to get comfortable, I find my focus shifting to Ghost and wondering where he is.

Is he with that skank? Sleeping in her bed?

Part of me wishes he is while the rest of me stings with jealousy at the idea. He rejected me as soon as he got what he wanted. Cast me back to the tower only there’s no white knight scaling the walls to save me.

My husband will likely kill me when he learns the truth.

I'm not able to perform the one duty, the one thing he needs to gain control of my father's assets.

The soreness from his taking my virginity sets in. The ache between my legs is nearly unbearable. I throw the blanket back and trudge to the bathroom, hoping to find pain relievers, but a quick search of the drawers leaves me empty-handed. There's no choice except to go downstairs if I want any relief.

Although I hate doing so, I put on one of Ghost's tees. The stupid thing hangs to my knees like a freaking tent. A reminder that I can't escape him. He's all around me.

Downstairs it's dark. I don't see Axe, but that doesn't mean I'm alone. Ghost won't leave me unguarded. At least not until he gets what he wants. Which in my case will be never.

I find my way to the kitchen and check the cabinet by the sink for pain relievers, finding none. Since I'm here, I grab a glass and fill it with water, although liquor would be more fitting. I'm not sure that would be the best idea.

There's some fruit cut up, so I help myself to some slices of melon and strawberries. Even though eating is the last thing I want to do right now, I need to put something back on my stomach.

Taking a seat at the breakfast bar, relishing in the silence. In my aloneness. I pop a strawberry into my mouth, not caring that the juice dribbles down my chin and onto the counter.

"Can't sleep?" I jerk at the sound of Axe's voice as he steps into the light of the kitchen.

“How long have you been standing there? Didn’t anyone ever tell you it’s rude to sneak up on someone?”

He flashes me a smile and goes to the other side of the counter. An unwanted intrusion.

“That wasn’t an invitation,” I snap.

His response is to smile wider and steal a strawberry from my plate.

“Get your own.”

“Just wanted a taste.”

I ignore his innuendo laced response.

“Rough night,” he hedges.

I snort. “What would you know about it?”

He lifts a shoulder. “A little or a lot, depending on how you look at it.”

“And?”

“Some years back, I was supposed to marry. Was a deal set up by my family and the club.” He pauses to rub the back of his neck. “I shouldn’t be telling you any of this.”

“Then why are you?” I arch a brow.

“Guess I sort of know what you’re going through.”

“Okay.” I motion for him to continue, pushing my plate in his direction since I don’t really have an appetite.

“She was the daughter of a powerful man. Cartel leader. He’d been taken out, and she was barely legal and in a world

of danger. Everyone wanted a piece of her fortune.”

“What happened?” I don’t see a wedding band. I’m assuming they didn’t marry.

“I’d gotten myself into some shit and she married my brother instead.”

“Oh.” That’s not what I was expecting at all. “Did you want to marry her?”

“Yes, and no. I mean, it worked out for the best, I guess. They’re happy.”

“And you, are you happy?”

He shoots me another smile and shoves a slice of melon between his lips. “I’m working on it. But the point I’m trying to make is you never know what the future may hold. Few years from now, things may be different.”

I don’t tell him that I don’t have that much time.

“Gotta say. Wasn’t expecting you to strip like that. Was entertaining to say the least.”

My cheeks redden, and I move off the stool. “Good night, Axe.”

“Good night, darlin’.” He tips his chin at me, and I scurry back to the bedroom, closing the door behind me.





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# AXE

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Pulling out my cell, I dial my brother even though I shouldn't be calling so late. Ainsley will fly to Chicago to kick my ass if I wake the kids. This shit with Ghost and Adeline stirs up my past.

A past that haunts me.

I can't change what happened and yet I'm still stuck from moving forward.

I can't return home, and I can't hide here forever.

I'm a wanted man.

A disgrace to my family, even if they try to pretend differently.

Unable to give my woman the life she deserves. Coralie was right to leave me. To make a life without me.

A life on the run is no way to live.

She deserves the fairytale.

Something I'll never be able to give her.

Over the years, I've gone from club to club. Tried to start over out west with Coralie until we realized I would never be free without leaving the country or clearing my name.

Our life in the shadows became too much of a burden for her to bear.

Never able to make friends. To settle in one place for too long.

Always afraid of being discovered.

We were constantly looking over our shoulders. She grew paranoid. Scared of her own shadow. Afraid that she'd do or say the wrong thing and we'd be discovered.

I couldn't keep asking her to live like that.

Not even for me.

Letting her go was the hardest thing I've ever done.

Pretending she doesn't exist is how I cope most days, but then something will happen to remind me of her. I'll hear her favorite song or see her favorite color and my mind goes straight back to her.

My old man has been working on clearing my name, but for now I'm a fugitive. One of America's Most Wanted. It's why I'm here. Hiding out in Chicago under the name Axe. Short for Axel.

"Hello," Abel croaks on the fifth ring.

"Hey, little brother."

"Something wrong?"

“Just wanted to hear your voice, fuckhead.”

“Aw, you miss me.” He chuckles and I hear his woman in the background asking who he’s talking to. “Tell her it’s her ex.” I grin.

“Dick. I miss your sorry ass. It’s good to hear your voice.”

“Yeah. Give everyone my love.”

“Will do, brother. Will do. Is everything okay?”

“Yeah. You know it is.”

“What’s wrong?”

“How is she?” he knows the drill. I go through this every few months. I get into a dark space in my head where all I can think about is Coralie.

“Same as last time you asked.”

“Right.” I made him promise not to tell me about her, no matter what.

I end the call and let out a sigh.

I shouldn’t have called him. It puts us both at risk.

Fuck. I miss my family. I was able to visit a few years back for Christmas.

There’s no place like home.

No place like Drag Creek.

I stare out at the city, wishing I could trade concrete and sidewalks for winding country roads.

Even if I could go back, it wouldn’t be the same.

A lot has changed.

Too much for my liking.

My brother has his club in Texas. A club that was meant to be mine, but I fucked it all up.

I'm glad it worked out for Abel and Ainsley. As fucked up as it is that she was mine first, I know they belong together. I thought Coralie was going to be that anchor for me. My home no matter where I roam. She was the first girl I ever loved and will probably be the last.

I can't go back, and I can't stay here. Not permanently. It's hard to plant roots on the run.

Except nomad life isn't so bad. The nights get lonely. Like tonight.

I'm here babysitting Ghost's Ol' Lady when he should be here, making her welcome. Seeing to her needs. Instead, he's laid up with that Boo whore.

I can't stand that cunt.

Laying back on the couch, I close my eyes and attempt to get some shuteye.

The distant, low sobs coming from upstairs serve as my lullaby.

Adeline is beautiful. She reminds me of Ainsley in some ways. A lost girl thrown to the wolves. Forced to depend on a stranger. A ruthless biker. All in the name of survival.

Almost like Déjà vu. I've been there. Done that. Got the room at the Lonely Hearts Motel to prove it.

Ghost needs to pull his head out of his ass before it's too late. There are plenty of other men who will dry her tears. Men who hold no loyalty to him.

Men like me.

## Chapter Eight



“Think you’re slick pulling that scene.”

Boo smirks at me. Bitch is playing a dangerous game. I’m still keyed up from how far things went with Adeline. I can’t shake how damn good her tight pussy felt wrapped around my dick. If I didn’t think it would cause further damage, I’d be upstairs fucking her again, ensuring that I knock her up. The thought has me horny and raging.

“I was complimenting her.”

“Right. You’re on thin ice, babe. Don’t do it again.”

She leans in and flicks her tongue out to lick my cheek. “Let me make it up to you. Your place or mine?”

I shake my head. “What did I say?”

“That I’m a naughty girl and you’re going to punish me?”  
Her lashes flutter.

“Not tonight.”

“Why? You in a hurry to go tuck in your wife. I’m sure Axe has it covered.”

“Last warning. You’re playing a game you won’t win.”

“What’s life without a little risk involved? Besides...” She grabs me by the dick. “My mouth beats your hand.”

She’s not wrong about that. My mind flashes to Adeline alone with Axe. He knows better than to touch his Prez’s Ol’ Lady. She’s probably asleep or crying into her pillow about what a bastard I am. If I had any decency, I’d check in on her. Instead, I take Boo up on her offer.

“Your place.” We go to her apartment on the seventh floor, where all the whores keep an apartment. Not all of them stay here full time. Some only stay on the weekends, but Boo is what we call a lifer. She’ll hang around until she finds a man, or her pussy gets too worn and we put her to work doing something else or cut her loose.

Cunt loves to be used and abused. Like most women who seek out this lifestyle, she has daddy issues. Unluckily or lucky for her, there are sick fucks like me who will take advantage. She goes for my zipper, not giving a damn my cock was just filling my wife’s pussy. Women like Boo will do anything to get what they want. She thinks she’s special. That I give a God damn about her. It’s sad, but not so tragic that I won’t have her suck me off.

“Kiss me, Ghost.”

“Not with that black shit painted on your lips.” I give her the excuse I always give her. I don’t put my mouth on the whores and they sure as fuck don’t put there’s on my lips. I grab a condom from the fishbowl in the center of her coffee table.

“Did you wrap it up with your wife?”

“That’s different.”

“Why? Because she has a golden snatch?”

“I didn’t get that good of a look. Are you going to suck my dick or keep flapping your jaws about something that doesn’t have shit all to do with you?”

She rolls her eyes but sinks to her knees, eager to please me.



The sound of Axe sawing logs on my couch is the first thing to greet me when I go to my apartment. I kick his boots off the upholstery. “Wake up, fuck stick. You’ve been relieved.”

He mutters something incoherent and shuffles to the elevator. I hang my cut on the back of one of the stools in the kitchen. There’s a soured plate of fruit on the bar. I dump it in the trash and rinse the plate. Boo normally cleans the place, but considering how their introduction went last night, I should get someone else. I bet my princess has never lifted a finger to wash a plate in her life.



I trudge upstairs to shower. Twisting the knob, I find the door locked.

I knock three times with no answer, leaving me with two options. One, I shoot the lock or two, I kick it in. I'd rather not have all my men come rushing in, guns a blazing if I fire off a round. I could use the other bathroom, but all my shit is in this room. I'm about to take my boot to the door when it's opened.

Adeline faces me wearing one of my shirts. I like the sight of her a little too much for my taste. Her blonde hair is down in wild, tangled waves. Her pink toenails dig into my rug as she chews on her bottom lip. The second her gaze lands on my bare chest, her lips curl in disgust.

“Guess I don't need to guess where, or should I say, who you've been with.”

I glance down, seeing the smear of black lipstick.

I don't owe her any explanations. We aren't a love match.

That's not what this is.

“Get dressed. I'm taking you to breakfast.”

“And what should I wear? More of your whore's clothes.”

I scrub a palm over my face. “I don't give a fuck what you wear.” I head into the bathroom to shower.

When I leave the bathroom, Adeline is coming out of the closet dressed in one of my white button-down shirts with the sleeves pushed up and one of my belts hugging it to her waist. The buttons are undone to her breasts, revealing she's not

wearing a bra and I can't help but wonder if she's going commando. I watch as she steps into her heels.

Fuck me. Watching her twist her hair up into a messy knot on her head is damn sexy.

"You better have on underwear," I warn.

She lifts her shoulder in an I don't care fashion. "I'll be waiting by the elevator." Without waiting for my response, she struts out of the room.

I groan as my cock twitches, itching for another go at her. Should skip breakfast and bury my cock in that sweet pussy. Fuck her over and over again until there's no doubt she's carrying my child. The key to regaining full control of the kingdom.

As much as I'd like to stay in bed all day, I've got shit to do.

There's no rest for the wicked.

Adeline stands with her back to me, her left foot raised, rubbing the back of her right calve. The way the shirt is bunched at the waist, I can almost see her whole ass. The idea of anyone else getting this view has my chest tightening. A low rumble sounds at the back of my throat and I decide against wearing my cut. We're only going to the diner across the street.

Their coffee is shit, but the location makes them convenient.

Downstairs, Cracker gives me a chin lift. It doesn't escape my notice that he's staring at Adeline's ass.

“You want to keep seeing out of them eyes? I suggest you stop ogling my Ol’ Lady.”

The dumbass has enough sense to look ashamed. “Sorry, Prez.”

Adeline’s lips lift into a full smile as we continue past him. I shouldn’t be pissed off that he got a genuine smile out of her. The act has me wanting to rethink not gouging out his eyes.

We sit at my usual table. Adeline taking the seat next to the window. A couple of wannabes are dining at the counter with some of the prospects. They give chin lifts, respecting our privacy for now. Any other morning, they’d already be up my ass trying to kiss it. Anything to earn a patch or the chance at prospecting.

“Two coffees. Extra cream and sugar for her. Black for mine. Two orange juices. Two breakfast platters and a side order of fruit.”

The server puts in our order with the kitchen and returns with our coffees.

“I’m capable of ordering for myself.” Not even eight in the morning and she’s starting with that sassy attitude that makes me want to bend her over my knee right here.

Before I can tell her, now isn’t the time, the news program broadcasting on the nearby TV mounted to the wall does the talking for me.

“And we’re back with the latest developments on a story we told you about that happened in the early morning hours in a

North Shore neighborhood. A celebration turned deadly when a firework display exploded and set the home of a prominent family ablaze. There's been no word yet on survivors or how many perished in the terrible accident. Responders on the scene have been working for hours and we're being told that those flames are finally out."

The camera pans to Adeline's family home, or what's left of it.

"Guess I won't be receiving my things after all."

I stare at my wife, left speechless by her response.

Her face holds no emotion, and I don't know whether to be concerned or impressed.

If I were a better man, perhaps I would have arranged for her death to be faked the way mine was.

But I'm not and I won't.

Shame to see the house wasted, but I left the staging and clean up to Grinder and Gunner. Knew I could count on them not to fuck this up.

The official report will say whatever I want it to. Corruption in this city runs deep and I have no problem footing the bill. Someone has to be the bad guy. It's a kill or be killed world we live in.

I've made mistakes in the past.

I won't make them a second time.

"I'll get whatever you need to be comfortable."

“Some things can’t be replaced.”

“Such as?”

“Photos of my mother.” Her hard expression falters and her bottom lip trembles.

“Here comes our food.” I slide her coffee mug over. A good man would have guilt over the situation. “We should go over your statement for the police when they manage to track you down.”

“What would you like me to say?”

“I knew you had it in you to be a good girl.”

Her cheeks bloom pink at my praise and I wonder how deep that pink would redden if I called her my good girl with my cock buried in her to the hilt. I may not be capable of love, but I can show my appreciation for her contribution to the cause in other ways.

## Chapter Nine

# ADELINE

“Holy shit, girl. Are you okay? I go out of the country for a few weeks, and I come back to your house blown up, and you married to a biker. What the absolute shit?” Carla screeches at me through the phone.

“Hello to you too. There’s way too much to get into over the phone. I’ll explain when I see you.” I choose my words cautiously. I’m well aware of my husband and Capone eavesdropping from the kitchen. Capone showed up this morning with some clothes and other belongings I had at one of my father’s apartments.

He gave me my cell phone about an hour ago. I’ve only been asking for the past three days.

It’s gone off nonstop with texts and calls expressing condolences and concern. Once news outlets confirmed my father’s death, everyone was getting in line to pay their respects.

The only response I give is, ‘thank you for respecting my privacy during this difficult time. There will be a memorial at a later date.’ What else can I say? ‘Thanks, I was forced to murder him by my new husband that none of you were aware existed.’ *At least not in our social circle.* A man I just so happened to marry the same night my father died after announcing my engagement to Roberto.

Though I’m guessing anyone who knew I was to marry Roberto perished in the flames. At least that’s the story.

“When did you get back?”

“My flight got in about two hours ago. Your house, or what’s left of it, has been all over the news.”

“Things have been crazy.” *I’ve been adjusting to living with a heartless bastard, trying to forgive myself for aiding him in murdering my father.*

“Send me the address and I’ll have my driver swing by.”

“Um. I’m not sure that’s a good idea.” I peer toward the kitchen and find Ghost standing with his feet planted firmly directly behind the couch where I’m sitting with his arms folded across his chest.

“That your girl?”

“Yes.”

“Do you trust her with your life?”

“Yes.”

“Invite her over, but she comes alone.”

I mouth, ‘thank you.’ “And what is the address?” I can hear Carla stifling her laughter at the fact I don’t know where the hell I’m at. I’m glad Ghost isn’t being difficult about her visiting. If I were to tell her she couldn’t come, she would call her older brothers, and I can’t afford to have them sticking their noses in this and starting trouble. The last thing I need in my life are more dead bodies. Everyone knows Dante and Carmichael Bianchi are as crazy as they are stupid. They have two things going for them. They are hot and loaded. Make that three things. They are also loyal to a fault when it comes to the people they care about and my being their baby sister’s bestie, I fall under that umbrella.

I give Carla the address and end the call.

“Is she hot?” Capone asks, and I roll my eyes. “Is she single?”

“None of your business.”

“You should be nice to me. I brought you your shit.”

“Thank you.” He narrows his baby blues at me like he’s waiting for me to say more. “What?” I huff.

“Is she single?”

“Like I’d want my bestie with the likes of you.” Sure, Capone is hot if tattooed, murderous, tall, dark, and handsome bikers are your thing. But Carla would never go for him. Not seriously, anyway. Her family would never approve of such a match. She’s expected to marry a good Italian man. One from a proper and pre-approved family.



“What’s wrong with me?”

“You keep company with him?” I hook a thumb toward my husband, and he cracks up.

“That’s fair.”

Ghost shoots him a ‘what the fuck’ look.

I watch as he sends a text on his phone. “Axe will be around if you need anything. I’ve got a meeting.”

“I don’t need a babysitter. Where am I going to go?”

“I don’t know, princess. That’s why the guard. You aren’t to leave the apartment.”

“If I want to go out with Carla, I will. You can’t keep me prisoner.”

“It’s for your own safety.”

“You mean it’s to make sure no one kills me before you get your hands on my inheritance?”

“You should be nicer to me. I’m the only one who gives a shit about your safety. The last of your father’s men scattered like roaches when exposed to light.”

“I’m sure they weren’t given much choice in the matter.”

“Let’s talk perimeters. You and your friend can go to the gym and the hot tub. Stay out of the bar and away from the residential floors. Axe will be with you at all times and reporting to me.”

“She lives here, doesn’t she? You don’t want me bumping into your whore.”

Capone shares a look with my husband.

