

# TRIGGER



**HELL'S JURY**

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

nikita slater

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**TRIGGER**

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# **Hell's Jury MC Book 3**

# NIKITA SLATER



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# CHAPTER ONE

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# Trigger



I'm in the food court in a mall in Reno sticking out like a fuckin' elephant in a playground.

Standing 6'2", weighing on the plus side of 220, with arms the size of most people's waists, I draw attention. It don't help that my hair and beard are in serious need of a lawn mower and my tats tell the story of my shitty life.

The food court is the last fuckin' place I want to be, but Hangman, the prez of my bike club, Hell's Jury, ordered me to keep an eye on one of the Blackbeards' ol' ladies.

Blackbeards are the Jury's enemy and tensions are escalating since my club brother, Coyote, killed one of their members, and they, in turn, kidnapped his sisters. We don't normally involve the ol' ladies of our enemies no matter how cuntish they are, but according to Hangman, we're working an angle and the ol' lady I'm following, the one who decided that New York Fries was her version of fine dining, might be useful.

What's fascinatin' to me as I sit at a table built for minions is that she's failed to notice me. She's with a gaggle of friends and they're eatin' and talking while everyone else within a twenty-table radius is sneaking glances at me. Maybe she's as dimwitted as the stories I've heard. After all, it took her 20 minutes to decide what she was gonna eat from a place that only sells fries.

Now she's wavin' her fork in the air and talking with her mouth full but then so are the four other women she's with. If

I'm being grudgingly fair, the food court is like a hive full of bees, so fuckin' busy, no one's noticin' anything... but me, which brings me back to how stupid the Blackbeard ol' lady is, chowing down on her poutine like she's from Canada.

It's a case of pot calling the kettle black anyway because on my food tray sits a fuckin' power bowl, which I ain't even heard of until the asshole behind the counter suggested that it would fuel my big-ass body and keep me going all afternoon. It's punishment for my impatience because it was the only joint that didn't have a fuckin' lineup. After I tasted it, I understood why.

I take another mouthful of the shit only my club brother, Coyote, would eat, then throw my fork back into the bowl in disgust. I pick up the bottle of water because the fuckers didn't sell coke and I wasn't gonna drink anything called Kombucha which cost seven bucks a bottle and looked like somebody with kidney stones pissed it out. But water, what a fuckin' waste of tastebuds. It's used in a shower while I'm fuckin' a chick, maybe two. It's not something to drink.

I swallow it anyway, to wash the taste of avocado off my tongue. My mouth is still touching the lip of the bottle as I look up.

And goddamn freeze.

Holy Jesus of Nazareth!

I place the bottle slowly on the table and straighten my back, going so far as to run my hand through my long curly hair like the hairbrush it hasn't seen in days.

I can't take my eyes off the woman standing about 20 feet from me. Not the fucking Blackbeard ol' lady, but a tall stunning woman built for licking, sucking, and fucking.

No male with a dick could overlook her long gorgeous legs lengthened by classy red 4-inch stilettos that turn her into a six-foot Amazon. She's wearing the tightest hip hugging grey skirt I've ever seen. No panty lines that I can tell, which has me drooling. I want to slip my hand under that fine piece of fabric to see how wet her cunt is.

Her perfect hips taper to a slim waist with the puff of a belly straining at the skirt's material. And her tits. Fuck! So perfect, I almost cream my jeans. The long-sleeved blouse she's wearing is a silky dark green number that buttons up the front, the top three buttons open. The closed ones are straining across her chest, like her girls are begging to be let out to breathe.

Her toffee-colored hair is long enough to wrap in my hand and use it as a bridle to ride her like the stud I am. In fact, between her hair, tits, and hips, I've already calculated 15 different ways of fucking her.

I lick my lips and swallow the saliva that's rapidly forming in my mouth. It's orgy time, my dick thinks, though if she were mine, I wouldn't share her with anyone, man or woman. I finally move my eyes off her tits to notice that she's holding a red tray in her hands, food on top of it as she scans the tables for a place to sit.

Bless my luck, and the Blackbeard ol' lady and all the other fuckers crowding the food court. There are hardly any places to sit. But me, I'm at a table for four and look like I'm sitting in the middle of a crop circle. She can't help but notice me.

Be cool, Trigger, I tell myself as I cross my arms, willing her to look this way, keeping my mouth a flat line so I don't look like a fuckin' dog in heat. She sees the table first, then moves past it to my face. My heart skips a beat, maybe two when our eyes meet. My dick salutes her like she's a five-star general.

Don't act like a 12-year-old, I tell it. Be cool.

I keep my gaze on her, but my face expressionless. For some reason, I don't want this one to know how easy I am. She's no club bitch, no hangaround and my dick's more excited than when 10-year-old me found the stack of porn magazines under my uncle's bed.

This woman, whoever the fuck she is, has it going on in every conceivable way. I hope the fuck she ain't married, not

that that would stop me, but I don't want the complication of killin' her husband.

Her red painted lips tip up as she holds my eyes and takes a step towards me, then another, and another, walking past all the other fuckers who're staring at her like fools. Her gait is slow and measured, her sexy hips swaying and her tit's bouncing as she gets closer. She knows that eyes are following her, yet she ain't lookin' for validation. A chick like her – she knows exactly what she's about.

What turns me on the most is that she's the only one in this whole fuckin' food court to have the balls to approach me.

I think I'm in love.

I blatantly look her up and down when she gets within a couple of feet of me. Gorgeous fucking legs that'll squeeze me in a vise, tits that are perfect round globes. I have huge mitts, but those babies, they'd fit and spill over the sides. Her lips, full and perfectly set in her Marilyn Monroe face were made for sucking cock. My cock.

“Excuse me,” she says in a cool sultry voice, meeting my hard, dark stare with her emerald eyes. “Would you mind if I sit with you?” She looks around the cafeteria. “It's busy today.”