They've been keeping me cooped up in this apartment for days. I'm going to go crazy if I don't get out of here soon.

"If I didn't know better, I'd think you're jealous, princess."

"I need to get ready."

"You do that." His lips twitch as though he's about to laugh at my expense, only he has better sense than to piss me off at the moment.

I don't spare him or Capone a second glance.

Upstairs, I comb through the bags and boxes of stuff Capone delivered. At least there are some decent clothing options. Better than Boo's Skanks R Us hand-me-downs. And he grabbed my favorite black flats that I have, or rather owned, several pairs of. I opt for a black, sleeveless, slinky, low-cut blouse with black, wide leg pants to match.

I finger the necklace my father gave me, wishing I were back home and that he was still alive. How could he leave me to this? To this biker. A man who has no regard for me. A jerk who will never love me. A man I will never love.

I suppose the same way he intended to hand me over to Roberto.

Ghost interrupts my thoughts. "You didn't tell me that your friend is a Bianchi."

"I didn't know I needed to. Is that a problem?"

"A complication."

I don't have to guess. "I assume this is about Dante and Carmichael."

"Something like that."

"Carla has always been my best friend. Her brothers love me. They consider me family."

"I consider them a pain in my ass."

"I don't understand what that has to do with Carla coming over. Don't you have somewhere to be?"

"She could be spying for them."

"Carla isn't like that. She doesn't work for them, if that's what you're worried about."

"Look, you don't like me, and I get that. But I need to trust you, and I need you to trust me."

"Trust and respect are earned. You've not given me a reason to show you that respect. You kidnapped me, murdered my father, and on top of that, you raped me. And now you want my trust?"

He swallows hard. "I know I'm a bastard."

"That we can agree on. Except I think you're a devil."

He grabs me by the wrist. "I'm your husband. I didn't rape you. Don't be going around saying shit like that."

"What would you call it, then?"

"You're testing my patience, princess. I'm making an effort here. You could do the same."

“So, I’m supposed to automatically think you won’t kill me the minute it better suits your club or whatever your plans are.”

“I’m not capable of love, but you’re to be the mother of my child. I won’t let anyone hurt you.”

“Maybe you won’t, but who is going to protect me from you?”

Ghost stares at me long and hard. He doesn’t respond to my question. Not that I expected him to answer. We both know that I’m right. There’s no one to save me from him. The monster who wants to use me as an incubator for his child.

“I’ve gotta go. I won’t return until late. Don’t wait up. Stay out of trouble, Adeline.” His hand reaches out, falling short of my cheek as I turn away from him.

The thought of his touch makes me want to vomit. And not for the reason it should, but because part of me wishes I could make him feel for me. To love me so that he will give up on this quest for a child. Because there is only one outcome.

My demise.

My death.

Unless I kill him first.

He leaves and I wait a few minutes to regain my senses and to stop the trembling of my hands. I can’t face Carla if I’m a bundle of nerves. She can read me far too easily. No one knows me better. Except even she doesn’t know that I’m unable to have children.

Ghost is going to kill me when he learns the truth.

That I'll never be able to give him a child. I couldn't even if I wanted to.

Nothing can penetrate his heart of stone. That much is clear.

Downstairs, I find my best friend in deep conversation with Capone. Ugh.

"You better call me." She taps her number into his contacts on his cell phone. I'm going to kill her. She has no idea what she's getting into with these men. I shouldn't have invited her. If I had refused to see her, though, she'd know something more was wrong. And I need to practice selling this marriage. If I convince her, then maybe I can trick myself into believing that somehow, I'm going to survive this biker.

A wicked grin spreads across Capone's mouth as he eyes Carla and her curves up and down. "I'm a call. You better pick up." He licks his bottom lip, and she fans herself. "By the way. Do you ride?"

"Beards and mustaches," she says, and the secondhand embarrassment her crude remarks bring me is unparalleled.

Ridiculous.

"I think I just fell in love." He clutches his chest like he's been shot in the heart.

"Capone," my husband barks, curling his lip as though he's as annoyed by their exchange as I am. "Stop dicking around." His gaze meets mine and I'm scared he's going to attempt to

kiss me or something for show in front of Carla, but in the end, he pinches my chin. “We’ll talk more later.”

I don’t tell him we have nothing to talk about. We both know where we stand.

Capone winks at me, and they get into the elevator.

Axe is out on the terrace, smoking and ignoring us for now.

I embrace my friend, trying to hold back my tears. Carla has always given the best hugs.

“Okay, enough. Show me the ring.”

I hold out my left hand for her to assess the infinity band. It’s not flashy or encrusted with diamonds. It’s simple and elegant. I wear my mother’s ring on my other hand now.

“Forever hmm.”

I roll my eyes as she studies my face, looking for the crack in my defenses.

“Something like that.”

“What the hell is really going on here?” she demands, tugging me down onto the couch. “Tell me everything.”

She has no idea how I wish I could, but doing so would endanger her life as much as mine.

Her silver-blue eyes sparkle with intrigue. “I know the accident is a coverup. Did Ghost kill your father?”

I shake my head. He didn’t, at least he didn’t act alone. My mind flashes to plunging the knife into my father’s chest repeatedly.

“Talk to me.” She takes my hands in hers as the tears I’ve been fighting since her arrival roll down my cheeks.

“It’s not safe,” I whisper.

“I’m not worried about a gang of bikers. I can talk to Carmichael and Dante. You know either of them would do anything for you. Hell, one of them would have married you if your father would have permitted it.”

“I don’t know about all that.”

“I do. I know for a fact Carmichael thinks you’re the shit.”

“The shit or just shit,” I tease, to lighten the mood. “Tell me about Italy. Were there any men?”

“A few, mostly cousins. So no to answer your question. I wasn’t swept off my feet by some hot broody Italian who wanted to spoil me.”

“No Massimo then?” I bring up her favorite fictional man from one of the book series she’s obsessed with.

“Unfortunately, not. But I can continue to dream. Maybe Capone will ride me into the sunset on the back of his Harley.”

“No freaking way.”

“Why not? It could be cool for us to both have a macho motorcycle man.”

“There’s nothing romantic about my situation.”

“Has he hurt you?”

I must hesitate too long with my answer.

“I’ll kill him.”

“I’ll survive.”

“You will, but he may not.”

I squeeze her hands. “Promise me that anything we talk about stays between us. This is serious. My husband is dangerous.”

“And now with your father gone and your hand, he’s also the most powerful.”

“He needs me alive. I’m safer being married to him.”

“I can call my brothers, just say the word.”

“I’m being dramatic. Seriously, don’t worry. I know he won’t hurt me. He married me to keep me safe.”

“Well, thank God for that.” She jerks away, going to her feet and I hope she’s buying my crap lie.

“So give me the tour. Where’s the rest of his hot shit biker crew?”

“Around.”

Axe rejoins us, and I wonder if he’s been able to hear us this whole time.



# Chapter Ten

## ADELINE

“Well, hello Charlie Hunnam’s lost brother,” Carla gushes, practically throwing herself at Axe.

“Leave him alone,” I warn.

“Why? Is he married too?”

“Far from married, sweetheart.” His lips pull upward into a big grin, eating up the attention.

Her smile falters. “Don’t tell me he’s gay. The best-looking ones always are.” She pouts.

“Not you too,” he says on a low groan.

“Do you get that a lot?” I ask him.

“No.”

“Okay then.” I don’t press him further.

“Hold up.” Carla holds a hand up in my face. “You said not you too.”

“It’s nothing, and I don’t have time for this shit.”

“Why? You have somewhere else to be?” Carla is like a dog with a bone.

“Nope. I’m afraid you’re both stuck with me until I’m given different orders.”

I roll my eyes. “Stop talking to him. Whatever you say, he’s only going to run back to Ghost to report on me.”

“Oh, he’s your bodyguard. Remember the hell we used to give Tommy?” She cracks up at herself. Tommy was old but sturdy as an ox. I gave him such a hard time. I was always trying to sneak off. Skipping school. Stealing his cigarettes when he wasn’t paying attention.

“Is she always like this?” Axe lifts a brow.

“Unfortunately,” I tease.

Carla twists toward me. “Excuse me. Don’t act like I don’t light up your life for the better.”

“That’s true. You do.” I love my best friend. And she’s right. Life would be dull without her. She’s always kept me sane. Kept me from dying while being locked in my gilded cage.

“I’m not a spy. I’m here to protect you.”

Carla fans herself. “Say that again, handsome. It’s hot.”

“Hi.” I wave a hand across her face. “Remember me. Your best friend that you’re here to visit. Not this beefcake.” I hook a thumb in his direction, and he leans over and bites it.

“Okay. I see where this is going. You’re playing with fire. Both of you.” She makes a little motion of her hand. “But you

do you. I'm not judging you. Though I'll have to break it to Carmichael gently."

"Your brother isn't in love with me and there is nothing happening between Axe and me. I value my life as I am sure he does his own. I'm married."

"If you say so."

"I do. Now let's go upstairs, where we can talk without prying eyes and ears."

"You ladies stay out of trouble. No jumping on the beds."

"I know what kind of bed hopping he has in mind," she mutters. "Tell me more about Capone and that fine, scary ass husband of yours."



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# GHOST

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"Carla has a nice ass."

"She's a problem we don't need," I remind Capone. The Bianchi brothers have ties with the Triads. Pushing their knock off perfumes and fake designer handbags shit to tourists, but

I've heard rumblings they've been looking for a new supplier for their drugs after they fell out with the Cartel and lost their bid on the cocaine they normally deal to unsuspecting dumbasses. Small time shit. Men in town on business looking for a cheap thrill. A hooker and some powder to get their party on. Drugs cut so much that they'd need three times the amount to catch a decent buzz.

They got too damn greedy.

This means there's another player on the board. Someone else has joined the league and is funneling dope on a larger scale. It's been showing up in our clubs. I don't give a fuck what they do in their territory, but when they start to poach, that's when I have a problem.

I take my seat at the head of the table after calling for church.

Every club officer files in one at a time, dropping their phones and weapons into the plastic bin outside of the door. Gunner and Grinder sit to my left. Capone to my right. Rash, Butcher, Cracker, Flash, Goat, Hatchet, Malice, and Mutant squeeze in where they can find a seat. One of the prospects closes the door once everyone is in.

Axe is here as a favor to Rebel Black, acting Prez of the founding club. His father, Slim Black, was an original member. The first to wear the president patch, before he was taken out by Grim Jones. God rest his soul. He was a real mean son of a bitch.

I take a sip of the club's moonshine. What got us to where we are today. To honor the brothers who came before us. The men who paved our road to hell with blood and good intentions.

Banging my gavel down on the oak table with the club's insignia carved and burned into the middle, I call our meeting to order.

“As many of you are aware. My marriage to Adeline Ricci expands our territory.”

“Prez. Prez. Prez,” my men chant.

I wave my hands to quiet them.

“While this puts us back on top. It also brings more problems. Meaning I'll need you working harder and longer hours to protect what's ours. Someone's bringing in primo cocaine. Not that cracker jack candy the Triads deal. I want to know who and where. No one makes moves in this city without my knowing about it and without us getting our cut. I want your ears to the ground. Shake shit up. Take down anyone who gets in our way. Hatchet, find out if your Russian Doll knows anything.”

“Was planning to go see her tonight.”

Flash makes a jerking off motion to Malice behind his back.

“Bet you do a lot of that for each other,” I tell them. Hatchet notices them making fun of him and punches Malice in the dick.

“Oof.” He grunts. “Flash started it.”

“Enough. You can measure your cocks later.” I turn my attention to Gunner and Grinder. “Any complications from the other night I need to be aware of?”

“An old lady, a neighbor, might have seen us. She was out walking her dog, but I handled it,” Grinder informs me.

Fuck. “How?” Last thing I need is one of my guys running down grandmas.

He smirks.

“You fucked that hag,” Gunner says, roaring with laughter.

“Talk about taking one for the team,” Goat puts his two cents in.

“Hope she was a GILF,” Cracker mutters.

“What the fuck is a GILF?” Butcher asks.

“A grandma I’d like to fuck,” Mutant educates the rest of us.

“I didn’t turn the lights on. But hell, she was soft and wet.”

“You got off by nutting in someone’s granny. You’re a sick bastard.” I shake my head.

“And you were giving me shit for wanting to fuck your wife’s bestie,” Capone grumbles.

“I don’t want to hear any more about grandmas or fucking. Let’s get back down to business.”



“Have you had dinner?”

“Axe ordered us a pizza for lunch.”

“I bet he did.” I may need to rethink Axe guarding my wife.

“He’s a nice guy.” She smiles while batting her lashes.

“Did he tell you that he’s on the run? Wanted for murder.”

“Guess that’s something you have in common. The only difference is one of you wasn’t caught.”

“If you’re trying to make me jealous, you’ll have to try a lot harder than that, princess. But nice effort.”

“My bad. I meant one of you is a rapist and the other isn’t.”

I inhale deeply, gripping the edge of the kitchen counter.  
“Stop saying that. We both know you enjoyed it.”

“What gave me away? Was it the way I slapped you or the way I clawed at you with my nails?”

I let go of the counter and grab her by the shoulder, holding her gaze as I tower over her. “Let’s get one thing straight, Adeline. You can’t rape the willing.” I lean in close, getting a whiff of her hair. She smells like me. Like my shampoo. I stroke my thumb along the base of her throat. “Your greedy pussy was squeezing the life out of my dick. If it weren’t for

the blood staining my cock when Boo went to suck it, I would've sworn you weren't a virgin."

"You're disgusting." Her hand moves in a flash to strike me in the face. I cock my head to the side as my jaw stings with her slap.

"And yet I bet if I wanted it, you'd go down on your knees eager to prove that you're better than her."

"I don't need to suck your dick to prove my worth."

"You'll do what you're told."

"Or what?"

"Don't worry, princess. I don't want to fuck you tonight. I have other plans."

"Did she like how I taste?"

"Who?"

"Your whore. When she sucked your dick, did she like the taste of me on you?"

"Want me to call her up here so you can ask her yourself, or perhaps you want to go with me to see her? I'm sure she'd teach you how to give me head if you want to watch. Get some pointers."

"I don't need any help. Just ask Axe. We had a great time while you were gone to your little meeting."

I wrap a hand around her throat, walking her backwards until her back hits the floor to ceiling window of the dining room.

"What did you just say?"



“You heard me.”

“I could kill you and no one would give a fuck except maybe your fat ass friend.”

“You can have a friend, but I can’t?”

I squeeze her throat harder. “Nobody fucks you but me. For his sake, you better tell the truth.”

“Like you really care. Like it matters.”

“It matters, Adeline.”

“Careful, Ghost. It almost sounds like you care about me.”

“Don’t flatter yourself. I just need your eggs. I don’t have to fuck you to knock you up. I’ll make an appointment tomorrow.” I take out my phone and fire off a text.

Her face pales. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it.”

“What are you playing at, princess?”

“No-nothing,” she stutters as I release her throat.

“I don’t do games. So, stop trying to play me.”

“You’re right. I don’t like that you fuck someone else. It makes me feel cheap and used. I know you don’t love me. I’ve always known I’d marry for money and never love, but I had always hoped that the man I gave myself to would respect me enough not to flaunt other women in my face.”

“At least I don’t hide who I am. I don’t bullshit you. I keep it real. What you see is what you get. I’m not going to fake it. Been honest with you every step of the way.”

“Yeah. Shame on me for wanting better than I deserve, right? My father was an evil man who hurt you. I’m not him.”

“His blood flows through your veins.”

“As it will with the son, you expect me to bear you. Are you going to hate him for being related to him, too?”

“I never said I hate you, Adeline. Hate is a strong emotion.”

“There’s a thin line between love and hate.”

“Hate would imply I care enough to feel something for you outside of necessity.”

“I’d rather die than have your child.”

“Don’t tempt me.”

“Go ahead and do it. It’s only a matter of when, anyway. My father is out of the picture. You don’t need me to take Chicago. You can’t hurt him through me. He’s dead.”

“Is that what you want? Are you ready to die right here? Right now?” I lead her out onto the balcony, taking her right to the banister. “I could throw you over and everyone would believe you jumped if that’s what I told them to believe.”

Adeline licks her pretty pink lips with tears glittering in her eyes.

“You don’t want to die, princess. You’re desperate to live. To feel. To be free. I can make you feel good if you let me. Make you crave my touch. Make you beg me to fuck you.”

I shove my thumb between her lips.

“I can teach you to enjoy making a baby with me.”

I pop my thumb from her soft lips.

“Not as long as you’re fucking your whore, too.”

“And that’s all this tantrum is about, then. You not wanting to share.”

“It’s about respect. Respect I’ve earned because I’m your wife.”

“And who says you’ve earned it? That comes in time, Adeline. It doesn’t happen overnight. Did you think I was going to what stick my dick in your virgin cunt once and fall in love?”

She doesn’t answer. She doesn’t need to.

“I’ll let you in on a secret. I haven’t kissed a woman since Victoria other than the one I gave you after our vows. I’ve not buried my tongue in anyone’s pussy since her. I’ve fucked plenty of women since her. All with a condom. All but one. You getting that from me was a big step.”

“You must have truly loved her.” She cups a palm to my jaw, and I want to pull away. Her touch is like a fiery flame, daring me closer. Brushing her thumb along my scar, she whispers, “I see you, Ghost. What was your name before? Who were you before you turned into this cruel monster? Who were you before my father destroyed you?”

“Someone I’ll never be again.” I grab her wrist. “So don’t fool yourself into thinking otherwise.”

“Why do you punish yourself and everyone around you?”

“Because I’m alive.”

“And she’s not,” she finishes for me.

“That’s enough sharing. Now take off your pants and turn around.”

## Chapter Eleven

### ADELINE

“Now take off your pants and turn around,” my husband grits the order at me.

“What for? You have other plans, remember? You don’t want to fuck me tonight.”

He slides a palm between the apex of my thighs. “I’ve changed my mind. I’m going to fuck you and I don’t want to look at you and see that pity that rests in the depths of your eyes. This is better for both of us if you hate me.”

“You mean it lessens the guilt you feel toward Victoria?”

“Don’t say her name.” He squeezes my mouth hard, and I dig my nails into his forearm deep enough to break the skin.

“Why? Because she died and you’re alive and are too damn chicken to end your own suffering.”

“Suicide would be too easy. The real hell. My suffering comes in living a life without her. Now take off your goddamned pants, Adeline.”

“Or what, you’ll rape me again? I don’t think so. If you’re going to fuck me, the least you can do is be man enough to look me in the eye when you do it.”