*Be cool, you fucker.* My heart's beating out of my chest and I think my fucking palms are sweaty. I have to resist rubbing them on my jeans. “Be my guest,” I say all Vin Diesel like, shoving my boot against the leg of the chair across from me and pushing it out far enough for her to slip into it.

A flash of relief crosses her face as she sets her tray down, then pulls the chair out a little further and gracefully slides into it, adjusting her skirt as she draws herself closer to the table. “Thank you,” she says as she drops her purse on the chair beside her.

Her sexy, posh cadence is smooth and delicious, like gravy on mashed potatoes, and my nipples point straight at her like they know she's gonna be the future Mrs. Trigger.

“You can sit on... with me anytime you want.” Yeah, a little corny, but I gotta start somewhere.

She looks down at her food, a blush to her face. “I was hoping you’d say that.”

I can’t tell if she’s playin’ my game or taking my words at face value, but I decide to back off. I don’t wanna scare the horse before she’s out of the gate. “So, guessing I wasn’t your first choice, hey?” I sound cool to my ears. Voice doesn’t squeak or sound too eager.

She looks up and into my eyes, a small smile playing at her lips as the blush grows deeper. “My other choice was those two guys over there with the matching golf shirts.” She tilts her head to the left.

I follow the direction. Yeah, two idiots not even aware of how stupid they look. “So you chose me for my fashion sense.” Her scent canters across the table and up my nose. She smells like the very last woman I’ll ever fuck.

Her eyes flick over my body. “Yes. And your ink.” She gives me a saucy smile and drops her eyes to her food.

I was right on first instinct. This girl knows what she’s about.

I laugh softly. “Trigger.”

“What?” She was concentrating on pulling her chopsticks from the package but stops and raises her eyes.

“Name’s Trigger.”

She flits her gaze to my arms then back again. “Wow, now I know why you need those biceps.”

I snort a laugh, liking her way too fucking much. She’s all body, which makes it easy for me, but she comes with a personality too. That scares the shit out of me.

“Road name.” I wait for the inevitable reaction – terrified or immediately flirty.

She does neither. Instead, she picks a small white triangle out of her noodles with the chopsticks and delicately puts it

into her mouth.

My dick is like a loaf of French bread left unbagged on the counter for three days.

“Nice to meet you Mr. Trigger. I’m Evanee. Not a road name.”

Intriguing. “And you were knocking my name.”

She grins. “I know.” She waggles a long painted nail at me. “My self-defence.”

I grin and take a huge bite of my power bowl to do something with my hands other than adjust myself again. “What’s that shit you’re eating?” Her struggle to snag a long piece of noodle fascinates me.

She finally gets a grip on the slimy bugger only to have it slip away. “It’s called Phad Thai. One of my favourites.”

“How’re you going to get those noodles into your mouth?” I’m thinkin’ about that Lady and the Tramp show, picturing us eating the same noodle until our lips meet, which makes me wanna swallow her tongue.

She raises the noodle up to her mouth, tries to grab it with her little pearlies, but it slips again, this time dropping on the exposed mound of her milky breast.

*Please, please, let me lick it off.*

She picks it up with her long fingernails and slips it into her mouth, then licks her lips like she knows I’m putty in her hands. “I’m a train wreck, it’s unavoidable.”

“You’re the prettiest train wreck I’ve ever seen.” Lame, sure, but in my defense, I’m struck dumb by the goddess in front of me.

Her laughter tinkles in the air. “And how many train wrecks have you seen?”

I try to recover. “None as first class as you.”

She flushes, then turns her attention back to her pad-ti shit, fishing for another noodle. I watch in reverence for about 30 seconds before she realizes I’m staring.

She gives me quick raise of her eyebrows. “Want a bite?”

Jesus christ. I so fucking want a bite. “Gonna feed me?” Finally, Cool Trigger is back.

“Is there any other way?” She picks up a piece of shrimp with the chopsticks, contemplates it, then stretches across the table and points it towards my mouth.

My eyes dip to her cleavage and I beg the straining buttons to pop, then look up into her eyes, which are holding steady on my face. But she knows. Fuck.

She touches the shrimp against my lips and I have no choice but to snatch it up. I gulp it down fast. Normally I wouldn't eat fucking fish if I was drowning in the shit, but for her, I might swallow a lobster, shell and all. I check her out again to make sure she's worth sacrificing my standards, and her cleavage winks at me. Oh yeah, she fucking is.

“Not bad,” I lie. “Your turn.” I scoop up a forkful of the power shit and aim it at her perfect mouth.

She leans over and parts her lips. My semi turns into a raging hard on as she slowly pulls the food off the fork, her teeth makin' me think of them tugging at my nipple rings. Then she chews, swallows, and slowly licks her lips as she touches the corner of her mouth.

She frowns as she regards the bowl. “Forgive me for generalizing, but you don't strike me as a quinoa and chickpea kind of guy.”

“A what?” I look at the bowl in dismay. What the fuck have I been eatin'?

She grins when she sees my horrified face. “I pegged you as more of a beef guy.”

My mind blanks. “I am.” Feeble.

She scoops up another noodle, getting it into her mouth, but some sauce splashes on her chest and blouse.

“Dammit,” she swears as she looks down at herself in dismay.

She rubs the sauce off her chest with her long fingers and sucks on them. Fuck me.

“I have an important meeting.” She points to the vicinity of her chest as if my eyes haven’t been glued to it since she sat down. “And now I’ve stained my blouse.”

Before fully thinking it through, I whip my bandana out of my back pocket, wet it with my water and lean over the table, stroking at the fabric with one hand, the other gripping the side of her open collar for tension.

I work on the stain for about half-a-minute before I realize how badly I’m behaving. I gradually slow my strokes as I roll my eyes up towards her face. Her full lips hold a small smile as she stares at me with a satiny gaze.

I clear my throat as I return to my side of the table, instinctively giving her tits a pat as I go. “I think that’s got it.” My eyes search her chest for any more splashes she might need help with.

A flush creeps over her face as she stares down at her chest. Lucky fucking bitch getting to see that rack anytime she wants. “I’ve got a meeting with a banker this afternoon and I don’t want to look anything less than perfect.”