Ghost shoves his hand down the front of my pants and jerks me into his hard body. I go up on the tips of my toes, determined to make him kiss me. To force him to experience emotions other than anger and self-loathing. I stare up at him, seeing that storm raging in his eyes. The way he wars with himself. Beneath all that hostility is a man who longs to end his own suffering. He punishes himself. Doesn’t believe he deserves any good. I respect that loyalty. It’s been engrained in me. But I also hate him for it because I know no man will ever love me the way he continues to love her.

His hot breath blows across my lips as he leans down and takes my face in his hands. He wants to kiss me. The tension crackles between us as he holds my gaze, moving in closer. So close that mere millimeters separate our mouths. I can taste his liquor tainted breath.

My pulse drums in my throat as my heart beats erratically. Electricity buzzes between us. Our mouths drawing toward one another like magnets. Just when I think he’ll give in, he grazes the corner of my mouth with his lips and moves down my neck, nipping and sucking, teasing me with his tongue that I long to feel in my mouth again.

“Take off your pants, Adeline.” He tugs at the waist of them, seeking a button or the zipper.

“They zip in the back,” I tell him as his hands fumble around my ass.

My pants fall to my ankles, and I kick off my shoes and step out of the wide legged fabric.

Ghost lifts me so that my ass rests on the ledge of the balcony wall. My back hits the railing as I circle my legs around his waist, knowing he could easily throw me over the edge. I hook my arms around his neck as he takes out his cock and strokes the length.

His eyes practically glow with fire as he stares at me with such intensity I may combust.

In one fluid moment, he has the crotch of my undies pulled aside and his dick in me.

“Fuck you’re tight, princess.” He groans into my neck as he thrusts. My ass cheeks rub against the cement wall, chafing my skin.

It’s a beautiful burn.

A beautiful ache as my body stretches to accommodate the intrusion.

This time is much better than the last.

“I’m going to split you in two.” His tongue darts out to wet his lips and I rock into him, moving with him, wishing if I kissed him, he’d kiss me back.

“And then what?” I gasp as he circles his hips and lifts me off the wall, still impaled by his cock. Those rough fingers dig

into my ass with raw possession as he carries me to a chair.

Sitting with me on top, straddling him, anyone higher up than us in any of the surrounding buildings could see us, but I don't think either of us care.

“Ride me,” he growls.

“Kiss me, Ghost.” I lean down, intent on having his mouth. “You've taken everything from me. If you want me to trust you. You've gotta give up something to me. Let go of that control. That pain. Give it to me. I can take it.”

“Stop talking, Adeline.” He grips my hips, controlling my movement as I grind against him.

I press my lips to his, soft and sure. He doesn't push me away, but he doesn't kiss me back. And I don't know why when it shouldn't, but the rejection cracks my heart further in two. He's splitting me apart, just not in the way he thought.

I want to continue to hate him.

Except he exposed himself to me. He can't hide from me, and I think that scares him. The fear of falling and having anyone else ripped away from him. Being responsible for someone else with the power to hurt you again.

I scare this big bad biker.

I saw that tenderness below that hard surface when he first kidnapped me. I see it now as he thrusts inside me.

He doesn't want to care about me, but Ghost feels for me. I'm not stupid enough to mistake this for love. I know this is



lust and hate rolled into one, but it means he can feel.

That maybe there is hope.

“Stop looking at me like that.” He closes his eyes, refusing to acknowledge that I’ve gotten to him.

“Why?”

He wraps a fist in my hair and tugs my head as far back as he can. Sinking his teeth into my shoulder, he bites me hard, marking me. Bruising me with ownership. “Be a good girl and come for me.”

The way he says good girl all deep and throaty warms me down to my damn toes. I know he knows I like it when he says it that way because his lips widen against my skin. He’s smiling as he buries his face in the crook of my neck to bite me once more.

He moves a hand between us to touch me. “Yeah, you like that good girl shit, huh? Set the pace. Show me how you want to be fucked.”

I place my hands on his shoulders and slowly roll my hips. I move slow and methodical, doing a trick Carla told me about, spelling out each letter of my name with each swivel of my hips.

“That’s it. That’s my good girl.” His fingers trace the ridges of my spine. “Faster, baby. Bounce that ass off my thighs.”

“Oh, God.” I shudder as a riptide swirls in my lower belly. My body bobbles on his thighs.

“Not God, princess. You call me by my name when I’m in you.”

“I don’t know your name.”

“Yeah, you do.”

“No. Not Ghost. Tell me your name.”

“That man died fifteen years ago. Call me Ghost or nothing at all.”

“Can we do give and take?”

“What’s that?” his cock twitches inside me.

“If I make you come with my mouth, you have to tell me your name.”

“I’ll play your game, but not tonight. Get up.” He taps me on the ass, and I untangle myself from around him. “Lean against the rails.” I do as I’m told. My controlling biker places my hands where he wants them and presses down on my spine, forcing my ass to stick out.

Ghost grabs me by the hips and enters me from behind. My legs shake like jelly as he slams into me over and over again. The lights of the city dance and sparkle before my eyes like I’m in a movie.

Definitely better than the first time.

He finishes with another slap to my ass as he pulls out.

“You should go stick your feet in the air.”

“What?”

“Before you go clean up. Don’t want to waste that baby batter.”

And like that, the moment I thought was there is gone.

I’m setting myself up for failure.

We both know how this story ends.

I know it’s going to hurt like hell, but I’m doing it, anyway.

Hearts can be very stupid things.

Like every other girl who has a special place in her heart for beautiful broken things, I think I can fix him.

Stupid girl with an even dumber heart.

My father broke him.

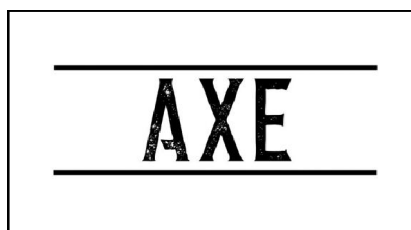
Now it’s up to me to set it right.

I bend down to grab my pants and when I look up, Axe is standing in the kitchen staring at me.

Blush creeps across my cheeks.

Was he watching us the whole time? He holds my gaze while wearing a devilish smirk.

## Chapter Twelve



I shouldn't be looking at the Prez's wife like this. Watching him fuck her stupid.

He called me up here to witness them in action. To remind me she's not mine to covet and yet it doesn't stop me from thinking about her.

Ghost doesn't love her. She was a pawn to punish a dead man. What he does is none of my business. I shouldn't give a fuck, but I do. Maybe I'm spending too much time taking care of a woman who isn't mine and will never be mine. The situation is all too familiar.

Adeline is fucking with my head. I don't know if she even realizes that she flirts with me or maybe she does it because she's bored. Maybe she looks at me like she is right now to get a rise out of her husband.

Her tempting rosy colored lips tip into a sweet smile as blush coats the apples of her cheeks. Her fingers wiggle to give me a small wave.

Prez walks past me to the fridge wearing a smug, satisfied expression. “Want a beer?”

“I’m good. You said I was needed.”

“Plans changed. I’m staying in tonight. You can take the night off.”

“All right.”

He looks at me like he wants to say more or brag about banging his wife, but Adeline enters the room smelling of him and sex. My fist tightens. I want to hit something. Mostly his face.

“Told you to put your legs up.”

“I thought you were kidding.”

“Guess, I’ll be fucking you again then.”

That’s my cue to leave. “If that was all, I’m going to head out.”

Adeline avoids looking at or speaking to me, and Ghost doesn’t say another word. I should go find that redheaded whore. Stray. The one who is always trying to ride my dick. Getting laid may not solve my problems, but it sure as fuck can’t hurt to try to get my mind off a woman that I have no business thinking about.

I know I can’t go there. It’s a line there’s no coming back from. One thing I can count on is there is always someone to get drunk and stoned with. I take a seat at the bar next to

Flash. The dude is known for having the good bud. Not that synthetic bullshit. I prefer the real thing.

Times have changed. You never know what people are lacing and cutting shit with these days.

“You got that homegrown?”

“You know it.” He pulls out a metal cigarette case and hands me a fat joint.

Running the doobie under my nose, I take a good whiff. “That’s what I’m talking about.”

“Right on,” he mutters and downs the last of his beer before taking off with Taco. He’s got the right idea.

I glance around the bar and spot Stray’s dark red hair coming out the bathroom followed by Boo. Stupid bitch. Was hoping I wouldn’t see her cunt ass.

“Need a drink?” Stray asks but is already grabbing me a can of Coke to pair with my go to friend Jack Daniels.

Boo pours herself a shot and chases it with my Coke.

“Grab me another Coke, Stray.”

“Why?” Boo snaps.

“I don’t know where your mouth’s been.”

“You wish you knew.”

“Right. Anyway, you on all night, or can you get off early?”

“I’m waiting on Ghost.”

“Bitch, I wasn’t talking to you. I was asking Stray.”

Boo scoffs. “Dick.”

Stray’s teeth dig into her bottom lip. “If I can get someone to cover for me.” She eyes Boo.

“Don’t look at me. You know I’ll be outta here as soon as he shows.”

“I wouldn’t hold your breath,” I tell her.

“How would you know?”

“Because I just came from the penthouse where he was balls deep in his woman and he told me to take the night off.”

She flips her hair. “That didn’t stop him on their wedding night.”

“Believe me or not. I don’t give a fuck, but he said he was staying in. They’re trying for a kid.”

She slaps a palm on the bar and storms off.

“Where are you going?” Stray calls after her.

“Let her go. She needs to walk it off. I’ll give you a hand if these assholes get too rowdy.

“Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it. You got a light?”

With a nod, she tosses me a matchbook. I light up the joint, take a hard hit, then offer it to Stray. She declines.

“Can I ask you something?”

She perks up. “Of course.”

“Why do you like me?”

Her lips purse. “Who says I do?”

“A man knows when a woman is into him.”

She leans across the bar, giving me a direct view of her tits. “I mean you’re hot. A little mysterious at times, but truthfully. You don’t put Boo on a pedestal like everyone else.”

I’m mid toke on her last sentence and nearly choke as I chuckle at that. “Isn’t she your butt buddy?”

“Women like her aren’t anyone’s friend. She’s out for numero uno.”

“You’re not wrong. How’d you end up here, anyway?” I take another hit, followed by a shot.

“With the club?”

“Yeah.”

“Condensed version. I ran off with loser boyfriend number one to chase him while he chased other women and a heroin addiction. He took off and left me stranded and penniless, so I hooked up with this biker and he dropped me in Chicago. Got a job as a stripper in a dump and met Goat. I think he felt sorry for me and offered me a place here. What about you?”

“Did some dumb shit and am currently banished to this club until I wear out my welcome or decide to move on to somewhere else.”

“You’re a wealth of information.”

I snuff out my joint and shove it in my cigarette pack for later. “Gotta keep the mystery alive.”



“We’re never going to happen, are we?”

“I’m not looking for love, but if I were...” I leave it hanging here.

“That’s probably the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

“You didn’t ask for my advice. I’m gonna give it to ya, anyway. Word to the wise. Stay away from bikers unless you want to be heartbroken. We care about two things. Riding and getting our dicks wet.”

Boo returns, appearing ten shades of pissed. I tried to tell her. The bitch climbs up on the bar holding a bottle of tequila in the air as she shouts, “Who wants to do body shots?”

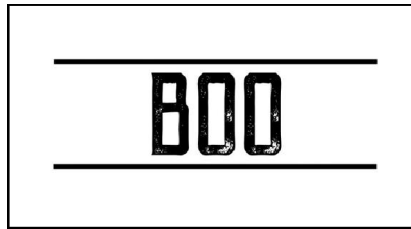
I shove back from the bar. I’m not that desperate.

“Do you want to get out of here?” Stray asks as other brothers crowd around to take Boo up on her offer.

“I can’t give you what you want.”

“I’d rather be sad than lonely tonight.”

## Chapter Thirteen



Fat, hot tears plop onto the landing of the stairwell.

*"They're trying for a kid."* Axe's words are like acid dissolving my soul.

Why does hearing that over seeing Ghost with his wife the other night hurt worse than anything that man has ever done to me? I've always prided myself on being able to handle this life.

I thought I was prepared for the worst. Him choosing someone over me. I guess I've always had it in the back of my mind that my only competition for this man was his duty to the club. Love the man, love the club. That's the way of this life for whores and ol' ladies. It's the one thing that we have in common. Knowing we'll never be first as long as we're never last.

His standing me up tonight cements things are changing.

And not for the better.

Maybe Axe is fucking with me. Being a dick for whatever reason. Not that he needs one. From the moment he arrived, he's had it out for me. Like he thinks he's too good to fuck club pussy. The way he acts toward me messes with my mind. Men have always made moves on me. Some women too. Not Axe, though.

There's only one way to know if what he said was true.

He'd tan my ass if he knew I was doing this, but I have to know if Ghost is choosing her over me tonight. Fucking Axe. I take the elevator up to their apartment and let myself in with the key he gave me for when I clean for him.

Quiet as a mouse, I crack the door and peer inside. No one is in the living room or dining area. Sweat slicks my palms as I tiptoe down the hallway to where the spare bedrooms are.

They must be upstairs and I'm insane for stooping to this level. Disappointed with myself, I decide to leave. I'm halfway to the front door when I hear her.

"If you're looking for Ghost, he's upstairs. I'm grabbing him a beer. You can deliver it to him if you want to speak to him."

I twist to face her and the wall I thought I'd built around my heart tumbles the rest of the way down. She's wearing his cut and a pair of black lace panties. Her gorgeous blonde hair is wild from rolling around in their bed, no doubt.

The sight of her flushed face is like a knife to the heart.

"It can wait."

"Leave your key."

Wordlessly, I leave one on an end table and hightail it back to the bar. He let her wear his cut. The leather that means more to him than anything.

I ignore the look of pity Axe wears as I enter the bar. I don't need nor do I want him, of all people, feeling sorry for me. Shoulders straight, tits out, I grab a bottle of tequila and climb up on the bar. "Who wants to do body shots?"

"Hell yeah," someone chants.

I whip off my top, showing off my pierced nipples and take a hard pull off the tequila, trying to forget all about Ghost. There are seven bikers ready to fill every hole I have and then some.

It won't be the first train I've had run on me, and I doubt it will be the last.



## ADELINE

I watch Boo slink out the door, then I grab the key she left behind and find a place to stick it for future use. The fact that she had been crying was evident. I shouldn't hate her, but I do. I know Ghost was with her after he sent me away to dry my

own tears on the night we married. The night we murdered my father together. I should push him toward her and wish them well, but I can't help the attraction that pulls me to him. This need to conquer him. To make the monster soft for me.

I want to make him love me.

To drive him crazy.

So that when I drive a knife through his heart, he'll never see it coming.

Like a good wife, I fetch his beer.

Upstairs, he's kicked back in the bed like a tattooed king, one arm resting behind his head. The covers pulled down at his waist.

"Did I hear you talking to someone?"

"Your little friend stopped by. Guess you missed your playdate."

"My playdate?" he grins.

I take a swig of his bitter tasting beer. "Mhmm." I drop a knee next to him on the mattress and he takes the beer from me. "I don't know what you call it."

"Booty call."

I scrunch my nose up at him.

"Do you want me to stop seeing her?"

"It would make things easier for me. Not having to worry that you're going to track some STD back to me."

“I wear rubbers.”

I shrug off his leather vest. “How many others are there?”

“Women that I fuck?” I nod. “I don’t keep track. It’s not like I have a harem.”

“So, she’s special to you?”

“No. A good time.”

“And me...am I special to you, Ghost?” I drop my other knee to the bed and sit with both palms flat to my thighs.

“Do you want to be?”

“I think we’d have a better chance of my getting pregnant if you try to make this marriage a real one.”

He shifts positions on the bed, placing his beer on the nightstand. Reaching over, he puts a hand to my cheek. “I’ll never be able to offer you anything other than protection.”

“I see.” I look away.

“But if you want to pretend that this is real, princess. I’ll make you one promise. I won’t fuck other women until you give me a son.”

“At least you’re honest. After the baby, then you’ll go back to your bachelor life. But what about me? Do I have the same privileges?”

“You mean, can you fuck other people?”

“It’s only fair.”

“Life’s not fair. If I catch you with another man, I’ll kill you both.”

“What if you don’t know about it?” I smirk, knowing I’m pressing his buttons. Forcing him to admit that he doesn’t want me with another man.

“I told you I won’t fuck other women. Take the win, princess. I rarely concede.”

“Pick my battles, is that it?”

“Exactly. Now that we’ve settled that there’s something you need to do for me.”

“And what’s that?”

“Show me what that mouth of yours can do besides talk.”

“I’ll need you to teach me.” I flutter my lashes. “You’ll be my first.”

His nostrils widen and I can tell he enjoys knowing no other man has had me.

I pull the blanket back, exposing his dick, and he makes the appendage jump when I go to touch him, causing me to squeal and draw my hand back.

“He doesn’t bite. He spits,” my husband mocks me, making fun of me for referring to it as the snake in his pants earlier. “Make a fist around it.”

I wrap my fingers around the rigid, yet silken skin. “Now what?”

“Is this your first time touching a dick?”

“Yep,” I pop the P. I glance at him to see his reaction, and the man looks absolutely feral.

Ghost covers my hand with his as he did when we jointly stabbed my father. My mind flashes to the blood that soaked through his shirt. My stomach rolls with the urge to vomit. I’m disgusted with myself.

This biker has done nothing except hurt me since he came into my life, and here I am, ready to be his fucking personal sex doll and breeding mare while knowing I can’t have children. What would he do if I confessed to him?



## Chapter Fourteen



“It’s not going to suck itself, princess. Use your mouth on me.” I sift my fingers through her hair, getting a grip to control her movements as her mouth descends. Those pretty pink lips kiss the tip, all sweet and innocent. Unsure but eager to learn. “Open up and take my cock between your lips. Watch your teeth. See how good you taste?”

Her virgin lips wrap around me. Knowing I’m the first man to have her mouth is empowering. Like with her virginity, this is another piece of my wife I’ll always own.

“Flatten your tongue. Yeah, like that. Fuck, such a good girl.”

Adeline moans at my praise and I have to control myself. To remind myself that she’s not done this before and I can’t go too rough too fast. Not yet.

“Use your tongue. Treat my cock like your favorite candy. Mmm.” Her head starts to bob as she finds a medium pace, sucking and licking. Working the base with her fist. She

catches me with her teeth a few times, but I don't mind.  
“That's it. Suck it, princess. Just like that.”