The fucking banker better be a woman. “You couldn’t possibly look less than perfect.” The frivolous words fall out of my mouth, but this time I mean them. I’m all charm and compliments because the girls like that shit, but this one, she doesn’t need validation. She already knows she’s perfect.

“Thank you,” she replies anyway. There’s no giggle or twirling of hair or anything like that.

I’m about to suggest we find ourselves a janitor’s closet and test how easy it would be to roll that tight skirt over her even tighter ass, but my words dry up and suddenly I’m a pimply 14-year-old idiot trying to talk the 17-year-old neighbour girl into giving me a blowjob. I clear my throat and cross my arms over my chest.

Our gazes lock, then the fucking moment is broken when a kid shrieks behind her. I look at the little shit, then beyond to



the ol' lady I'm supposed to be following only to find three teenage boys sittin' at the table.

"Fuck," I say. I look at her with regret. "Duty calls."

I try not to knock the table over as I stand while at the same time conceal my fucking hard dick. She can't miss it because her head is exactly waist high, and her face is planted a foot from it. Her eyes twinkle as she looks up.

"See you around, beautiful." I grin, then take off.

I've lost the Blackbeard ol' lady and when I get back to the food court, Evanee's gone.

I don't give a shit about Hangman's wrath as I walk the mall lookin' for my future bride. She's in the wind, but it don't matter. I'm gonna track that woman down and marry her.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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## Evanee



Nothing goes according to plan, which for me is as foreign as Elon Musk being humble. It wasn't the lunch because I'm used to being stripped down by male eyes. Men think of sex eight times a day on average, but when I walk into a room, I think they fulfill that quota in half the time.

It's not ego talking, it's experience. I don't pretend to be anyone that I'm not. I've been groped and kissed without permission, been eye-balled by twelve-year-olds, propositioned, begged, offered money, a job as a mistress and an exotic dancer. I've even had a plastic surgeon ask if I would pose for an 'after' picture, but that seemed deceitful, since I don't have breast implants.

My mother tells me to dress down, stop wearing makeup, learn to walk like a man. I've never complained about the attention, but she doesn't like it. She's my mom, after all. She doesn't want her daughter sexualized to the degree I am.

But that's not who I am and frankly, why should I be? I like dressing up in designer clothes, four-inch stilettos and hip-hugging skirts. I like the way men look at me, but I'm not a bitch. I play by the girl-rules. I don't mess around with boyfriends or husbands, don't flirt with assholes, and I treat women with respect, but I'm not a pushover. I'm friendly, open, and inviting to other women unless they're rude, aggressive or try to move in on another woman's man.

And I like sex, but I don't overindulge. I've been accused of having a sex addiction, but that's the looks, not the reality. I have a sexual past – what woman my age hasn't? But I'm also

selective and not the shy retiring type. I know what I like, and I'm not afraid to ask for it.

Some men get it, some men don't.

It's why my relationship with my ex, Erik, lasted as long as it did. Most of the day, we hated each other, but he was good in bed. Not great. I'd give him seven on a ten-point scale. But the biker I met at lunch? I get all sorts of shivers when I think of him. I'm glad he left when he did. I'm glad we didn't exchange information. Okay, not glad, but from a practical point of view, relieved because he'd lead me astray and I don't need distractions in my life. Not right now anyway.

The problem is that my mind is on him and not on the meeting I so carefully dressed for. As a rule, I don't use my looks as a weapon, but I'm not a paragon. Sometimes a girl has to do what a girl has to do.

The banker brings me back from my fantasy of hot sex with the even hotter biker with his disappointing words.

"I'm sorry," Barry Franklin says as I sit in a chair in front of his massive desk. I wonder if he's compensating for something as I cross my legs and straighten my back to show my chest to its full advantage. "You have no collateral." He glances at my breasts. "The business is speculative and until it can show viability, the bank cannot lend you the money."

Barry is a tall, handsome, sexy man if a little too lean for my tastes. He's also charming and comes across as sincere. Not all villains are disgusting ugly unwashed men, but I've learned to recognize a snake in disguise and the rattler behind the desk thinks he has the upper hand.

Maybe he does. "Mr. Franklin," I say with a good measure of supplication. "How am I supposed to show viability when I don't have the funds to open the doors?" I shift slightly so he can get a side view.

He clears his throat. "I know you think that because I'm a friend of your family's you should get special consideration, but it would be unfair to other clients if I showed favouritism." He tilts his head as his eyes take a Sunday stroll over me.

“Why are you asking for a loan anyway? You’re Lyle’s little darling. He’d give you anything you asked for.”

First of all, I don’t think anything of the kind. True, I came to him because he’s a friend of my father’s, but I expected him to fall for my charms not my connections.

Second, yes, Lyle Whittaker, my father would give me anything I asked for, but there’s not a snowball’s chance in hell that I want him involved in my business venture. He’s exacting, controlling and expects the world to revolve around him.

“He’s using his influence here.” It’s a statement not a question, and my words are so icy they could freeze penguins.

“My clients do not influence my decisions,” Barry lies. “But really, Evanee, your dad’s not asking for much. Set up in Reno instead of Sagebrush. And let him invest. From a monetary viewpoint, it makes sense.”

My rich daddy wants to partner with me, which means he’ll take over. I won’t have a friendly business where I can grow a loyal client-base, not with my throat-cutting father at the helm. I’d get crushed in Reno. Dad rubs elbows with all the important people, and I wouldn’t be able to go to the bathroom without someone reporting back to him.

I stare at Barry until he drops his eyes, then with as much dignity as I can muster, I rise from the chair. “Had you approved the loan, I would have been very grateful.”

I don’t exchange sex for favours, and I think he knows me well enough to know I’m bluffing. Still his face falls at what might have been.

“Evanee,” he stands as well. “This is for your own good. You’re setting yourself up for failure.”

He might be right, but I won’t know if I don’t try. “Good day, Mr. Franklin,” I say sweetly. Inside I’m raging, but if he sees how upset I am, he’ll report back to my father, and that will give dad more ammunition than he already has.

I stroll around the mall to cool my anger. After I’ve indulged in some retail therapy I can’t afford, I settle my bags

in the trunk of my sweet little Beamer, then slide into the leather bucket seat. My car was a gift from my parents when I graduated high school, but I'm 26 years old now and my little darling is starting to feel its age. Last month, I had to replace the ignition and that gouged a big chunk of my savings. "Stay healthy," I say as I start it up. "You and me against the world, girl. You and me."

The Beamer understands and like Thelma and Louise, we hit the road. Reno is suffocating me, and Sagebrush already feels like home. Thirty minutes, later I pull up to the building that is going to be my future veterinary clinic, Sweet Tidings Animal Hospital. Aside from my father's meddling, there's another reason for hanging my shingle in this town. It's more affordable and less competitive. There's only one other vet clinic in town and despite the owner being the ex-boyfriend, this place is big enough for the two of us. If it isn't, we'll have a show-down and I don't like to brag, but I'm a pretty fast draw.

I slide my way out of the Beamer, grab the shopping bags, one of which holds my sweet new Valentino Garavani Tan patent leather pumps that I got for the bargain price of \$595.00, and stroll inside the little vet shop that already feels like home. There's still work to do, but it's starting to look like a warm inviting place where pets and their people will feel welcome.

My three-legged cat, Kona, who's been lying on the reception counter, stands and stretches like the diva she is and my two dogs, Blackie, a white poodle with a missing ear, and Cujo, the sweetest Rotti I've ever encountered, greet me like I've been gone six weeks instead of six hours. They're all rescues which explains the weird names, but dogs and cats don't like change and abused ones need as much familiarity and love as they can get.

I open one of my bags and hand a ball to Blackie and a stuffie to Cujo. They jump around like it's Christmas, express their gratitude with their eyes, then run off with their new treasures.

Kona jumps off the counter and lopes over to me, slapping at the bag.

“Don’t worry, I didn’t forget you.” I pull out a small mouse with a bell on it and toss it to her. She forgets to thank me as she pounces.

“There you are.” Wendy Unser bustles from the back and startles me.

“Geez, Wendy. You walk like a cat.” My new receptionist is a 71-year-old woman who is willing to work for minimum wage. She’s a little forgetful, swears without reserve, is trying to stop smoking, and wears blouses so bright, dogs are grateful they’re colourblind. A former topless dancer at a nightclub in Reno, she also owns 5 per-cent of my business, which emptied her savings. If I didn’t need eight full hours of beauty rest at night, the fact that she’s invested every penny she has into the business would keep me up at nights.

She shuffles by me and slips behind the dusty reception counter. “How’d it go with the bank?”

I don’t scowl, but I’m feeling it down to my toes. “Exactly as I thought it would. Barry Franklin is an asshole.”

The springs of the second-hand office chair protest as she drops into it and swipes at the dust with her arm. “You knew that going in.”

I nod glumly. “I was still hopeful I’d change his mind.”

Her eyes sweep me, settling on my cleavage. She jerks her chin towards it. “Well, if that won’t move him, nothing will.”

There are several chairs in the reception room, but they’re as dusty as the counter, so instead of sitting, I step out of my pumps to give my feet much needed relief. “I know.” I pick up the shoes and if they had been my running shoes, I would have hurled them against the wall, but these are Manolo Blahnik and like me, need pampering.

“I have some good news, though,” she tells me. “Well, two bits.”

I perk up. “Lullaby?”

“Yes. I talked my nephew into putting up the fence in the back. He and three friends say they can have it done over the weekend. They’ll do it for two flats of beer.”

Happiness ripples through me as I think of my dwindling funds. “That is good news. We can bring our darling here.”

“Until the authorities come snooping.”

I try to justify my choices. “The fence will be high. There aren’t any buildings tall enough here for anyone to see and she’s small. We’ll clean up after her everyday and even if it smells, this is a vet clinic so no one will be too suspicious.”

Wendy seems to agree with me because she nods. “Troy will be glad enough to get rid of her.”

Troy is one of Wendy’s ex-boyfriends, still a hanger-on when Wendy wants sex. She’s never been married, and shudders at the thought. At present, we’re using Troy’s backyard, but Lullaby keeps drinking out of his pool. “And peeing in it,” he insists, but I’m doubtful. Lullaby’s a girl.

“We’ll have to sneak her in after dark,” I tell Wendy. “Walk her over, I guess, because she’s too skittish to be ridden by anyone who isn’t an experienced rider.”

Wendy heaves a sigh. “You could’ve taken equestrian lessons instead of elocution. It would’ve been more practical.”

She’s right, but at the time, I didn’t have the foresight to consider that. Perhaps it was because I was fifteen. “We don’t have a saddle for her anyway.”

“Too true.”

“And the other good news?”

Wendy grins as she places her forearms on the counter and clasps her hands. “Well, while you were out trying to achieve the impossible, I had a meeting of my own.”

I can’t decide whether to feel hopeful or apprehensive. Wendy is resourceful, but she’s also a wheedler. “And who would you be meeting with?”

“The owner of Broughton Veterinary Services.”



I groan, forget the dust on the reception room chairs, and sit down in despair. “Please tell me you’re joking.”

She’s still smiling, though her lips are firmer. “I don’t joke. You’ll never get the doors open if you wait until you have the financing in place. You have to face the fact that you can’t set up the surgery and until that happens, we need an alternate solution or we’ll continue to sit on our asses and moulder.”

She’s right, but Dr. Erik Broughton? He’s the enemy and it isn’t only because he’s the competition. He’s also the ex-boyfriend. Worse than that, the relationship ended because of a dead rabbit. I still maintain he was at fault, but he claims it was my neglect. There’s no reconciling such divisive perspectives and never will be. Wendy knows the history.

“What...?” I choke. “Why...?” I’m not prone to sputtering but I can’t force words past the little bit of vomit in my mouth.