Her saliva runs out of the corners of her mouth. I love all the sounds she makes. The slurps and gurgles as she tries not to choke. Bucking my hips, I fuck her pretty mouth until she cries. When I'm close, I pop free of her mouth. Gripping her under her arms, I pull her over to my lap and push her panties aside, so she sinks down on my dick.

“I don't know which I love more. Your pretty mouth or your tight cunt.” I press my thumb between her lips to stop myself from kissing her. Adeline's making me crazy in a dangerous way. I've already promised to stop fucking other women. She didn't even have to beg or shed a damn tear.

Rolling her hips, my good girl takes control and I give it to her. I lay back and let her play. Exploring my torso as she grinds, she traces the ink tatted across my chest with her tongue. Peppering kisses up my neck, she bites me hard enough to fucking bruise and part of me likes it. Likes that she's marking her territory.

My princess has a jealousy streak, and it's hot.

Her lips hit my jaw and I shove my face into the crook between her neck and shoulder.

Adeline stops moving. “Look at me, Ghost.”

“Did I tell you to stop?” I growl against her skin, nipping her with my teeth with pressure, but not hard enough to break the skin.

“I want you to look me in the eye and tell me why you refuse to kiss me.”

“I’ve kissed you.”

“You expect so much from me but refuse to give any true parts of yourself to me. Because you’re still in love with a dead woman.”

I glare at her until her face goes fuzzy in my line of sight.

“I’m sorry you lost her. That you never got the chance to know your child or experience all that you thought you would, but I’m here. Living and breathing right in front of you. You chose me for revenge or whatever reason. But I’m here, Ghost. I’m yours.” She places my palm on her chest. “You make my heart race. I’m here. Real. Yours.”

*Thump. Thump thump.* My wife’s heart flutters beneath my hand. My pulse pounds in my temples. A tightening sensation flares in my chest, like my heart will squeeze tighter and tighter until the organ bursts. “You don’t know me. You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.”

“You can try to hide. But I know that the man you claimed died is still in here. Show him to me. Show me who you really are. Tell me your damn name. Let the past go. Build a future with me.”

“I’ve told you. I can’t give you what you want.”

“Then I can’t give you a baby if you won’t even kiss me. A baby should be created out of love, not duty or hate.”

“What about lust?”

“Sure, that happens a lot because people mistake hormones for love. I don’t want that to be my story. *Our story*. I don’t want to fight with you. I want us to, I don’t know. Start over. Get to know each other. I need this to be real, Ghost. I need you to give me all of you.”

I’ve gotta get out of here. I shove her off me, practically breaking my dick in the process.

“Stop pushing so God damn hard.”

“Stop being afraid to feel something real for me or anyone. When was the last time you allowed yourself to be happy? Truly happy. Do you even know the answer to that?”

I grab my cut and stomp to the closet to get pants.

“Go running off scared. Like a lost little boy. That’s all you are,” Adeline screams at my back as I slam the bedroom door behind me.

“Fuck.” I go out on the balcony and light up a cigarette. This is why Adeline was a perfect choice. We’re supposed to hate each other.

She’s not supposed to dig under my skin and expose me from the inside out.

I take a hard drag and lean over the railing, staring out at the skyline of the city.

I don’t want this.

Closing my eyes, I think about Victoria. Loving her was all I knew. She consumed my every waking moment. Every breath

that pulled through my lungs was for her. Losing her may as well have killed me. I should've died with her.

I hear the door open behind me, but I can't look at her right now. Adeline takes up too much space in my mind. She's suffocating me. Trying to smother my demons. I brought her here and set this all in motion. Maybe I should let her go. Free her from this marriage. But her arms slide around me, and her lips meet the center of my spine.

"I'm sorry I upset you. I didn't mean to push."

A vision of Victoria appears in my mind, and I can't explain it. I can't hear her, but she's talking to me. Telling me it's time to let go. Time to move on. I shake my head as a tear trickles down my cheek like I'm a fucking pussy.

I push my wife's hands away and flick my cigarette into the night, watching it swirl in the wind. Keeping my eyes on the orange ember until it disappears.

"I'm going for a drink."

Adeline grabs my arm. "Don't you dare go running to her. To easy."

I stare down at her possessive grip on my arm, then I look at her face, seeing tears glittering there.

God damn her for looking so damn pretty when she cries.

"Stay here and drink with me or take me with you. But don't walk away and leave me alone." Her hand falls away.

I know she didn't ask for this. To play part in my revenge and the demise of her father. No one will ever replace Victoria, so why am I so fucking tempted to stay? To give in to every demand she asks of me?

“Get dressed.”

Her face lights up with the glow of a million twinkling lights.

Adeline darts up the stairs, then abruptly stops at the top. “Where are we going?”

“Down to the bar.”

The eager grin she had on her face falls and this tight pain in my chest grips me like a vise threatening to end me if I don't do something to return her smile. “There's somewhere else we can go. Wear something you can ride in and decent shoes.” Like magic, my words bring that light back to her eyes.

I'm in trouble. I'm in over my head and losing control.

I grab my cell phone from the kitchen counter and dial Capone. “Call the friend. We're going for a ride. Yeah now.”

## Chapter Fifteen

### ADELINE

After some quick personal care, like washing my important lady parts, I put on some clean undies and deodorant. I sling the tee of Ghost's that I threw on to go chasing after him onto the closet floor and stare at my small collection of clothes, wondering what qualifies as appropriate for riding. He joins me moments later.

“What's wrong?”

“I have no idea what to wear.”

“Allow me.” Ghost starts handing me random articles of clothing and there had better not be anything belonging to his whore in the stack.

I settle on a black Harley Davidson tee with faded orange lettering and a fat man on a hog paired with a pair of jeans with the knees ripped out.

I have never owned a pair of real motorcycle boots a day in my life, so I'm stuck with a pair of black Converse. Not that I

don't love them, but shit kicking boots would be perfect for the occasion.

“Now you look more like an ol' lady. Might want to do something with this hair if you don't want it flying in your face.” He tugs on a tendril before tucking the strand behind my ear.

I go up on the tips of my toes, getting in his face, our mouths close to touching, daring him to close the gap between us. “Noted,” I whisper.

“Hurry up, before I change my mind,” he whispers back, flicking the tip of my nose. “I've got a few calls to make. Don't take forever.” Pulling out his cell phone, he dismisses me.

Getting Ghost to kiss me is becoming a game, and I don't enjoy losing.

Quickly, I put my hair in a loose braid. I don't trust him not to grow impatient and leave me behind.



In the parking garage Capone is waiting for us, holding two helmets and two black bandannas with the club's insignia printed on them.



Ghost takes one of the bandannas and covers my face from the nose down, tying it off at the back of my head. “This will protect you from any bugs going in your mouth,” he tells me, then places the helmet on my head, securing the strap under my chin.

“Who’s the other for?”

“Me,” Carla struts up, looking like a total bad ass biker babe. Dressed in a black tee with slits cut across the chest, black skinny jeans, and a pair of black silver studded boots. Her hair is wild and wavy. Red lipstick stains her lips, and her eyes are all smoky and mysterious. She looks sexy. I’ve never been jealous of my best friend until now, seeing the way Capone is staring at her as though he wants to bend her over his black motorcycle and fuck her stupid right here, right now.

I’m not sure any man has ever looked at me, except maybe Roberto. I shudder at the thought of his severed head. Capone whistling at Carla as she does a twirl for him breaks me out of that dark headspace.

I run my fingers over the creepy ghost face painted on the side of the gas tank, trying to pay attention as they each go over a basic rundown of guidelines for being a passenger.

“Don’t wiggle and move around,” Ghost tells me as I throw a leg over and straddle what he calls the bitch’s seat. Once he’s on, he has me scoot forward a little, placing my crotch to his rear.

I grab his belt loops and he shakes his head. “Arms around me, princess. Something happens and you need me to pull

over, tap my belly twice and that'll tell me to stop.”

I rest my hands on his stomach under his tee, trying to resist the urge to scratch my nails across his abs. I found out from Axe that my husband is fifteen years older than me.

Before I was aware of my father's plan for me to marry Roberto, I had always had this strange fear of being forced to marry an older Capo. A fat, ugly one on the verge of losing whatever was left of his graying hair.

Even if I hate Ghost nearly every second of my existence, I'm glad he's at least hot.

We roar out of the parking garage. The purr of the engine vibrates my insides. I look over at Carla and Capone in the lane next to ours when we stop for a traffic light. Her mouth is covered like mine, but I can tell there's a big smile on her face.

Riding through the city is such a different experience compared to doing it in a car or even the L Train. Everything's louder and more alive. Including me.

The four of us end up at a bar with other bikers wearing cuts with different logos on the back. Before we enter, Ghost takes the bandanna that was around my face and ties it around one of my belt loops, clearly displaying that I'm affiliated. Capone mirrors the same action with Carla.

Inside, we order some beers and the guys put in for the next game at one of the billiard tables in the back of the low-lit bar. We get a few looks, mostly the other men sizing up Capone

and Ghost until they see their patches. Others seem to recognize them immediately.

“Friends of yours?”

“Something like that. This bar is one of the only neutral ones in the city that isn’t affiliated with one club. It serves as a space where we can communicate without a fight breaking out. Was the safest and worst place to take you. No one will touch you in here, but it also means they now know who you are.”

“Great.”

“We’ll always have targets on our backs, but you’ll always be safe with me.” His gaze lingers on my lips, but he doesn’t kiss me.

Disappointment must color my face, because he winks at me before tipping his beer back and chugging. A table opens up and Carla grabs me by the arm, leading me to the old-fashioned jukebox in the corner. She cashes in some bills for change from the quarter machine next to the bathroom, where there is also a condom dispenser. Classy.

We browse the song choices, finding a selection that probably hasn’t been updated since the late 1970s. I leave the decision to Carla. Capone grabs two stools, situating them away from everyone else, next to the jukebox where we can watch them play. With them distracted with their sticks and balls, I start grilling Carla.

“Have you been talking to Capone?”

“We’ve been texting a little. Nothing serious. I was surprised when he called. I was going to turn him down until he mentioned you.”

“Has he told you anything about Ghost or the club?”

“Our chats are more sexual. He wants to fuck me.”

I nearly spit out my beer at her bluntness, but that’s my best friend. She rarely holds back. “Are you going to?”

“I haven’t decided. Though there’s something to be said for tall, dark, and dangerous. And those tattoos are sexy.”

She’s not wrong. I’m torn. Of course, it would be convenient and great for me for her to be involved with him if I didn’t know what these men were capable of. Only I do know, and I don’t want this life for her. As much as I want to protect her, that’s not something I get to decide for her.

I know what it’s like to have the freedom of choice ripped away.

She bumps her shoulder with mine. “How’s married life treating you? The two of you seem less tense.”

“We’re trying to make things work. He, um, agreed to stop fucking other people for now.”

“For now? Ugh. I suppose that’s something.”

“Maybe. If he’s to be trusted.”

“And you don’t trust him?”

“I’m trying to.” There’s so much I wish I could tell her, but the less she knows about the truth of my marriage, the better

off she is. “One day at a time. At least the sex is good.”

“You’ve been holding out on me.”

“A lady doesn’t kiss and tell.”

“You’re no lady.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. Being married to a biker makes me an ol’ lady. Thank you very much.”

“I want details, damn it.”

“Ok. There is one thing that really bugs me. He won’t kiss me.”

“What do you mean? Like he doesn’t initiate doing it or he refuses?”

Before I can get into specifics Capone approaches. “You two over here behaving?” He goes straight in and lays a kiss on Carla’s lips. Wasting no time, I can tell he’s going all in with tongue.

My cheeks heat, and I glance away. Part of me is jealous that Ghost wouldn’t dare. I look for my husband and find him at the bar, ordering a beer. If I were on the outside looking in, I’d think he was hot. The kind of man you let take you to some trashy motel for a one-night stand to rock your world and never hear from again. A bad boy you know is toxic and unfixable, but you think you’ll be the special one to change him.

Being here at this dive biker bar with my bestie at my side, it’s easy to forget that none of this is real. My biker’s gaze

catches mine and he shoots me a smile that goes straight to my pussy. There's no denying that we have sexual chemistry.

He approaches our trio, beer in hand, cocky smile. Like he knows I'm remembering all the filthy things he was not only doing but saying to me while he was in me.

Ghost was right about one thing. He does make trying for a baby fun.

Even if it will never happen. He doesn't know that.

The longer we do this dance and play this game, the harder it gets to completely hate him.

Because even though he's done awful things, he's done them with love for his dead family.

We understand each other in that sense.

"You thinking about fucking me or killing me, princess?" His voice grits in my ear, all deep and sexy in the tempo he knows turns me on.

"Both," I answer honestly, and he rewards me in the most unexpected way.

His lips land on mine, soft yet firm. His hand strokes my cheek, wet with condensation from his beer as he plunges his tongue between my lips. Shock disappears, replaced with need as I return his affection.

Like I'm overcome with sickness, a fever, I slide my tongue against his.

The room spins and the world fades away.

Carla and Capone cease to exist next to us.

All I know is the taste and feel of him are all I crave.

Ghost is all I know in this moment.

All I want.

All I need.

## Chapter Sixteen



My wife is kind of adorable. She thinks she's slick, but I can read her. I can practically see the gears in her head turning. She can't decide if she hates me enough to kill me or if she's falling in love with me.

I confess. She's got a fire in her that I'm drawn to. Like a moth to a flame. I can't seem to leave her alone. Guilt eats at me. Being with Adeline is natural. She makes me smile. Every day I wake up wondering what she will try next.

I know she thinks she's being clever. Trying to seduce me. To make me feel something for her. Getting me talking about the past, wanting my government name. Placing demands on me. Showing me her jealous streak.

I cross the bar, intent on being an asshole. Making her squirm. But she stares up at me with them gorgeous olive-colored eyes and I can't deny her the one thing I know she wants.

My kiss.



Something that I reserved for the woman I was supposed to marry, but no amount of time or suffering will bring her back and maybe it's time I stop punishing myself.

Adeline's lips press to mine, all sugary and plump, with a hint of beer on her breath. Slipping her the tongue, I know she's caught off guard by the intimate act. But she quickly reciprocates, moaning into my mouth as our tongues dance, warring for control.

Neither of us are ready to submit and are equally enjoying the battle. I sense it the second she gives up fighting for dominance. Her fist grips my tee and she surrenders to me. Our kiss turns from hard to sensual, slowing in pace. It's hot, wet, and fucking deep.

I pull away first, still holding her face. I sweep my thumb across her lips, wiping away her smeared lipstick.

Adeline stares at me, dazed and confused. I'm about to suggest we get out of here when I spot Rollo giving me a subtle nod. Capone and I share a look.

“Stay right here. I mean it. You and Carla don't move off these stools. We'll be right back.”

Adeline nods, and I hope she fucking listens. Don't like leaving her on her own. She has Carla, but she's a fucking Bianchi and I don't fully trust her.

Like I don't trust Rollo. That's the only reason I'm having Capone watch my back instead of Adeline's. Rollo's not an enemy, but he's not exactly a friend either.

He runs Southside. Motherfucker is always dripping in gold and carrying a wad of cash thick enough to choke a horse. He's flashy and shows off too much. I follow him to the back room that's reserved for meets like this.

“Yo. What it do?” He slaps his palm against mine, flashing his grill at me.

“What's up, man?”

“Hear you making big moves. Nabbed yourself a princess. Word is that the Triads have been recruiting, trying to expand their reach beyond Chinatown on both sides. Was wondering if you've heard anything on your end.”

“Nothing solid. Nothing worth repeating.” He could be blowing smoke. Feeling me out. But sounds like the Triads cut the Bianchi brothers out.

“I've been losing men and money.” He scrubs a hand over his bald head. “Been losing some of my best girls.” Rollo is a pimp, but he treats his stable of women decent. If they're leaving, it's got to be for bigger and better money.

“I'm not supplying the Triads. I hear anything I'll send word.” We don't ride through his hood. We share mutual respect. He stays out of Northside, and we don't touch the South. The Triads have Chinatown and the rest eat scraps.

“Appreciate it.” He bumps my fist.

I need to get back to my wife and put as much distance between her and Carla as possible. They may be friends. I don't doubt that. However, I know about family and where

loyalties lie first. Carla will do what her family says, no questions asked.

She, like Adeline, was raised to be loyal. Family before dishonor.

It's why Adeline didn't turn the knife on me when I took out her father. He told her to do it and she had to obey.

I stop Capone before we go back to the women. "Take Carla home. If you're going to fuck her, do it tonight, then never call the cunt again."

He licks his lips. "You think her brothers would use her to do their dirty work?"

"Yeah. No cap." If she wasn't Adeline's friend, I'd have Capone kill her and frame the Triads.

"I'm on it."

"All right, let's get them and bounce."

Adeline and Carla are nowhere to be seen. If they took off, I'm going to kill both of them.

"I'll check the bathroom," Capone tells me, and I hit up the bar to ask the bartender if he's seen my wife. I shouldn't have left them unsupervised.

"Did you see where the two women by the pool tables went, man?"

He lifts his chin and I turn to see Capone has them both. "I had to pee. It's not a crime," Adeline's bitch best friend snaps.

"Cool it," Capone warns her, tightening his grip on her.

“Never mind,” I mutter and take my wife’s hand. “Let’s get out of here.”

“I wasn’t finished with my drink,” Carla nags. Capone will put up with that shit for about five minutes.

My VP stops walking and hoists her up and over his shoulder.

That shuts her ass up.

We get them outside and the women say their goodbyes. If Capone does his job right, he’ll piss her off, forcing her to want to avoid him. Therefore, staying away from my wife. At least for a while.

Adeline and I ride out.

Capone and Carla peel out in the opposite direction.



I watch over Adeline as she sleeps peacefully for the first time since I brought her into my life. She’s gorgeous. Beautiful, thick hair. Pouty lips you can’t help but want to taste. She rolls to her other side; the covers slipping down with her movement to expose her naked back. Her ass juts out. Her perfect ass that I want to bite, spank, and fuck.

I’m going to claim every inch of her. Fuck every hole.

I trace a finger down her spine, spelling out my name. The one I've not used in fifteen years.

Lorenzo. Imagining it inked on her skin, branding her as mine in body.

Adeline is awakening things in me I swore I'd never allow myself to experience ever again.

This started as revenge, but it's quickly developing into something more. A new obsession.