“I asked him if he would do our surgeries until we could set one up.”

Bloody hell! “You didn’t tell him we were strapped for money!”

Wendy scowls. “I have a little more intelligence than that.” She reaches for the phantom package of cigarettes she keeps under the counter, then glares at the empty spot. “I asked. He said, Yes.”

“And the string attached?” I say dryly. “I’m not going to blow him if that was the deal.”

Wendy grins. “The string attached was that we quote his surgery costs. He won’t cut a deal because you’re a bleeding heart that lacks understanding of after-surgery care. His words.”

I suck in my breath. That bastard. “Right there is the problem, Wendy. He’s a horrible surgeon. He couldn’t even remove a rabbit’s ovaries without fucking it up.” Yep, I’m that mad.

“Well, the deal’s done.” She stops when she sees my anger. “With your approval of course.” She stops again, reaches for

the phantom cigarettes, her eyes glued to the empty spot. “I kind of implied you already had.”

I stand as I heave a breath. She’s right about everything. “I guess if we don’t need to set up a surgery right away, then we can have the doors open in three weeks. But it’s just you and me, Wendy. I can’t afford a vet’s assistant.”

“I know, hun. It’ll be slow going at first anyway, but the good news is that Dr. Broughton is an arrogant asshole and there will be a ton of his clients who will want to at least check you out.” She glances at my chest again.

“We need an examining table.”

“No problem, I know a butcher who owes me a favour.”

I don’t ask. With Wendy, I’m learning not to.

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## CHAPTER THREE

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# Trigger



We're in church, Hangman's on a rampage and a month later, I'm still thinking about the luscious woman I met at the food court. I don't realize Hangman has asked me a question until Rocky swipes at me. "Get your head out of your ass," he hisses.

I look up. All eyes are on me. "Uh... yeah."

There's some general laughter. "Yeah what, you fucker?" Hangman says in his usual gritty voice.

"Yeah, I got it under control?" I venture. I glance across the table at Reaper, who shrugs.

"The genital warts?" Fucking Hash says and everyone roars. Well, everyone but me and Hangman.

"I asked you if Lacy passed her sick onto any of the johns."

He's talking about the club's brothel, Dick's Picks. One of our girls, Lacy, has been out a week with a bug, but she was smart enough not to come in as soon as she felt the sniffles. I turn red. "I meant no."

Joker, our VP takes over. "Where's your fucking head at, Trig? You been like this for a month. Distracted, moody. Hash might be right about the genital warts. You're not fucking the passarounds, which makes them bitchier than usual."

I groan. He's right. Since I met Evanee, I've lost my sex drive for any other woman. Not even the thought of two together, me watching as they go down on each other, gets my

post panting. It's a huge problem, not my dick because yeah, it's huge, but it's never been so delinquent. The problem is, I've looked everywhere and can't find the woman of my lust. Not one single sighting. No one's even heard of her. I might have to reconcile to being a monk for the rest of my life. Both my dick and I shudder at the thought.

Apparently, I've lost the train of conversation again as I'm jerked out of my chair by Hangman. He's fisting my cut as he slams me against a wall, his snarling face inches from mine.

Red scrambles out of the way.

"You fuckin' get your head in the game or I'm gonna turn you into turnip mash! You got a problem, say what it is. You don't wanna fuckin' talk about it, then don't bring it to the table." My backbone ripples with pain as he gives me another slam, then abruptly releases me.

"Fuck." I don't like being manhandled, even by the prez, but he's justified this time. No excuse for bein' distracted in church. "Sorry," I mumble. "Can't talk about it." Meaning I won't, because I don't need the razzin' I'll get if the guys find out what's got me moping.

Hangman bulldozes his way back to his chair and it groans under his weight as he slams into it. That's how he is – frenetic energy that never seems to wane. It would be hard to tell that he was pissed except for the part where he tried to break my spine.

"I asked you a fucking question! How's the girl?" he snarls. He says it like he doesn't give a shit about Lacy, but he does. Underneath his gruffness he has a soft spot for women.

Red grunts as he rights his chair and I give him a look of apology. The big fucker offers me a shit-eatin' no-problem-I-got-your-back grin.

I straighten my cut, pick up my own chair and straddle it as my mind flits from Lacy to Evanee. They have the same mink brown hair, but that's where the similarities end. Evanee has long, fuckin' legs and second-helping tits. And she's gorgeous

to boot. I don't get how she's still single. Wait a sec. She never said she was single, did she? My dick withers in despair.

"Answer, you motherfucker!" Hangman shouts, slamming his hand on the table hard enough to make it rattle.

"Lacy's good," I say quickly. "She thinks she's ready to come back, but I told her to take another week. Don't need Typhoid Mary spreading her toxic love to the customers or other girls."

"And Amara doesn't mind?"

"Since when do I give a fuck about Amara?" I posture. "She might be the fucking madam, but I'm still in charge."

It's not true. Amara is the only thing that keeps Dick's Picks in the black, but apparently, it's the right response, because Prez abruptly changes subjects. "Me and Joker had a convo with Trident. He's sendin' some of his boys up here to bolster our numbers."

Trident is the president of the Jury's Vegas chapter and a mean fucker wrapped up in cupcake foil. He's this mellow, even-tempered guy, even when he's pissed, but that don't mean he won't single-handedly beat you to death. He'll be smiling doin' it, but still.

"Who's coming?" Coyote asks. Coyote will have to do a security reassessment to accommodate the new guys.

"And where will they be staying?" Rocky adds.

Hangman addresses Rocky's question first. "They'll be staying with you, fucker. You and Jess have a big enough bed."

Rocky's face turns red. "Fuck that! Those guys aren't getting' anywhere near Jess." Rocky's smart, so it makes no sense he's reacting to Hangman's half-assed attempt at humour. I guess girlfriends really do make you stupider.

Reaper echoes my thought out loud as he rolls his eyes. "You're an idiot."

"Piss off, cocksucker," Rocky replies with a middle-finger salute.