I'm not supposed to give a fuck about her. Not on an emotional level. Only now that I have her, I intend to keep her. My plans have changed.

I want Adeline to crave my touch.

My affection.

My love.

Even watching her sleep turns me on.

Stroking my cock, I slap the head against her ass, before spreading her cheeks to tease the rim of her asshole with the head. As tempted as I am to just take it, that's something we'll need to work up to.

Reaching around her front, I tease one of her nipples. Rolling the tender skin between my fingers, pinching and rubbing as I guide my cock in her from behind. Fuck, her sweet heat envelops my dick, welcoming me home.

She wakes with a startle.

“Be a good girl and let me fuck you like this,” I grit in her ear and bite the shell.

She shudders, her eager pussy contracts. Her muscles squeezing me so damn tight.

My wife loves when I praise her.

“Touch yourself, princess. Imagine my mouth there.”

Doing as she’s told, as I watch over her shoulder, she touches her belly, gliding her fingers further down until she hits the target.

Her eyes roll back as she grinds against me, touching herself. The tip of her finger circles her clit. Grabbing her wrist, I draw her wet fingers to my nose, wanting to smell her. “Give me a taste.” I suck her fingers between my lips. She tastes like mine, and I want more.

Pulling out, I flip her on her back, spread her legs, and stare at her pretty little cunt. Pink, wet, and swollen with need. Adeline stares at me with flushed cheeks in anticipation.

I run a finger through her slit. “Anyone ever kissed you here?”

She shakes her head.

“I’m getting all of your first.” I hook my arms under her thighs and rub nose along the same path my finger took, inhaling her musky womanly scent. “I’m going to kiss you right here.” I give her a lick.

“Please,” she pants, her pussy dripping with the need. “Be with me. Please.”

“Please what?”

“Ghost,” she whines.

“Tell me what you want, and I’ll give you my real name.”

“Your mouth.” She squirms.

“What about it?”

“Do that thing again with your tongue.”

“Tell me, Adeline.”

“Fuck me with your mouth,” she cries out.

“Good girl.” Spreading her pussy lips, I get down to business and reclaim another piece of the man I once was. I allow myself to let go and give something to Adeline I’ve not done for any other woman since Victoria.

The threads binding me to the past begin to unravel, releasing me from the promises I made to a dead woman. She’s nothing but a distant memory. Adeline is here. Writhing beneath me. Eager to please me. Ready to give me anything I want and more.

And she does.

Fuck is she giving me the fantasy.

Digging her fingers into my scalp, she holds my head in place, practically smothering me in her pussy. I’m not complaining. I only regret not tasting her sooner.

Adeline is primed and ready to come for me. Her soft pants build to loud moans as her back arches. She flexes her hips, moving her body in rhythm with my tongue and fingers. Her juices drip down my chin she's so wet.

“Ghost. Ah,” she says like my name on her tongue is her last prayer.

“It's Lorenzo, princess.”

“Lorenzo,” she parrots.

“Yeah.” I curl two fingers insides her, making a come here motion, hitting her magic spot.

Adeline shudders and shakes. Her fucking sweetness melts like sugar on my tongue, and I can't get enough.



## Chapter Seventeen

### ADELINE

Ghost. Lorenzo. I don't know which to call him, snakes up my body, dragging his lips across my skin in a wet, fiery trail, stopping to pay attention to each of my breasts. He reaches my mouth and doesn't hesitate to kiss me. If I didn't know better, I'd believe this is a lot like making love. He's looking at me and touching me in a way no one has ever dared.

I don't see lust in his eyes. There's something else there that terrifies me. I vowed to make him love me and now that I think he could be starting to fall, I don't know if I have it in me to hurt this man.

I know I'm completely fucked in the head. Maybe I have Stockholm's Syndrome. Because I can't formulate any other explanation for the emotions flowing through me as he lines up and thrusts deep and hard. Thoughts that have me wishing that I could give him back what he lost. A wife. His child. One out of two isn't so bad. I could be the someone to love him unconditionally and fix what my father broke inside him that made him think he had no other choice than to kill.

It's hard to remember that I hate him.

That he hates me.

The line between love and hate is so blurred I'm not sure there's even a line as he moves on top of me, doing his best to make a baby with me.

There's this determined energy radiating from him that has me wanting him to. To put his baby in my womb and for him to truly love me.

"Fuck, baby," he groans, and I lose what control I had left. Hearing him call me baby is so much more intimate than the pet name princess. There's a different tone in his voice. Almost pained. "I could do this all night."

"What's that?"

"Be inside you." He kisses me while I die a little on the inside, at the best compliment he could have given me. With those words, I know this isn't a game for him. He means what he says.

His movements slow, and he demands my eyes be on his. "Do you feel it?"

My heartbeat flutters a million miles a minute like the wings of a hummingbird. His hands and mouth are all over me at once and then he starts to move with an unmatched ferocity.

My head knocks against the headboard as it bangs the wall.

"Yes, Ghost. Yes."

"When we're in this bed and it's you and me. It's Lorenzo."

I nod and yeah, I totally feel it and him. There's been a shift in my relationship with my husband and we're so good we're better than good. I think this is what they call the honeymoon stage.

“No games, Adeline. I'm giving you real. Don't fuck me over.”

“I promise, Lorenzo.”

“Good girl. Now roll over.”

He positions me face down and bottom up. His rough hands grip my hips, and he slams into me from behind to finish what he started. Sweat beads form, dripping down my bowed back as I take each deep brutal thrust.

My husband pounds into me relentlessly, chasing his release as mine climbs higher and higher.

His warmth flows into me and he holds me in position, refusing to pull out until every drop is spilled and even then, he continues to fuck me, to force another orgasm on me.

I'm a blubbery mess by the time he's through, practically speaking in tongues.

And when I think it's over and he's pulled out, laying next to me, he comes back at me with his fingers, making sure his come doesn't leak out.

I want to confess that his efforts are futile, but I can't.

Doing so would break not only my heart, but possibly his.



“Mornin’,” Axe calls out as I enter the kitchen.

“Hey.” I woodenly make my way to the coffeepot and grab a mug from the cabinet.

“Why are you walking like someone shoved a corn cob up your ass?”

“Long night.”

“Must have been since it’s nearly noon.” He grins over the brim of his cup. “Get yourself together. I get the honor of taking you shopping.”

“What for?”

“Rooftop barbeque. Ghost left his credit card and a list.” He taps a piece of paper with a black card.

“Where is he?”

“Meeting.”

“With who?”

“He didn’t say.”

“And if I need to reach him?”

“That’s why I’m here.”

“And here I thought you love my company.”

“I mean, you’re hot as shit to look at.”

I shake my head and look at the list. I've never shopped for groceries a day in my life. I snort seeing the first item. A bikini. "Is there a pool?"

"Yeah. On the roof. One of the best in the city."

"Really?"

He smirks. "Maybe if you didn't sleep all day, you'd get out of this apartment more and explore the building."

"I don't sleep all day."

He arches a brow. "I'm going to smoke. Be ready to go in ten."

"That's not enough time," I protest, but he's already going out on the balcony.

Jerk.

I rush upstairs to find something to wear. I settle on an off-white scoop neck sleeveless top paired with my wide leg black pants. I know there's no way we're going on a bike with the extensive list I've been given. I hope my husband doesn't think I'm going to be preparing any of the food. I don't cook and have never had to clean. Not that I think I'm too good for it, but I was brought up with the privilege of never needing to learn.

I grab my phone and meet Axe by the elevator.

We take one of the many black SUVs in the parking garage.

I'm sure we look like quite an odd pair as we enter Target. Me in my designer clothes and Axe in his leather and denim.

I'm trying not to panic. I don't know what half the items on the list are and wonder how pissed Ghost would be if I hired a caterer.

"This will go quicker if we divide and conquer. I'll get my swimsuit and you can handle whatever this is." I rip my part of the list off the top and extend the rest toward my shadow.

"Some of this we'll get from the butcher, but we'll stop there last."

"I have a better idea. You go shopping and I'll call up Carla and meet her for a late lunch."

"Nice try, sweet cheeks."

"Sweet cheeks?"

"Yeah. You've got a sweet ass."

I glare at him.

"What? I can't compliment you?"

"What will my husband think?"

"I reckon he'd say he agrees." He grins.

"Ugh." I scrunch my nose and grab one of the red baskets.

"Do you think we're going to fit all this shit into one tiny basket?" He laughs harder and fetches a shopping cart. "We stick together. I've got my orders."

"I know what you can do with your orders," I mutter under my breath and take over, pushing the cart. We stop in the clothing section first because picking out a swimsuit will probably take me the longest.

“Which color do you think he’ll like?”

“Just pick something,” Axe barks at me.

“Someone’s testy.”

“Woman, we’ve looked at every style in here five times. Nothing new is going to appear.”

“Fine,” I snap, but hold up two more as he pinches the bridge of his nose.

My cell phone vibrates with a text.

**Carla:** *Bitch! Call me back.*

Axe pushes the cart, grabbing what looks like the most random junk off the shelves while I text.

**Adeline:** *Can’t really talk right now. I’m in a Target. Shopping for a thing.*

**Carla:** *What thing?*

**Adeline:** *Something for the club. I don’t know the details.*

**Carla:** *Look at you doing wifey shit. Can I come to this thing? When is it?*

**Adeline:** *Not sure. I’ll ask when I see my husband.*

I smile at the thought of my broody man.

**Carla:** *Well, let me know. Capone is a dickhead. BTW.*

**Adeline:** *You knew that before you climbed on his motorcycle. What did he do?*

**Carla:** *I don’t want to talk about it through text. We should have a girl’s night like we used to. Junk food and cheesy*

*romance flicks. Face masks and painting our toes.*

**Adeline:** *I'll text you once I'm back at the apartment. I don't know if I have plans yet.*

**Carla:** *Ugh. FINNEEEEE. But I want it noted that we haven't had a night like that in forever.*

**Adeline:** *You're so dramatic. We hung out before you went on your trip.*

**Carla:** *Yeah, but now all your time is wrapped up in your bikerhole hubby.*

**Adeline:** *We double dated a few days ago.*

**Carla:** *Honey, that was last week.*

I blink. Her response catches me off guard. Was it a week ago? The days have been blurring together. Lorenzo has been keeping me busy and sleep deprived. Most nights he gets in after I'm asleep, but he likes to wake me up with either his tongue, fingers, or cock inside me and I'm not complaining.

I glance at Axe and notice him staring at me.

“What?”

“Figured you'd know which to get.”

I look to the shelf he motions toward.

Pregnancy tests.

My stomach plummets to my feet.

“Aww, did you get knocked up?” I pinch his cheek.



“Ha. Cute. It’s not for me, smartass. Ghost put it on the list. In bold. I might add.”

Guess distracting my husband with sex isn’t working as well as I had hoped.

Not everyone can get pregnant right away.

We’ve not been married that long and yet at times it’s like we’ve been together for years.

I put on a fake smile and grab the closest box. It’s not like it matters which test I purchase. The results will be the same whether it’s an early detection test or not.

Negative.

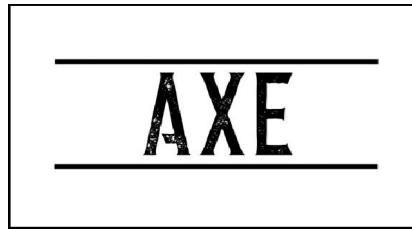
I can’t have children.

My father saw to that the same way he controlled every other aspect of my life.

“Hey, are you okay?”

Axe grabs my elbow and I jerk away. “I’m fine.”

## Chapter Eighteen



“You truly are a damn spoiled princess. Do you even know how to marinate meat?” I chuckle as the prospects bring in more of the bags from Adeline’s shopping haul.

“It can’t be hard. I’m sure there’s a tutorial online.”

“Have you ever even used an oven before?”

She stiffens. “I’m not going to apologize for growing up with money.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Sure you did. Poor little rich girl with enough money to pay someone to wipe her ass for her. I’ve heard it all before. I’m used to people hating me for who I am. For coming from blood money.” She shrugs.

“Look, why don’t you have a glass of wine. Go take a bath and take that test. I’ll handle all of this shit.” I wave at the sea of groceries and shit. We put in a big ass order with the butcher that will be ready for pickup in a couple of days. Adeline is in over her head, but she’s trying.

“Are you sure? Don’t you have a life besides taking care of me?”

“You’re not so bad, sweet cheeks.”

“You better not let my husband hear you calling me that. He may get the wrong idea.”

“I don’t really care if he does.” Fuck. I shouldn’t say shit like this to her.

“Axe,” she whispers my name, her bright eyes sparkling with playfulness.

“He knows I’m full of shit.”

“Good. I kind of like having you around.”

“Better watch out. My head’s swelling.”

She rolls her eyes before walking away and I don’t inform her that I’m talking about my other head.

“You either like getting burned or have a death wish,” one of the prospects says with a shake of his head.

“I didn’t ask you to talk. Make yourself useful and put all this shit away.” I stomp out to the balcony and take out my cigarettes.

I stare up at the second floor, seeing the lights flickering on. Adeline has no idea that I have the perfect view of her as she moves from the bedroom to the bathroom, undressing as she goes.

I lose sight of her once she hits the bathroom, but she reappears in nothing but a bra and her undies. Fuck me, Ghost

is a lucky bastard.

I light up my cigarette and stop gawking like a fucking pervert. Blowing smoke rings over the banister I stare down at the street below and wonder what Coralie is doing right about now. Did she move home to Drag Creek? I've wanted to reach out and call her so many times. Only there's no point. She can't handle a life on the run, and I want better for her than a lousy bastard like me.

I think about tracking her down, seeing if she's living the good life without me. Has she found a better man? One worthy of all the love she has to give. Love she used to give me so freely.

My cell buzzes. Fucking Stray. I knew I shouldn't have fucked her, but loneliness drives a man to stupidity. Never should have given her my damn number, either. I've been avoiding her. She's a nice girl, but she's not for me.

**Stray:** *I have the night off if you want to hang out.*

My finger hovers between deleting the message or hitting reply.

"Ahhh!" I drop my phone, ignoring the cracking sound the screen makes as it shatters. I run inside, taking two steps at a time as Adeline screams again.

I find her in the bathroom scantily clad in a towel that barely covers her ass. She's staring at her reflection in the mirror at her hair.

“I take it your hair isn’t supposed to be black or your fingers.” What I’m assuming is hair dye drips from her hair and onto the floor.

“That bitch. That fucking bitch,” she seethes.

“Who?” I ask, even though I already know the answer. This has Boo written all over it.

Adeline glares at me. “Get out.”

I hold up my palms and back away, closing the door as I go.

That smart ass prospect lurks by the bedroom door. “She’s fine.”

“Didn’t sound like it.”

“Come on, let’s give her some privacy. I need to call Prez.”



“Where is she?” Ghost storms into the living room.

“Upstairs. Refuses to come out of the bathroom.”

He pauses at the bottom of the stairs. “How bad is it?”

“Can’t say. Was wet when I saw her.”

He nods.

“Am I free to go?”

“Yeah. Thanks for...just thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

I leave him to deal with the mess that Boo has made of Adeline’s appearance and go down to the bar.

Speaking of the she-devil. Boo’s behind the bar, swaying her hips to some female rapper. Bitch looks damn smug, wearing an evil smirk as she lip syncs to the lyrics. Some song about being a bad bitch and a devil.

I snort. If the shoe fits.

I help myself to the cooler behind the bar, grabbing a longneck. Boo stops dancing and grins at me. “I hear you’ve got yourself a new girlfriend.”

“I don’t know who your source is, but you fuckin’ heard wrong. But if I was you, I’d be getting the hell outta dodge.”

“Why is that?”

“I’d say you’re about five minutes from Prez stomping his boot in your ass.”

“Aw, are you worried about my safety?”

“Fuck no. I don’t want to have to scrub your guts off the floor after he spills them.”

Her face pales. “Is he mad?”

“So you admit it.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Right,” I mutter.

“Heads up, feisty redhead incoming.”

Fuck. I turn around right as Stray takes up a stool at the bar.  
“Hey, Axe. Didn’t you get my text?”

“Busted my phone.”

“Oh. Bummer.”

“Not really.” I shrug and take a hard pull off my beer. At least with my screen busted, I can’t be tempted to seek out Coralie and ruin her life for a third time. Even though I have a backup phone, I can insert my sim card into.

“I was wondering if you wanted to come over later.”

“Can’t. I have other plans.”

“Some other time, then?” Her big eyes burn into me with so much hope I almost feel bad for what I’m about to do.

“Maybe. Are you ready to go?” I ask Boo.

“Huh?” She looks at me like, what the fuck?

“If we’re going to make that movie, we need to get gone. Prospect. Watch the bar,” I call out, not caring which one responds. One of them will.

“Um, yeah. The movie. Right. Later, Stray,” Boo says softly, sounding as if she almost gives a damn about someone other than herself.

I lead Boo to the parking garage.

“What the fuck was that? You know she’s my best friend.”

“Then why’d you go along with it?”

She lifts her shoulder. “I don’t know.” She stares at her shoes. “I’m not high enough for this.”

“That makes two of us. Let’s get out of here. It’s better if you lie low tonight, don’t you think?”

“Why are you helping me?”

“Because I’m bored, and I needed Stray off my back, and you were there.”

“Fair enough.”



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**BOO**

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I follow Axe back inside, going up the back service stairs to his apartment. His place is one of the smaller units that hasn’t been converted into an actual apartment. It even still has the outdated hotel furniture. He doesn’t live on the same floor as the other brothers, either. He’s on the floor where Ghost has his office and shit. There’s nothing in the room. A queen sized bed. A long dresser with a flat Tv mounted over it on a swiveling bracket.



There are no personal effects out anywhere other than a pile of dirty laundry rumped in the corner. Dude doesn't even have a chair or a table. I sit on the edge of the bed, picking at the frayed edges of his tattered blanket.

He hands me a jar of moonshine and I twist the lid off. "So..." I take a sip. The corn liquor tastes kind of bitter, like unflavored cough syrup. "You trying to get me drunk to take advantage of me?"

"Wouldn't need you drunk if that's what I wanted."

"Ouch."

"Oh what, now the truth hurts your feelings?" He sits next to me, his knee touching mine.

I'm not uncomfortable, but being here in this tiny room alone with him almost makes me claustrophobic.

He jerks the jar from my grip, some of the liquor sloshing over the top.

"What's your story, anyway? Why are you exiled?"

"Just not ready to settle down, that's all."

"You've been here a while." I note as he takes a deep breath.