“Clearly someone didn’t get fucked this morning,” Jawbone comments, drawing laughter. He’s a pain in the ass, but he has some good one-liners.

Coyote interjects like the entitled asshole he is. “Who gives a fuck where they’re staying.” It’s funny to hear the shit that comes out of Coyote’s mouth these days. He used to be this posh bugger, but since his girl almost died and his sisters got kidnapped, his golden crown is tarnished. He’s still not up to my bad-ass standards, but less easy to fuck with than he used to be.

“There’s no fuckin’ room here,” Hash jumps in with his usual abrasive tone. “We’re full up since Peyton moved in.” Peyton, the fucked up ex-Blackbeard chick, was instrumental in saving Coyote’s sisters. Hash’s the biggest asshole the Jury’s got, so everyone was suspicious when he took her under his wing. He’s lookin’ after her, but keeping his dick zipped up. I’m still waiting for his ulterior motive, but so far, nothing.

“When’s she movin’ out?” King asks gruffly. “We’re not a fuckin’ shelter for Blackbeard ex-whores.”

Hash bares his teeth. “When I fuckin’ say, you asshole. You gotta a problem with that, I’ll meet you outside.”

Joker intervenes in the school-yard fight. “Forget about Peyton. She’s not on the fuckin’ agenda.” He looks down at his notebook. “Brothers from Vegas are Mothman, Viking, Rider, and Stark.

I whistle. Mothman is Vegas royalty. His father is president, and his brother is the veep. It’s a family affair, and the trifecta rule with an iron fist. “We get the evil princess, hey?”

Blood snorts. “Too fuckin’ ugly to be a princess.”

“Who’s Stark?” Red asks.

“Mothman’s prospect.”

Fender sighs like he’s carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. “That’s just what we need. Another fuckin’ Crank.”

“Fuck off,” Hash warns. Hash is sponsoring Crank, who’s so wet behind the ears, there’s mould growing, but the kid’s an inker with more talent than Picasso. Better even than Hash, whose talent far exceeds his brain. Hash runs Sailor Jerry’s, our ink shop.

Eight snorts from his corner. He never sits, hardly ever talks, but he’s deadly with his fists and any other weapon of choice. “He ain’t no Crank. Ex-Navy Seal with a take-no-prisoners rep. Scary motherfucker.”

“How do ya know him?” Red asks.

Eight answers with a none-of-your-fucking-business glare.

“You’ll get along with Viking.” Hangman smirks at Eight. “He don’t got much to say either.”

Fender chirps like a cricket, which gets us laughing.

“They’ll be here tomorrow or next,” Joker says, trying to bring the meeting under control. “They’ll be takin’ rooms at the Shawshank.” Shawshank’s motel, which also rents rooms by the hour, is conveniently located near our brothel. Not one of our properties, but a good appendage to have and the guy who runs it don’t mind the business.

“Move on,” Hangman orders. “We got a lot of bullshit to get through.”

Joker doesn’t acknowledge Hangman and I wonder if they’re on the outs. Joker’s the only one that Hangman treats with real respect. If the prez has a friend in our club, it’s definitely the veep. Doesn’t matter if Joker’s pissed at Prez though – he won’t let that interfere with doing his job. “How’s the progress on the renos?” he asks Fender.

Coyote looks pained while the rest of us smirk. His fine for fucking up was a big one. Five-hundred K for killing Vortex, a Blackbeard, is funding the new shine we’re puttin’ on the clubhouse.

Fender grins. “Comin along fine. Got the plans drawn up and I’ll go over them with you and Hangman later today.”



Hangman's attention shifts. "Blackbeards are gonna come knockin' on our doors so watch your backs. Keep your families safe. Doubt they'll target kids or women but can't trust they won't after they grabbed Coyote's sisters and knocked-off his parents." Not a hint of sympathy in his cold dead heart over Coyote's loss.

"Jesus, Hangman," Red says under his breath. Despite being sponsored by the prez, Red hasn't been a member of the club long enough to know that Prez is an unflinching bastard.

Hangman ignores him. "Crip'll paint his club as the victim because we left a trail of bodies getting the girls back. Need to retaliate before they do." He glances at Coyote. "How's the thief? Still worth startin' a war over?"

Coyote narrows his eyes at Hangman's bullshit. "Bryce is fine. Sends her love."

This gets a laugh since Coyote's new fuck-toy is almost as talkative as Eight. "Good," Hangman says. "Bring her around. Time to vest her."

"In due time," Coyote murmurs.

Hangman would normally challenge something like that but for some reason breezes by it. "Gonna put word on the street that we got hard evidence on the feebz that have been harassing us." He turns his attention back to Coyote. "Got anything on the two fucks, yet?" The feebz are two federal agents who've gone rogue. They killed Jess's brother and Hangman thinks they have a snitch inside the club.

"Gettin' on it today."

"Make it a priority," Joker orders. "We need to find those fuckers fast, before they do any more damage."

"What else?" Hangman asks, lookin' around the room.

"Got a new business on Front Street. Vet clinic." Reaper says. Reaper and Eight are in charge of our protection racket. Most of our 'customers' are in Reno, the one's that pay the premium rate, but we don't like to neglect the good citizens of Sagebrush. The businesses here get a discounted deal.

“Been there yet?” Hangman asks, his interest sharpened.

“Nah. Doors aren’t opened yet. Woman vet, apparently. Figure it’s an opportunity to send in the rookies.” The rookies are the two prospects, Zero and Crank.

Hangman nods. “Good thought. They should be able to handle a broad. Talk to them, make sure they have the process down, then give it a go.”

“On it,” Reaper grunts.

“I’m gettin’ tired of talkin,” Hangman says to Joker. “Anything else?”

Joker shakes his head. “I’m fuckin’ tired of talkin’ too. We’re done here.” Yep, definitely tension between the prez and VP.

Hangman ignores him, directing his attention to me. “Since you ain’t keeping Raven company, track her down and send her to my office. My dick needs some relief.”

He gets up and storms out like he’s pissed with the world.