"I don't like to talk about the past."

"Okay. You obviously didn't bring me here to fuck me, so what do you like to talk about?"

"Why don't you tell me why you pulled that childish stunt?"

I lick my lips as he stares at them. "I didn't know I needed a reason. I was bored."

“Bullshit.”

“Why don’t you like Stray?”

“She wants a boyfriend.”

“And you don’t?”

“Want a boyfriend? Fuck no.” He chuckles. “Why do you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Have to fuck with everyone.”

“Because it’s fun.”

“You’re all about fun, aren’t you? Heard about that show you put on a few weeks back.”

I stiffen. “I was drunk and horny. So what?”

“Doesn’t it bother you that they’re only using you?”

“No. I’m using them too.”

“To what end?”

“I don’t know. What’s it matter to you?”

“It doesn’t.”

“Okay... I think I’m going to go.”

I start to get up when he leans toward me, brushing my hair behind my ear. I stare at him, wondering what the fuck is happening here.

Axe moves in to kiss me, and I rear my hand back and slap him across his bottom lip.

“What the fuck?” He rubs a finger across his split skin, dabbing at the blood.

“What are you doing?”

“I thought you were into it. Fuck,” he curses and goes into the attached bathroom.

I follow after him and lean against the door frame, crossing my arms over my chest. “Well, I wasn’t.”

“Your ring cut my damn lip.”

“News flash pal, not everyone wants to jump your dick.”

“Yeah. Noted. You can go now.”

“Let me see.” I step toward him.

“Why? Want to see if you can black my eye while you’re at it?”

“You’re such a baby?” I grab a washcloth from the towel rack and wet it.

I dab at the cut with the cloth. His blue eyes meet mine and I don’t know what it is about him, but I decide what the hell and grab him by the collar of his tee and smash my lips against his.

We go at each other like starved savages. Teeth clashing. Clothes flying. Axe lifts me onto the counter of the tiny sink, my ass going into the wet basin. The faucet digs into my back, but all I can focus on is the fact that his tongue is down my throat and I’m not mad about it.

He fumbles with his zipper like an amateur. “Hurry up before I change my mind.” I give him a hand and his pants

drop. My skirt is already hiked up over my hips as he yanks my panties down to my ankles and tries to take them off over my boots.

“Bed,” we both mutter at the same time.

Axe lifts me as I kick my shoes off, my underwear landing with them as they thud against the floor. He presses me against the wall, nipping at my neck as I angle to get him inside me while I’m hoisting my legs around his hips, locking my ankles above his ass. So much for the bed. He takes me hard and fast in what seems like a drunken fever dream.

“Oh shit,” I cry as the back of my head hits the wall hard enough, I think we just cracked the drywall. He feels so good. Too damn good for a man I can’t stand.

“You okay?”

“Don’t ruin this by talking,” I warn.

He grins at me and slams me against the other wall.

My back hits the towel rack, but I don’t complain. I focus on chasing my next orgasm. His teeth scrape my neck and I close my eyes, unable to look him in his, afraid of what I’ll see there. What I might feel.

And fuck if I don’t want to feel a damn thing besides getting off.

## Chapter Nineteen



Entering the bedroom, I find Adeline curled up in the center of the bed with her hair wrapped in a towel. Hand tucked under one side of her face. Thick tears race down her cheeks as she stares blankly at the closet. I slide in next to her, facing her.

“Hi,” she croaks.

“Bad day?” I raise a hand to grab the towel and she slaps my hand away.

“Don’t. I don’t want you to see it.”

“I’m sure it’s not that bad.”

“I’m hideous.”

“I doubt that. I can just stick a paper bag over your head and fuck you.” I try to lighten her mood with a joke.

She sniffles and rolls away from me, losing the towel. Fuck. There are patches. Some spots were missed. “I’ll get you an appointment. I know a guy.”

She rolls back toward me. “She ruined my hair.”

“It’s not that bad. It’s like I have a punk princess in my bed.”

“I think we both know there’s nothing punk about me. If you want to sleep downstairs tonight. I understand.”

“Because of your hair?”

She nods.

“The last thing on my mind is your hair. I’ll deal with Boo.”

“No,” she snaps, popping up like she’s been possessed. “I’m going to kill her.”

“That’s what she wants. A reaction.”

“Well, she’s going to get one.” My wife rolls off the bed dressed in short pajama shorts that hug her ass cheeks and a thin tank.

“Where are you going?” I question while she digs out a pair of footie socks from one of the dresser drawers.

“I told you. I’m going to kill her.” Adeline nearly topples over as she gets her socks on.

“Baby.” I shift off the bed and start toward her.

Her palm flies up and in my face. “No. Don’t baby me.” She storms past me, going downstairs to the kitchen to rifle through the drawers. At least she didn’t go for a knife.

She grabs a pair of scissors.

“Jesus. What are you planning to do with those?”

“I’m going to cut her hair off.”

“Is that going to make you feel better?”

“I’ll let you know.” She moves to go around me, and I hook an arm around her waist.

I press my lips to her neck, then behind her ear as I stroke the underside of her tit. “Stop. I’m tired and really don’t want to clean up another body today.”

“Another?” She freezes long enough for me to grab the scissors.

“Come to bed and I’ll tell you about it.”

“Oh no. You’re just trying to distract me to protect your whore.”

“One. She’s not my whore and two, I’m not protecting anyone but you.”

Her eyes narrow into tiny slits, and I realize I just fucked up somehow.

“Oh, fuck you.” She makes a run for it and slips into the elevator.

“Adeline,” I shout, dropping the scissors onto a nearby table. “She’s not worth the trouble.”

My wife stares back at me with a look that says, ‘fuck around and find out.’ She may look all sweet and innocent, but she was raised in the mafia and Boo has disrespected her more than once. Rightfully, the cunt has earned Adeline’s wrath.



# ADELINE

“Adeline,” my husband snaps as the elevator doors close in his face. I smile a satisfied smirk and get off at the bar. I stomp inside, dressed in my pajamas, forgetting that everyone can see how screwed up my hair is.

“Can I help you with something?” One of the big burly guy’s steps in front of me. I think he’s one of the club officers or the enforcer or whatever.

“Move, Hatchet.” I shove against his chest. He strokes his russet-colored beard as though I’m nothing more than a gnat he can’t be bothered by. He reminds me of that lumberjack guy I read about as a kid who had an ox. All he’s missing is a flannel.

“Does Ghost know you’re down here?”

“Yup,” I pop the P and knee him in the balls. I don’t have time to make chitchat. I have a black lipstick wearing emo cunt to destroy.



“Oof.” He grabs his junk as I shove on past him, hunting for that dark-haired bitch.

One of the other whores is staring at me from behind the bar. The redheaded one who smiled at me on my first night here. “Where’s your friend?”

“Huh?” she gapes, looking around the room like she’s lost in wonderland.

“Don’t play stupid with me. Is she hiding back there?” I lean over the bar, my feet no longer reaching the floor.

A palm curves to my ass, giving me a slap. I turn around, prepared to take someone’s head off to find my husband staring me down.

“She’s not here. Let’s go.”

“I’ll go when I’m good and ready to.”

“Get off the bar,” he growls, all low and scary, but I’m too mad to heed his warning.

“If you’re looking for Boo, she left with Axe.” Stray snuffles and I notice the tears staining her cheeks.

Disappointment fills me. I don’t know why it bothers me that Axe is with her. I guess I sort of thought we were friends. And friends don’t fuck whores who did you dirty. Guess I’m not the only woman Boo has fucked over, judging by the sad expression this chick is wearing. Her mouth turns down as her bottom lip wobbles.

I had no idea Axe and Stray were a thing.

The only man who has ever truly broken my heart was my father. I guess I'm lucky in that regard. If Carla were to ever go after my husband, I'd be devastated. And that's how I know he means something to me. I fear losing him.

Afraid that what little smidgen of happiness I'm finding will be ripped away from me at any moment. Because I don't deserve it.

I slide back off the bar. Lorenzo wraps his arms around me and kisses the top of my head. "Let's go home, crazy pants."

"I'm not crazy," I mumble as he strokes his thumb up and down my back.

"You had scissors."

"And I would have used them too."

"I have no doubt of that." He lifts me, carrying me back to the elevator. I bury my head in his neck to avoid looking at Hatched. I know I owe him an apology for kneeing him in the nuts.

The man is doing his job, but no one is going to keep me from giving Boo what she deserves. I never checked the key she gave me. Stupid me for assuming she was mature enough to do the right thing. I know better now.

Lorenzo places me on my feet. "I'll set up a house call. Malice's mom manages one of the top salons in the city."

"Great."

"It's not that bad."

“I’m not a calico cat, and yet that’s exactly what my hair resembles.”

A low chuckle erupts from his throat.

“This isn’t funny.”

“My apologies.”

“Mhmm.”

Laying a hand on each of my shoulders, he massages the tight muscles. Lolling my head back, I rest it on his chest. “Don’t think you’re getting laid tonight.”

He kisses my forehead. “Wouldn’t dream of it. Did you take the test?”

My blood runs cold. “That’s the last thing I can think about right now. I’m deciding which method of torture will be appropriate for punishing your whore.”

“Let me worry about Boo.”

“This is between her and me. I don’t need you to handle her. I want her gone.”

“I’ll make sure she’s punished, but she’s been loyal to the club.”

“And what about your loyalty to me as your wife?” I shake my head and exit the elevator. “Spending the night with Axe isn’t a punishment.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” He stomps up the stairs behind me.

I slam the bathroom door in his face, locking it before he can barge in.

The knob twists and jiggles. I ignore him. Leaving him to wonder what I meant by the statement. My reflection stares back at me from the mirror. I don't recognize myself and I don't even mean my hair. I'm harder yet more vulnerable.

Then again, I have nothing to lose. This whole relationship with Lorenzo is a façade. Like a house of cards and one wrong move will send it all tumbling down. "Open the door, Adeline."

"Piss off."

He slaps the door, but I hear him walking away.

I rip open the box for the pregnancy test. This tiny plastic stick is all my husband cares about.

I don't know why I'm bothering to entertain this as I read the instructions.

"This is stupid," I mutter, pulling my shorts down and sitting on the toilet. I already know the results are going to read negative. This is a waste of time, yet I do it anyway to appease him.

Stick peed on, check.

I place the test on the edge of the sink and wash my hands. There's no point in waiting for the word I dread to pop up. So, I don't wait to see the result. I brush my teeth and leave the test there for Lorenzo.



“Oh, damn girl. Don’t worry. Alfonso has you. I got you.” The stylist purses his lips, then snaps his fingers across my face.

Lorenzo wasn’t lying when he said he knew a guy. I’ve tried in the past to get in with Alfonso and was always wait listed.

“How bad is it?”

“Good news is your hair is healthy.”

“And the bad?”

“We have a few options.”

“Which are?”

“I can try to reverse the damage by stripping the color out over several appointments to maintain the integrity of your hair or I can touch up the color that’s there now, by matching the shade as close as possible. What do you want to do?”

Boo thinks she’s won this round, but I’ll win the war.

“Touch up the color.”

“You sure? Your man made it sound like getting you back to blonde was dire.”

“I’m sure.”

My husband has been trying to suck up to me for the past few days. Going out of his way to kiss me before he even

leaves the bed in the morning. Treating me to breakfast in bed. Suggesting I go out to lunch with Carla though he doesn't like her because of her family name and her brothers and saying she can come to the club only pool party.

“Cool. I came prepared for both.” He gets his supplies ready.

“How do you know the club?”

“My brother-in-law. My husband's oldest brother is a member.”

“Malice, right?”

“Yup. Their mother is my business partner.”

“What's that like? Working so closely with family?”

“It's not been without challenges.” He grins, draping a cape across my shoulders. “Just the color or you want a trim too?”

“Let's do some layers.”

“Okay, Mrs. Thang. I'm going to mix your color, you just relax.”

I pull out my phone to text with Carla. We didn't get to do our movie night.

**Adeline:** *Girl's night? We can get shitfaced and watch movies.*

**Carla:** *Will Capone be there?*

**Adeline:** *That would defeat the purpose of girl's night.*

Axe strolls in looking like he crawled out of a box in the alley. Bloodshot eyes, wrinkled jeans, and a rumpled tee.

I ignore him and stare at my screen, waiting for Carla to reply to me about our bestie date.

**Carla:** *I'll be over after dinner with my parents.*

“Is it a requirement to be a member of the club that the men have to be good looking?” Alfonso asks as he sections my hair for the color.

“Nah. Have you met Butcher?” He’s not even a little cute. He’s exactly the type of man I envision when I think of a serial killer. He’s got one of those faces only a mother could love.

“I suppose there’s always an exception to the rule,” he notes.

“Hey, I need to pick up the meat order for the party. Can I trust that you’ll stay put?” Axe stands before me with his hands shoved in his pockets. I glance past him, giving him the silent treatment. He’s sleeping with the enemy and therefore no friend of mine.

“She’ll be in my chair a while. Girl, you’ve got thick hair.”

“You’ve got my number if something comes up. I’ll send a prospect up, just in case.”

“We’ll be cool. Now go and get. Your pretty face is too distracting, and I’ve got work to do,” my stylist gives him his marching orders.

“Are you mad at me or something?”

I continue with the silent treatment.

Alfonso looks at me, then back at Axe, but doesn’t comment.

“All right. Whatever.” Axe leaves.

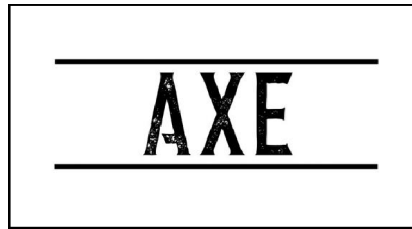
“Honey, you are ice cold. What did that fine ass man do to you?”

I spill the tea to Alfonso, telling him all about Boo.

“She must have a death wish.” He makes a tsk sound.



## Chapter Twenty



“This changes nothing.” Boo pulls her top down over her head.

“It can’t happen again,” I promise, and my dick practically weeps in protest. The bitch is a good lay. I see why Ghost keeps her around. She’s good with her mouth. Can make a man forget his own name and what day it is, apparently.

“Right,” she mutters, as though she’s trying to convince herself.

“This never happened,” I tell her while reminding myself that this was a huge mistake. A severe lapse in judgment.

“Good. We’re in agreement then.”

“What will you say to Stray?”

“Shit. Do you want me to say something to her?”

“Tell her whatever you want. I never should have started with her.”

“She’s a sweet girl. You should give it a shot.”

“I’m good.”

“Don’t call me.” She balances on one foot, putting her shoes on.

“Wasn’t planning on it.”

“Okay. Later or not.” She gives me a small wave and books it out the door.

What the fuck was I thinking? Of all the people I could’ve fucked, I picked the one bitch I despise the most. Not once. Not twice. Three times, or was it four? I need my damn head checked and probably my dick, too.

My phone buzzes from somewhere in the room. I find it under my crumpled jeans and a discarded pizza box.

**Ghost:** *Where the fuck are you? You need to check in. You’re on Adeline detail today.*

Fuck me. I groan. Boo and I have spent the past three nights together, getting totally wasted and fucking each other’s brains out. Not my smartest life choice, but I’ve done worse. I rifle around the drawer of my nightstand, searching for a bottle of painkillers.

I find them and wash a few down with piss hot beer. Checking the time on my phone, I know I don’t have time for a shower. Another text comes through that the deli order is ready to be picked up. I’m sure Adeline will want to go and considering I’m on her detail today, she has no choice.

I find her upstairs sitting in a chair presumably about to get her hair repaired by some fruity guy rocking a purple mullet

wearing a floral shirt even my grandma wouldn't have been caught dead in with jeans so damn tight if he farts, he's going to blow a hole out the ass of them.

By the way Adeline refuses to make eye contact with me, she has to know who I've been with and is holding it against me. Who I fuck is none of her business and yet guilt stabs me in the chest like a knife to the heart, as though I've somehow betrayed her.

Boo really did a number on her hair.

I bet Prez about had a shit fit when he saw it. Boo better watch her back. I almost feel bad for the bitch. Almost. For her sake, I hope he's in a generous mood when they cross paths.

“Can I trust you to stay put?”

The dude doing her hair answers that they'll be a while.

I've not even been here five minutes and already Adeline is killing me with the silent treatment. I give up on forcing her to speak to me. I've got shit to do.



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# BOO

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Damn it. I have to go to the bar to grab my keys. I hope Stray isn't around. I can't deal with her judgment right now. I'm doing enough of that for both of us. I don't want to hurt her. I meant what I said to Axe about her being the kind of girl he should go for. She's sweet and only slightly feral.

A relationship between us would never work. He's an asshole and I'm a free spirit. Not that I would ever consider the possibility of there ever being anything between us outside of meaningless sex. Even if the sex is the best I've ever had outside of Ghost.

Speaking of the devil. The heat of his gaze burns through me like lava incinerating me to the bone. "I need a word. Now." His voice comes out low and lethal. I gulp and follow him to the stairwell.

I should be worried about my safety. Only I'm not afraid of him. His cock has been in me one too many times for me to fear him. He snatches my keys from my hand. One of the jagged edges cuts my palm in the process.

"Ouch," I hiss and blow on the ripped skin as blood drips from the scratch. "What are you doing?"

He doesn't answer. He simply fingers through the ring until he finds what he's looking for. The key to his penthouse and the one for the bar. I wait for him to take the one that unlocks

the door to my apartment, but thankfully he doesn't. Not yet. "You're on probation. I know what you did and don't bother trying to deny it. I don't want to hear any excuses."

"I'm sorry."

Ghost blinks as the muscle in his jaw twitches in what I assume is annoyance. "You're sorry."

"That's what an apology usually means."

"You've never been sorry a day in your pathetic life. One more fuck up, Boo, and you're done. Stay clear of my wife."

"Don't threaten me with a good time. She could join us." I tap my fingers on his chest, and he grabs my wrist, twisting my hand back so hard and far I'm afraid he's going to snap the bone.

"The only reason you're still here is because, at one time, your father meant something to this club."

"Don't throw him in my face. That's a low blow."

"If he could see the way you've been living, he'd die all over again of fucking shame." He releases my hand and shoves my keyring into my cut palm.

"Fuck you, Ghost. Just fuck you." Tears well up, threatening to spill. My father gave everything to this club, and they branded him a traitor. A rat. This club was his life, and it grew to be mine. I thought I'd always have a place here. That being here, serving the men he dedicated his life to, would keep me closer to him. I thought Ghost understood that. That he got me.