The rest of us follow him out. Rocky and Red are tryin’ to get my attention, but I’m distracted by thoughts of Evanee again. I take a couple of steps towards the front door as I pull out my pack of smokes, but Coyote blocks me. “Want me to find her?”

“Who the fuck are you talking about?” But I keep my voice low and look around to make sure no one’s listening.

“Whoever has your panties tied up so tight you can’t drop them for Raven.” Raven’s my favourite passaround. Didn’t figure she had a temper, but she’s so pissed I’m actually a little afraid of her.

“Ain’t a woman.”

Coyote smirks. “Can’t think of what else it might be.” He used to be a monk, but now that the smug bastard’s emptying his balls on a daily basis, there’s no living with him.

“How the fuck did you reach that conclusion?” I should tell him to fuck off and walk away, but a little voice inside me,

probably my dick, thinks maybe he can help.

“Only thing I can think of that would get you swearing off the passarounds.”

“Later,” I mutter as I catch Reaper headin’ over, his attention on Coyote.

When I approach Raven, her eyes light up, then dim when I tell her Hangman’s lookin’ for her. Trouble with passarounds is they get attached, start thinkin’ things that ain’t ever gonna happen. She and me were never gonna be a thing and I never told her otherwise. She’s a good girl, but not for me. Until Evanee, I didn’t think anyone was for me.

I get hard when I conjure her. Time for a shower.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

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## Evanee



It's another retail therapy day and I'm shelving my new purchases (bandages, surgical gloves, and a new pair of Amina Muaddi slingback pumps) in the storeroom. Well actually, I'm shelving the vet supplies and admiring the shoes in the mirror. My feet and legs were made for heels, I decide.

My Zen zone is interrupted by a commotion at the front door. I freeze as my heart thinks about stopping. I left the door unlocked and while I'm not normally the nervous type, I'm not always popular with the humans who used to belong to my sweet, rescued animals. Only some of my sweethearts come from the rescue society.

Other times, when urgency's required, I'm forced to eliminate the middle-man and escort the darlings from their current hell with the help of my duffel bag. It's stocked with bolt cutters, a screwdriver, a hammer, gloves, leashes, animal treats, a loaded Smith & Wesson .38, and running shoes.

A loud unhappy 'woof' followed by an offended 'meow' gets me moving to the front.

I jog out in my new heels, which I have to admit look pretty good with my Devi tuck shorts and white sheath top, only to come skidding to a stop at the scene in front of me.

There are twins for starters – tall, blond, and beautiful – young though, and not quite grown into their potential. They're like bodyguards flanking the woman standing between them. She's a small, perfectly formed porcelain doll and while the twin girls practically beam at me, the woman

eyes me with open curiosity and a marble countenance. All of that is irrelevant because a gorgeous Neapolitan Mastiff is leading their party. Its joyful bark sends a cupid's arrow straight into my heart and I risk getting drooled on as I crouch down and greet it like a long lost dearly-loved relative. "You are the most beautiful animal I've ever seen!"

In a dry, slightly mocking voice, the little one interjects. "Great. A blind vet."

Apparently Cujo thinks so too as he peeks around the corner of the reception desk and gives a tentative high-pitched yip. Poor guy's a dalmatian in a Rotti body.

The twins giggle and I wonder how they can resist patting their little friend's head – I mean the woman, not the mastiff. "His name is Freud," one of them says.

"Freud," the other echoes.

I stand, pleased at how long I'm able to squat as I get a visceral vision of naked me with my new heels on, crouching in front of Trigger, our eyes locking, his hands pulling my hair as he forces me to swallow his cock. I clear my throat. "I'm Evanee."

"I'm Maddy," one of the twins says. "And this is Emma." She gestures to her sister, who repeats, "Emma."

Since they're not wearing matching sailor suits, knowing their names makes it easier. In fact, Maddy is wearing an Etro short sleeve romper that probably cost \$3000 dollars, and the other, Emma, has on the sweetest Charo Ruiz pink mini dress, which beautifully complements her colouring. I have the sense that these two are kindred spirits.

The little one not so much as she says, "Is the real vet in?"

I frown at her. She's kind of cute, but her vibe is remote, like she's there but not there. "I'm the real vet," I reply, trying to keep the annoyance from my voice. "Dr. Evanee Whittaker."

"Oh," the woman replies with a ghost of smile that says, "I'm fucking with you. Then she adds, "The vets I've encountered in past are old and ugly."

My animosity vaporizes.

The twins giggle. “I can’t believe you of all people are generalizing, Bryce,” one of them says.

“Yeah,” her clone agrees. “It’s like saying all thieves are male and smarmy.” Even their voices sound alike.

Bryce takes exception to the statement. “I’ve never met a smarmy thief.” She thinks for a moment. “But you’re right. Not all thieves are as talented as me.”

I’m intrigued by the possibilities. “Please tell me you really are a thief.” I’ve never met a thief before and hold on to my excitement that she’s more than just a shoplifter.

“Oh, she’s real, alright. She steals jewels,” Maddy says like she’s taking credit for everything the thief knows.

“And money,” her sister adds in the proud tone.

“And collectables.”

Emma turns Maddy. “Didn’t Jess say she stole a puzzle box?”

“I’m right here, girls,” Bryce says, then looks at me. “And I’ll deny everything the under-age, over-giggly, monozygotic peaches have just told you. Besides,” she adds. “I have retired.”

“Bryce is our brother’s girlfriend,” Emma says as she shares a shy intimate look with Maddy. Then the twins turn from bubbly to pensive, their smiles falling, their faces reddening, their blue eyes dulling.

Miss Marble inexplicably takes their hands and squeezes. “You’re okay, girls. You’ve got me and Coyote.”

Coyote? How intriguing, but whatever’s going on is a private moment so I slide behind the reception counter and fuss with three vintage troll dolls Wendy keeps on the desk for luck.

The moment passes as Freud, picking up on the sudden tension, gives a terse bark.

Cujo’s answering bark of solidarity yips out from the back.