Maybe I was wrong.

About him.

About the club.

About everything.

If my father could see me now, I'm not sure what he'd think about the way I've been living my life. Except I don't think being a club whore is the future he envisioned. Blinking away my tears, I realize Ghost has already walked away. He doesn't give a fuck about me.

Disgrace and guilt coat me from the inside out, seeping through my pores as I do my walk of shame up the stairs to the floor of my apartment. The jingling of my key's echoes, alerting Stray to my presence. Her door jerks open as I twist the knob of mine.

"Have you been with him this whole time?"

"Who?" I play dumb, though we both know by him she means Axe.

"Tell me one thing, Boo. Did you sleep with him?" I don't respond, but no response is all the answer she needs. "I thought so."

"Listen, piece of advice. Don't get emotionally invested in any of this place or the people in it." I enter my apartment and shut the door in her face. I don't owe her anything.

I don't owe anyone here a damn thing.

## Chapter Twenty-one

### ADELINE

“I thought you fell in. Thought I was going to have to call for Axe to fish you out of the bowl.”

Carla snorts. “How many bathing suits did you buy?” She assesses my haul from the other day dumped in the center of the bed as she comes out of my bathroom.

“I need options. I’ve never been to a biker pool party before.”

“Neither have I, but I’m sure the logistics are the same as any other, except the men are tattooed and mean.”

“As opposed to what just mean?” I stick my tongue out at her. “Help me pick something. When I bought these, my hair was still blonde. I don’t know what colors complement my hair now.”

“Let me see the red one. Hold it up next to your skin. Red goes great with dark hair, but only if you have a decent tan so that it doesn’t wash you out. Unless you’re going for the Morticia Addams aesthetic.”

“Ha. Ha. It’s not Halloween yet.”

“I can’t believe that cunt had the tits to sneak in here and put dye in your shampoo. Anyone else and I’d be impressed at the level of pettiness. But she fucked with the wrong bitch. I better not find out who she is.”

“I appreciate you. I can stick up for myself, though.”

“Yeah. Yeah. You’re an ol’ lady now. Tough as nails,” she teases.

“Back on the subject at hand, please. What do you think?” I hold up the skimpy two-piece.

“Maybe the black one. It’s classic. What time does this shindig start tomorrow, anyway?”

“Noon I think.”

“Capone still hasn’t asked about me?”

“Nope. To be fair, I haven’t really seen him around here lately.”

“Asshole,” she grumbles.

“Most men are,” I remind her.

“True. Speaking of assholes. When does yours get home?”

“Whenever he feels like it, I guess. I don’t know. Sometimes I can’t get rid of him, while other times I barely see him.”

“You spend more time with your bodyguard than you do the man you married.”

She’s wrong, but sometimes it appears that way.



“You still giving that poor guy the Ricci Silent Bitch Treatment?”

“Yup. He sleeps with the enemy.”

“So does your husband.”

“Ouch.”

“That was rude. I’m sorry. Do you really think he called things off with that skank?”

“He promised.”

“And you bought it? You know I love you, but men lie to get what they want.”

“You think I don’t know that? I want to trust him.”

“I just don’t want to see you get hurt.”

“It’s my heart to break.” I know she’s bitter because Capone fucked with her, then blew her off. That doesn’t mean that Lorenzo is playing me for a fool. I ignore the clawing sensation that gnaws at the pit of my gut. “Do you think my situation would be any better had I married one of your brothers?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“The men in our lives have never been saints. Some are simply more honest about who they are.”

A hand moves to her hip as she pops it out, cocking her stance to one side. “So, what, my brothers and father are all a bunch of liars and cheats?”

“Wake up, Carla. Do you even know what your family business is?” I know our fathers worked together. Her father was an underboss. I know he felt passed over when my father chose Roberto for me to marry when he had two single sons up to the task. He probably would have offered himself up if Carla’s mother wasn’t in the picture.

Carla was sheltered from a lot or, if she was in the know, she never discussed any of it with me.

“You know what, Adeline. I think it would be best if I went home. You’re projecting your issues onto me, and I don’t appreciate it.”

“If that’s how you feel.”

She tosses the bathing suits onto the bed and stomps down the stairs. I let her go and don’t go chasing after her. Maybe our worlds are too different now. If given the chance, I know her family would make a move against my husband and his club.

Though I suppose it’s my club too.

What was an invisible line in the sand has become visible, clearer now.



“Did I miss girl’s night?” Lorenzo questions as he empties his pockets out onto the dresser while I watch him from the bed.

“Carla had to dip out early.” After she left, I took to YouTube to learn how to marinate the meat for the barbeque. Axe offered to help, but he’s still on my shit list.

“That’s too bad. I was looking forward to watching Capone sweat when he came up with me.”

I go up on my knees. “In what way?”

“He gave her the blow off after he fucked her. I’m sure she bitched about it.”

“Why did he blow her off?” Carla told me that after he took her home, he got a blowjob and left her hanging. I agree that it was a shit thing to do. He got his without a thought for her needs.

“I don’t want to talk about Capone and where he wets his dick.” He goes into the bathroom, avoiding the question which leads me to believe he had a hand in that play.

I may be annoyed with my bestie, but I don’t want anyone screwing with her. Lorenzo just bought himself a serving of my silent treatment.

He returns to bed freshly showered and naked. His tan inked skin glistens with droplets of water and I find I’m second guessing the silent treatment. Erect and ready to claim what he wants, he stalks toward me.

Drool dribbles out the corner of my mouth.

“C’mere, baby.” Cooking a finger toward me, he stands at the foot of the bed. I nod and crawl to him as he strokes himself, hypnotized by his movements, completely under his spell. “Open your mouth and stick out your tongue.”

Like a good girl, I do as I’m told.

With hunger filled eyes, I watch him pump and stroke his fist up and down his veiny shaft.

“Got some new ink in your honor, he whispers, stopping long enough to show me in the curved space between his thumb and finger where the words ‘your throat goes here’ are inked.

On anyone else, I’d think the tattoo was tacky, but on my husband it’s hot as hell.

Pre-cum beads at the bulbous tip of his cock and I go to lick it.

“Not yet,” he warns, then rubs the head slowly against my top lip, teasing me, smearing the pre-cum there. His other hand sifts through my hair from the crown to the base of my neck, his grip on me tightens, giving me a squeeze before he smacks his length onto my tongue. Wrapping my lips around the head of his cock, I nearly gag.

“Such a good girl. Take me further back.” Flexing his hips, he holds my head in place to prevent me from moving when he hits the back of my throat. “Fuck, Adeline. Such a pretty little cocksucker.”

My nipples tighten under my shirt, the fabric rubbing me as his tempo increases. I gurgle and suck him while pinching and rolling my own nipples.

“That’s it. Touch yourself.”

His pace quickens even more, liking what he sees, driven by the need to get off. I give up on touching myself and focus on making him shoot his load down my throat. I want to taste him. I want to make him lose control. Lose himself for me. Because of what I’m doing to him. I pop him free of my mouth and turn my attention to his balls. Something I’ve never done. I suck one into my mouth, then the other while I stroke his shaft. He groans and shudders, signaling that he’s getting closer. Hearing my man moan for me is hella sexy and empowering, encouraging me to touch him in other places. I squeeze his ass and take his length back into my mouth, flattening my tongue and hollowing my cheeks as I suck until I cry and he’s coming down the back of my throat. Doing my best to swallow every drop, I continue sucking him, milking him dry.

He brushes a finger along my cheek, wiping away the moisture there.

“I think that’s the fastest anyone has ever made me come, princess.”

I know his words are meant to compliment me, but all they do is remind me that he’s fucked a lot of other women. Especially the one I hate the most.

Not reading the change in my mood and expression, he comes in for a kiss. I press my lips together, denying him what he wants. To taste himself in my mouth. His tongue prods along the seam of my lips. I try to pull away, but he wraps a firm hand around my throat, pressing his thumb into the hollow space at the base.

“Don’t be a brat.” I stare up at him, meeting his molten gaze. “Now move to the top of the bed, want you riding my face until you come.”

And with that order, I forget that any other woman has been with him or made him feel good.

Lorenzo lays back on the pillows and I straddle his face. He grips my hips and I grind on his tongue as if it were his cock while holding onto the headboard for support.

My generous biker makes good on his word, and I cream on his face and again on his glorious dick.



I awaken earlier than usual to the sound of Lorenzo arguing on the phone with someone.

“Tell them they work for me or not at all. I don’t give a fuck. We don’t pay them to ask questions. Nothing has changed since Marco was in power.”

I wrap an arm around him from behind and press my lips to his shoulder. He bends his head to kiss the tips of my fingers as a good morning greeting. At least I'm not on the receiving end of his wrath any longer.

"Never mind. I'll handle it. I've got a meeting near there tomorrow, anyway." He ends the call and turns to me. "I'm afraid Axe will have to take you to your appointment."

"What appointment?"

"Your appointment with the OBGYN."

"You never told me you made me an appointment. I already have my own doctor."

"Dr. Tores is one of the best."

Shit. He's going to find out. Maybe I should come clean. Maybe he'll understand. Sympathize with me over another monstrous act my father committed. He leaves the bed, taking his warmth with him. I shiver under the fan. The temperature in the room seems to have dropped twenty degrees.

"Lorenzo?"

He stops at the bathroom door. "What?"

I chicken out. "Do you want breakfast?"

"Nah. I'll grab something at the party."

"How many people are coming?"

"Not a lot. Today is mostly for the club officers and the brothers who rarely get time with their kids." He winks at me,

and my stomach drops along with what was left of my appetite.

My husband wants the one thing I can't give him more than anything in this world. Logically, I know I'm not defective. That my father's choice took a family off the table before I was old enough to process what it meant for my future on a grander scale. The loss of what could be is hitting me harder than I expected this morning.

Moving through the motions, I go through my normal morning routine, pretending that everything is fine. That there isn't a baby sized hole in my heart. One where I will never know what it's like to have a child growing inside of me. I'll never experience all the ups and downs that come with pregnancy. My stomach will never stretch and grow. My baby will never kick me from inside the womb. My breasts will never fill with milk.

Lorenzo will never get to rub my swollen belly. We'll never pick out a crib or baby clothes.

I push away thoughts of what I can't have and try to focus on what's in front of me. On the life we're building. One that's the biggest lie of all.

"Can you tie this for me?" I call downstairs to Lorenzo.

He trudges back to the bedroom, coming up behind me at the dresser as I turn to my side to make sure my ass isn't hanging out of my bottoms while crossing my arms over my chest to stop my breasts from being on display.



“What’d you need a hand with?” He curves a palm to my hip, shoving a finger under the string of my bottoms and snapping it.

“Tying these strings.” I loop them around my neck.

“I don’t think I can.”

“What?”

“If I turn you loose in this, I may be forced to fight, and I was looking forward to a steak.”

I roll my eyes, but he assists with making sure my top is tied in a secure double knot. “Thank you.”

“Do you have something to wear over it?” Cupping my ass with both hands, he kisses my shoulder.

“Nope.” I smirk, anticipating his reaction in the mirror.

With furrowed brows, his dark eyes meet mine in the reflection.

“I have a sundress.”

“Thank the fuck. I’d hate to kill one of my men for staring at you a little too hard.”

“Will Boo be there with Axe?”

“Why would she be?”

“I thought since they’ve been seeing each other maybe...”

“That explains it.”

“What?”

“Your freeze out toward him. Are you jealous?” he growls.

“Of course not. I thought he was my friend.”

“It’s not his job to be your friend. He’s here to protect you when I’m not able to. Nothing more.”

“It doesn’t matter. I was wrong about him.”

“Is Boo all this is about?”

If I wanted to be petty, I’d rat him out for flirting with me.

“What else would it be?”

“I don’t know. You tell me.” His fingers move inside my bikini bottoms to cup my pussy. “Or do I need to remind you that you’re mine and only mine?”

“No.” I gasp at the intrusion of two of his thick fingers entering me.

“Are you sure, princess?” he does the deep growly voice that sends me over the edge.

“I’m yours. Only yours, Lorenzo.”

“That’s right. And if you behave like a good girl, I’ll fuck you like a bad one later,” he promises, and I lose his fingers as he shoves them in his mouth. “Fuck, my princess has a tasty pussy.”

“But you said you wanted a steak.” I smirk and he kisses me.

## Chapter Twenty-two



“God damn, brother. Your Ol’ Lady is looking fit as fuck.”  
Creek slaps me on the back.

I shrug his hand off. “How many times do I need to tell you? You’re a prospect. I’m Ghost to you. The privilege to call yourself one of my brothers is given when you earn your patch. If and when that time comes, you’ll call me Prez. Got it?”

“Yeah. Prez. I mean, Ghost. Sir.”

“Fucking hell, someone get this dipshit out of my face before I murder him.”

“Sorry, Prez. Ghost.”

*Splash.* I shove the fat fuck into the pool.

Goat and Capone shake their heads, nearly doubling over in laughter.

“Did you hear what that dumb fuck said to me?” I take a swig from my jar of moonshine, watching my wife as she

dots on Capone's daughter, giving her another popsicle. It isn't often Tamsyn allows Bree to come to the clubhouse, but she has a new boyfriend, so he's been getting to see her more frequently. She's dating some hot shot corporate lawyer. Capone told him if he ever hurts either of his girls, he'll cut off his dick and fuck him in his own ass with it, then shit down his throat.

The bastard laughed until he realized Capone meant every word.

I don't know how he does it. Watches the woman he loves with another man. Allows that man to spend time with his kid. I asked him about it once and he said he'd rather see her happy than not have her in his life at all. Shit is completely fucked.

It'd be a cold day in Hell before I ever let Adeline ride off into the sunset with another man. Maybe that makes Capone a better man than me. Either that or a complete idiot.

"Bree's taken up to your woman. Won't be long before you'll have a runt of your own driving you bat shit crazy."

"That's the plan."

"You making any progress in that department?"

"She sees the doctor tomorrow. Then we'll know for certain."

"All your sacrifices are paying off."

"Our sacrifices, man. I didn't get this far on my own."

"You know I've always got your back."

“Why do you think I made you VP?”

“No doubt.”

“Daddy me go wim. You wim wif meee.” Bree grabs him by two fingers, giving a tug. She has a problem pronouncing S sounds, but Tamsyn says she’ll grow out of it.

“Thanks for watching her,” Capone thanks Adeline as she secures an arm around my middle. “But just so you know, when the time comes for the two of you, I don’t do diaper changes.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” My wife tucks further into my side.

“Wim. Daddy. Wim.” Bree yanks on him again.

“Duty calls.” Capone tosses his tee onto a nearby lounge and enters the pool, holding his arms out to catch his daughter as she stands at the edge, ready to jump.

“She’s adorable,” Adeline murmurs.

“She’s a cute kid, but don’t be getting any ideas. I want a son. First,” I tack on, and she gets this far off expression on her face. “Don’t worry. If we have a girl, we can always try again.”

“Right.” She blinks, seeming to snap out of whatever had her mind elsewhere. “How many kids do you plan on us having, anyway?”

“At least four. I don’t ever want my children to be alone. With four, the odds are better stacked.”

“Were you...do you have siblings?”

“No.” My mind goes to Santiago. I can’t help but wonder what he’d think of how my life has turned out. I always thought our children would grow up together like we did.

His was another life lost too soon at the hands of Adeline’s father. At least I can now say his death hasn’t been in vain. Our first son will be named in his memory.

“What’s she doing here?” Adeline snaps me out of my thoughts. I glance across the rooftop to see Boo in a red polka dot bikini and denim cutoff shorts with the waist rolled down. Next to her is Axe. The bitch just had to align herself with the national Prez’s son. The only person one step up from me in the chain of command. His ass is more trouble than he’s worth.

I owe Rebel Black. That’s the only reason I tolerate his son’s presence. The only reason he’s allowed to walk into this event with a whore on his arm.

“Have you tried Goat’s hot dog sauce?”

“Don’t change the subject.”

“Let’s keep the peace for today. If Capone’s ex gets wind of any drama in front of Bree, she’ll cut back on his visits.”

“Whatever. She’s not worth my energy.”

“Wasn’t Carla supposed to be here?”

Adeline’s mouth screws up as though she’s sucking on a sour piece of candy. “She had other plans.”

“Did the two of you have a spat?”

“A mild disagreement. I’m sure one of us will break the ice and text, eventually. We never stay mad long. She’s like the sister I never had.”

My mind drifts back to Santiago and how losing him gutted me. I won’t be responsible for that happening to my wife.



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**AXE**

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“I can’t believe I let you talk me into this,” Boo gripes as we enter the party.

“It’ll be fine.”

“Everyone is staring at us.”

“So let’em stare. They’re probably shocked you’re dressed in something that isn’t black.”

“Ha. You’re real funny.”

“That’s me. I’m a regular wise guy.”

“Isn’t that the mafia?” She smiles and I notice she has a dimple in her right cheek. The more I’m getting to know Boo, the more I realize we have more in common than I thought.

We're both outcasts. Rejected. Unwanted. More trouble than we're worth. The only difference between us is the fact that my father is alive and still holds a position of power. Boo's a disgraced biker brat with nowhere else to go.

Out there in the world that exists outside the safety of this club, she'd be dead. Our enemies would either use her against us or kill her for sport.

Boo reminds me of my status. That I'll never be able to provide any woman with a steady life. At least with her I know there's no expectations. She fucks everyone.

"Want a drink?"

"Sure. I'll take a beer."

"Coming right up."

I leave her staring at the view of the city. Any other woman and I'd worry about her ability to handle herself. Not her. Not Angela Joy. Short for AJ. Better known as Boo because as a kid she had a Halloween obsession. This is what I learned about her last night with my cock buried deep in her cunt.

"Damn, you're one dumb motherfucker." Gunner shakes his head at me, laughing under his breath.

"Why's that?"

"Bringing Prez's pussy to a party with his wife and the ol' ladies of the men she fucks."

"She's more than that."



“Don’t tell me you like her? I thought you were stupid a minute ago, but fuck. Come on, man. Boo?”

“At least I can get my own pussy without my brother holding my hand.”

“Fuck you.”

“You wish I’d let you tap my sweet ass.” I grab our beers and he flips me off. “It’s not big enough. Like your pecker, fuckhead.”

“Suck my nuts.”

“I’m allergic.” I grin as Flash and Grinder walk up with a blunt. I pass on taking a hit and leave them fools to it.

As big a pain in the ass as Gunner is, he’s not wrong about my bringing Boo up here. Everyone is giving us dirty looks, but the thing about it is. I don’t give a fuck. I cashed in my ticket to Hell a long time ago.

“Hey.” I bump the cold bottle against Boo’s shoulder.

“Thanks.”

“Did you want a plate or to get in the water?”

“Not yet. Let’s not push our luck.” She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and takes a hard pull off the bottle.

“No one is going to say shit.”

“They don’t have to. I know they’re all thinking it.”

“What’s that?”

“What’s she doing here? Why’d he bring her? Are they fucking?”

“What about me? You seem to know what’s on everyone’s mind. Tell me what I’m thinking right now.”

She stares at me intensely, studying my face. “You’re thinking, man. I really want to get Boo a hot dog.”

“Cute. All right. I can do that. What do you want on it?”

“Do you know if Goat made the sauce?”

“I can ask?”

“He’s always made the best sauce. And well, no offense to her, but Adeline doesn’t strike me as a girl who knows her way around the kitchen.”

“You’re not wrong. She’s cool though. You’d probably like her under other circumstances.”

She scrunches her nose, making an ew expression.

“No?”

“Yeah. I’m not really into the whole rich bitch scene.”

“Nah. She’s not like that when you get to know her.”

“I doubt that, but I’ll take your word for it.”

I balance my beer on the ledge and hit up the food table.



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**BOO**

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I shouldn't be here. That's the one thought I keep having as I watch everyone around me laughing and having a good time. I'm the last person any of them want to see today. Especially Ghost and Adeline. It's weird watching them together and seeing him look...content.

I think it's the first time I've ever witnessed him so at ease amongst his men. With anyone.

He's always had this dark cloud around him. Our pain was something we shared. His brutal past and my fall from grace. Him hating the man who ruined his life. Me hating this club for what they made my father become.

I'm not even jealous that he's moved on. Sure, I was angry at first, but Ghost was never going to be mine. That prank with Adeline and her hair was childish, but seeing her today, I did her a favor. The darker color suits her. Gives her some edge.

Not that I care.

But maybe this is a sign that it's time for me to move on. To let go of this idea that this is where I belong.

"Cheers, girl." Prue, Mutant's sister, clinks her beer with mine.

"Hey you. Longtime no see." She stopped coming around after things didn't work out for her and Hatchet. I don't know what happened between them. Wasn't my place to ask, but she's always been cool.

"I didn't think I'd see you here today."

"You and me both."

"I see you finally got you a patched man."

"Not even close. We're..." I pause, not knowing how to describe whatever is going on between Axe and me.

"Friends?"

"With benefits, I suppose. Though I'm still working out what the perks are since he dragged me to this."

She laughs. "Well, he's hot. Just saying."

"I can introduce you."

"Oh, no." She holds a palm up. "I'm done with bikers." She laughs at the judgmental look I give her. "I'm only here to pick up that little squirt." She points to a little boy on Mutant's shoulders in the pool.

I didn't think Mutant had any kids. "His or yours?"

"Mine. He loves his Uncle Mute. And the pool is a nice perk."

“One of the best in the city,” I note, wondering where I’ll go if I decide to leave.

Axe is nomad and I know he won’t stick around here much longer.

Maybe he’ll want some company on the road when he leaves.

## Chapter Twenty-three

### ADELINE

“Ok. You were right. Today wasn’t too bad.” I wrap my arms around Lorenzo’s neck as he secures a towel around my body.

The only people left are the club’s prospects. My husband explained that they aren’t members yet but want to be. I didn’t tell him that Axe already broke down most of the hierarchy and roles of the officers. His face lights up with such pride, talking about his men. I’m seeing such a different side of him.

The way he is with his club brothers and their kids. That was the hardest part of the day. Not the drama of Boo coming as Axe’s date. Witnessing Lorenzo with the kids and knowing he’ll never have that as long as he’s with me nearly broke me.

I never thought I’d say he’d make a great dad, but he would be the best. Patient and kind. He was like this whole other person with them.

Most times, adults blow kids off. Not him. He made every one of them feel special.

“Hey. What’s going on in that head of yours?” He cups my chin, pinching it between his finger and thumb so I can’t escape his watchful eyes.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Adeline.” he takes a serious tone with me that raises the hair on my arms.

“Sometimes, I think about my father, and I miss him.”

“I wish I could apologize for killing him, but I won’t. If I could dig up his ashes and do it all over again, I would. I’m not sorry.”

I swallow. “I know he did awful things. You weren’t the only person he…” I stop. “I can’t talk about this right now.”

“What did your father do to you that was so horrible that you didn’t hesitate to end his life?”

I jerk away. “Nothing.” I shake my head. “He never touched me or anything, if that’s what you’re thinking. He wasn’t a sicko.”

I go to grab a beer and he jerks it out of my hand.

“Hey.”

“You shouldn’t be drinking.”

“Whatever.” I don’t know what’s crawled up his ass today. Every time I’ve tried to have anything with alcohol in it, he’s taken it for himself or shoved food at me instead.

“You know you can tell me anything.”

“Dredging up the past never helps anyone. I’m cold and I think my shoulders got too much sun. I’m going to shower and get ready for bed. Are you coming with me?”

“I’ll be coming in you.” He grins and I relax, allowing the tension our conversation brought on to roll off me.

“You better.” I kiss his cheek.

“I’ll be down soon. I’ve got to make sure these lazy asses do what they’re told.” He nods toward the prospects who are cleaning up from the party.

“In other words, you like watching them do all the grunt work.”

He flashes me another smile and picks up some empty bottles of beer as if to prove he’s going to help them.



Waking up with achy, red shoulders was not on my agenda for today. Neither was this doctor’s appointment I’m trying to mentally prepare for. I could use my sunburn as an excuse to reschedule, but it’s only delaying the inevitable. Lorenzo already suspects I’m hiding something. I’m only glad he’s unable to come to this appointment with me.

Acid burns in the bottom of my stomach. There’s no way I can eat the breakfast he left for me on the nightstand. I wish I



was awake before he left so I could at least thank him for the gesture. For a man with such a violent nature, he has a lot of good in him too, even if he refuses to acknowledge it. He's not uttered those three words yet. I know he more than likes me though.

Maybe he'll understand.

I should tell him now.

No.

He's going to hate me and send me packing.

My brain wars with my heart.

I suck in a breath and throw back the covers.

I can do this.

My father didn't raise a coward.

I take my time doing my hair and makeup, preparing for what's to come.

Like I told Carla, my heart is my own to break. When this is over, once he knows the truth, I'll give it to him if he still wants me. If he'll still have me.

I don't see Axe downstairs.

*Weird.* He's supposed to drive me. I take the elevator to the second floor, where I know Lorenzo has his war room or whatever. Hopefully, I can catch him before he leaves for his meeting.

There's usually a prospect on duty by the elevator. I walk down the empty hall, trying to remember which unit serves as

his office.

A door opens and out steps Boo dressed in the bikini she wore yesterday. Wiping the pad of her finger around her lips as though she's wiping something away, she smirks at me. "He's all yours."

My heart lurches in my chest, stealing my breath. I freeze in place, unable to speak or react. I can't breathe. There's a cement block on my chest. I'm going to throw up. I can't believe I thought he was falling for me too. My skin crawls.

Every touch.

Every kiss.

Every promise.

None of it was real.

Not one second.

*He's all yours.*

Meaning she was just in there with my husband.

His meeting.

The meeting was with her.

His whore.

He promised me.

He lied.

"Boo," I call after her as she steps into the elevator. "No. he's all yours."

Tears spring and I run for the stairs at the end of the hall. I rush to them blindly, finding a fire exit that leads to the alley. I don't know where I'm going except that I can't be here. I can't even look at him.

I was falling in love with him, and he was playing me this whole time.

I'm a fool.

An idiot.

All his talk about babies and the future was all lies. At least the parts that made me believe there was a chance at a proper marriage. He found my weakness and used it against me to manipulate me into giving him what he wants.

I'm so stupid.

Why did I think he would hold true to his word?

All men are the same.

I run down the alley, avoiding empty shipping crates and garbage as I try to get as far away as possible.

I keep going until my lungs burn and ache.

I stop at the end of the block I'm on, careful not to step into oncoming traffic, trying to see where I am and figure out where I'm going to go when a black matte Aston Martin slows next to me. The passenger window rolls down to reveal Carmichael behind the wheel.

“Adeline?”

“Carmichael.” I snap out of it. “Can you give me a ride?”

“Get in.”

Opening the door, I drop my ass to the seat.

“Where are you headed?”

“Um... to see Carla.” She may be mad at me, but I know when I tell her how stupid I’ve been, she’ll forgive me. She’s the only person I can count on.

“Are you okay? You’re kind of breathing hard.”

I catch my bearings, willing my pulse to slow as I breathe in through my nose and out my mouth. “Fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Just got a little spooked, is all.”

“Was someone chasing you?”

“No.” I close my eyes and take another deep breath, biting back my tears.

Leaning my head against the window, I don’t realize we’re at the harbor until the car shuts off. “Carla’s on a boat?”

“I’m really sorry about this,” he tells me.

Before I can question him, his fist slams into my temple.



“What were you thinking? I told you I’d handle Adeline,” a woman chastises someone. I try to focus on their conversation.

I know that voice.

“Carla?” I croak and blink as my head throbs.

“She’s waking up,” a male voice warns in a hushed tone.

Opening my eyes, I find myself unable to move my hands. They’re tied behind my back.

“What’s going on?” I mutter, trying to focus on the flesh-colored blurs waving in front of my eyes that turn out to be Dante’s fingers.

“Sorry about Carmichael. He doesn’t think. Are you okay?”

“No. Why am I tied to a chair?” I look around the room, not recognizing my surroundings. There’s a bunch of crates with Chinese symbols stamped on the sides. “Where are we? Where’s Carla?”

“I’m here.” My best friend approaches, dressed in a navy-blue pantsuit and pale blue top like she’s been working in an office or something. I didn’t even know she works. Guess I’m not the only one of us keeping secrets.

My stomach lurches. I’m nauseous and having a hard time recalling what happened in the car with Carmichael. When I asked him to bring me to his sister, this isn’t the reunion I imagined us having.

“What’s going on? Untie me.”

Her expression softens. “I wish I could. You have to know. I didn’t want things to go down like this.”

I blink. “Go down like what? I don’t understand any of this. What are you talking about? Stop messing with me.”

She squats down, placing a hand on my knee, giving me a placating pat. “Honey, I saw the test.”

“What test?” My pulse pounds against my temples and bile burns in the back of my throat.

“I know you’re pregnant. And if you have Ghost’s baby, then he’ll push us out of the fold when he inherits the rest of your father’s territory. I can’t let that happen.” I hear her words, but they sound foreign coming from her lips.

“I’m not pregnant. I don’t know where you got that from, but I can’t have kids. I’ve known since I was a teen. You know I wouldn’t lie to you.” I thought we were friends. I’ve told Carla things about myself I’ve never shared with another soul. Stuff about my father. Conversations I’d overheard between him and his men. Details only someone on the inside would know. Oh my God. She was using me the whole time.

Our whole friendship was a lie.

Lorenzo was right about her.

Chills fan up and down my arms.

I have no one.

Not my husband.

Not Axe.

I'm all alone.

Carla stares at me but doesn't believe me. "We'll need you to take another test." She's cold and straight to business.

"Carla, you're my best friend." I try to reason with her. To remind her we grew up together practically like sisters. "Why are you doing this? You remember when my appendix ruptured? My father had them take everything out. He was worried I'd develop the same cancer as my mother. It's why Roberto was chosen to be my husband. He knew I'd never have his children. Carla, you know me, and I know you. Don't do this. You have to let me go."

Her hand whips across my mouth. "Enough lies, Adeline. I saw the test in your bathroom. I read the results."

"That can't be right. Go to my doctor's appointment with me. I have one today with Dr. Tores. She specializes in fertility issues, I swear to you. I'm not pregnant. You don't want to do this."

"Gag her," she snaps. "Someone get a pregnancy test."

"No." I fight against the bindings, but it's no use.

Dante frowns at me, but he still shoves a handkerchief in my mouth.

Panic floods me.

I can't be pregnant. She'll see.

Then she can let me go.

This isn't the Carla I know.

She's not the same girl who bonded with me over terrible boy band music and chocolate.

It's like I'm seeing a stranger.

Did I ever know her at all?

Tears of betrayal stream down my cheeks.

How can she do this? She has to know my husband will kill her. He won't let anyone stand between him and what he wants.

I picture his face and wonder how he'll react when he realizes that I'm gone. Will he even care? I'm sure Boo will gladly have his baby.

But could Carla be right? Am I pregnant?

Is that why Lorenzo was being so sweet? Why he didn't want me drinking? Did he see the test? I never asked him.

It's not possible. I turn over all the information in my head.

The surgery. My father paying off the doctor.

Did they lie to him and take the money?

I'm going to be sick.





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# GHOST

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I answer a call from Axe. “This better be good.”

“Is Adeline with you?”

I hold up a finger and excuse myself from this meeting with the lawyers about Adeline’s inheritance to work out the logistics if she’s pregnant. I haven’t talked about it yet. Not even to her. I don’t want to jinx it. “What do you mean, is she with me?” I pull the phone away from my ear to check the time. “She should be with you at her doctor’s appointment.”

“I was running late this morning. When I went up to your apartment, she wasn’t there. I’ve looked all over the building.”

My blood runs cold, turning to ice.

“Have you checked the feeds? She’s got to be there somewhere. What were you doing?”

Capone hears my tone and walks over to me.

“Flash is going back over them now. We lose her at the elevators.”

“How’s that possible?” This can’t be happening. My pulse pounds in my ears as all color drains from my face. I should have never let her out of my sight. The second I saw that test, I should have cuffed her to me. Fuck. Fucking fuck. I punch the wall, splitting my knuckles open.

“I don’t know. I was preoccupied. I fucked up, I get that.”

“She’s pregnant. If anything happens to her or our child, so help me. I will string you up by your balls.”

“Fuck. I’ll find her. I swear to you.”

“You better.” I hang up on him and dial my wife’s number.

After four rings, a male voice answers, “Hello Ghost.”

I put the call on speakerphone and click on the app to track her location to find they have turned hers off. Fuck. “Who is this? If you’ve hurt her.”

“Relax. Your wife is fine. For now.”

“What do you want?”

“See, I knew you were a reasonable man. I’ll be in touch. No cops. Don’t try anything stupid.” The call drops.

“What’s going on?” Capone questions me.

“Mobilize everyone. I want our building on lockdown. Someone has Adeline.”

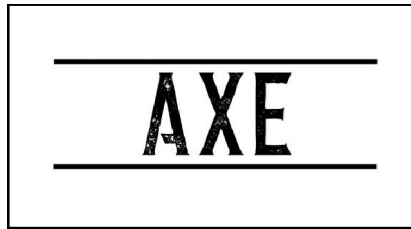
If anything happens to her, I’ll burn this city and everyone in it to the ground.

I can’t lose her.

I won’t.

**TO BE CONTINUED...**

# Epilogue



Flash pulled some footage from the street cameras. They show Adeline getting into an Aston Martin. It's taking some time to do a cross reference to find out who she associates with that drives that kind of vehicle.

Capone is keeping Ghost away to prevent him from killing me.

I wouldn't blame him.

I've fucked up royally.

I didn't know Adeline was pregnant. Not that her safety isn't important, but this changes everything. If anyone else found out, they'd kill her to prevent the club from taking over all of Marco Ricci's territory and the money and manpower that comes along with it.

"Got it," Flash says, looking smug. "One of the Bianchi brothers owns the car."

I let out a sigh of relief.

“She must have snuck out with Carla. I’ll call it in.”

My phone buzzes as I step out of the security room.

**Abel:** *You’ve gotta see this. I just hate to do it through text.*

“What the fuck?” I mutter as I scroll through the photos my brother is sending me.

I scroll down and back up.

Coralie has a kid.

Not just any kid.

My kid.

I’ve gotta go.

I need answers.

I shove my phone in my back pocket and head straight for my bike.

“Hey.” I turn at the sound of Boo’s voice as I enter the parking garage. “What’s going on today?”

“Was a false alarm.”

“Where are you headed?”

“There’s something I’ve gotta take care of.” I sling a leg over my Harley.

“Can I come?”

“Babe, where I’m headed, I may not come back.”

“Sounds perfect.”

I cap a hand across the back of my neck.

Her face falls. “You don’t want me to come.”

“It’s not that. It’s a delicate situation. I don’t have time to explain.”

“So, tell me on the way.”

“Don’t make me regret this.”

I start up my bike, and she hops on the back, wrapping her arms around me.

Home sweet home.

I’m on my way.

# Acknowledgements

I wouldn't be doing any of this without all of my fabulous readers. Here we are over sixty books later and you aren't sick of me or my morally gray toxic men. It is truly amazing that you guys are still here and wanting to continue this wild ride with me. I can't say thank you enough. Your support means the world to me.

My writing buddies you all know who you are. You always show up to ensure I'm getting all the words in with our weekly/daily sprints. You inspire me more than you know.

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And of course where would I be without the support of my fam jam and super annoying cat hehe. Thank you for understanding the ups and downs that come along with my writing career.

## Author's Note

Hey Book Besties,

I know you are super mad at me right now for another cliffhanger ending but would I truly be me and would this be an authentic Black Rebel Riders' MC book without one? If you read the OG series then you should recall I'm notorious for this in this world. I know waiting for what's next can suck, but I promise to make this series worth the wait. I hope you love Ghost, Adeline, and yes Boo too. But it was especially important to me to bring Axel aka Axe back and give him more of a story and being that he's Rebel's son I couldn't think of a more fitting character to stir up some trouble with.

If you haven't read the other books then the best place to start is at the beginning with the man who started it all, Grim. If you're curious about Axel/Axe his story begins in Moonshine & Mistletoe.

I cannot wait to bring you more books in this series. I don't have an exact date at this time so be sure you follow me on



social media so you don't miss a thing. I expect book 2 to be ready for a summer 2024 release. Fingers Crossed.

Happy reading,

Glenna

# About Glenna

Glenna Maynard is a Wall Street Journal & USA Today Bestselling Author best known for her gritty motorcycle club romances. She has a passion for writing antiheroes and romance as dark as her heart with over 60 titles published. When she isn't arguing with the voices in her head or drinking reader tears you can find her curled up with a good book or attempting a new craft with her kids and husband in Eastern Kentucky.

Visit <https://www.glennamaynard.com/> for more information.

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