I put my vet hat back on as I glance at the Mastiff. “Is he ill?”

“No,” Bryce replies. “The other vet is an idiot, so we came to check you out.”

I laugh at Bryce’s forthrightness and then harder as the girls join in.

“He is, isn’t he?” I say as I return to the group.

Freud nudges up to me and I run a hand down his back. “I’m sorry, sweet baby, but I’m not quite open for check-ups yet.”

“The door was unlocked,” Bryce states the obvious like she’s personally insulted I’m not open.

The twins prowl the office, peeking behind the counter, looking down the hall to the closed doors. Emma is talking to Singalong, my most recent acquisition. The budgie effectively shuns the girl by turning his back and mooning her. Literally. She’s lost all her tail feathers from the stress of her former life, but there’s some peach fuzz now that she’s in a calmer and more welcoming environment.

Maddy is heading to my shoe stockroom, and I slide in front of her and herd her back to the reception area. “Yes, the door was unlocked,” I tell them. “I just got back from getting some supplies and had my hands full so I couldn’t lock it behind me.” I smile affectionately at my new shoes, which smile back at me. “I got slightly distracted.”

“Why aren’t you open?” Emma asks as she picks up Kona, the three-legged cat and kisses its nose. Kona hisses and attempts to swipe at her with its missing paw.

“Yeah,” Maddy adds as she sticks a finger in Singalong’s cage and gets nipped for her efforts. “You’ve been setting up for weeks.”

Their Mastiff loves them, I’ve no doubt, but they aren’t charming any of the other animals. Inexplicably, Bryce is being crowded by Blackie, and she’s examining his missing ear with her fingers.



I'm starting to feel stalked by these women who are asking intrusive questions. Still, I'm growing fond of my three future clients, so I decide to be truthful. "I'm setting up in stages because I'm having trouble getting financing."

"Really!" all three exclaim like this is the most exciting thing they've ever heard. Well, the twins exclaim. Bryce adds a slight emphasis to the word.

I can't help smiling at their enthusiasm. "Yes. I've only managed to raise 51 percent of what I need to fully open the doors, so I plan to do a soft opening next week."

The three women exchange looks. "Wouldn't it be fun?" Maddy says to Emma.

Emma appears to fully understand her sister. "I've been so bored," she replies. "And this would be such a distraction." Her eyes get distant, and my brain finally kicks in. These are the girls whose parents died in a horrific house fire a few weeks ago. It's been all over the media. No wonder they're hot and cold.

Bryce intervenes, "It seems we can't do anything without Coyote having an opinion."

"He's smothering you?" It's Emma who's asking.

"No," says Bryce bluntly. Then, "Yes." Then, "Maybe."

The girls exchange smirks. "He's always been overprotective."

Bryce sighs. "I think I need an outside project now that I've managed to manipulate BETH."

*Beth?*

"And it would be good for us," Emma says to Maddy (or vice versa because I'm starting to confuse them again).

"Get our minds off all the stuff that happened."

"Yes," Bryce agrees. "It would be like therapy."

Then the twins say the one thing that solidifies my opinion that they're kindred spirits. "Shopping therapy!"

Even though I'm confused, I'm all in. "You want to go shopping?"

Bryce shakes her head. "No. We want to invest in your enterprise."

The twins nod enthusiastically, then Emma (the one wearing the pink mini, I think) says to the other, "But how can we do it without Dylan finding out?"

Dylan?

Bryce raises her eyebrows at the girl like she's just been insulted. "I'm a thief if you recall. Coyote doesn't need to know what we're doing." She turns to me. "If you'll take straight up cash."

Emma stares at Bryce. "Where will you get the cash? Coyote's generous with our allowances, but he'll notice a big withdrawal."

Allowance? I don't understand who this Coyote/Dylan is and why he controls these women's lives, but none of them seem to be particularly upset by it, so I keep my thoughts to myself. Still, when I have more time on my hands, I plan to emancipate these women.

Bryce sighs. "He keeps most of the money he gets from the club in his safe."

Emma frowns. "He doesn't. He gives it to the women's shelter."

Maddie shakes her head at Emma. "He gives some of it to the women's shelter and the rest to the Jane Goodall Institute."

"Seriously?" Emma counters. "He's not into gorillas."

"That doesn't matter. They do good stuff."

"What, Maddy? What do they do?"

"Good stuff," Maddy repeats, narrowing her eyes at her sister.

Emma opens her mouth to retort, but I decide to prevent the brawl by saying to Bryce. "He gave you the combination?"

Bryce furrows her brow at my apparently offensive statement. “Of course, he didn’t.” That’s all she has to say.

The three of us go, “Ahh.”

She directs her next question to me. “Charities notwithstanding, the funds may be proceeds from criminal activities. He’s part of Hell’s Jury Motorcycle Club. I don’t know if you’re familiar with them?”

My heart skips a beat. “I am!” I want to ask them about Trigger, but I suppress the urge. I want tall, dark, and dangerous in my life, but at the same time, he’s a distraction that I don’t need right now. I decide the meeting with this Neapolitan Mastiff is serendipitous, because I will fully use my connections to track my hot tattooed biker down when I’ve got more time to devote to my love life.

Bryce ghosts me with a smile. “It’s cash. No one can trace it back to you.”

“It’ll be like cleaning the money,” Maddy says.

“No, it won’t,” Emma argues.

Bryce seems accustomed to the bickering. “We’ll have to draw up some sort of a contract.”

“Of course,” I agree. Maybe it’s naiveté, but I can’t think of any reason why one can’t invest with cash. No one has to know where it comes from. My heart is happy and so is Cujo’s as he yips his joy, then when he gets our attention, scurries down the hall in a panic.

“Then it’s settled.” I think we should shake on it, but Bryce doesn’t, so I do the second-best thing. I head down the hall, rifle through Wendy’s locker, and grab her cheap bottle of whiskey and four urine sample cups (unused of course).

“It’s not anywhere near top of the line,” I say as I return. “But I think we should drink to our partnership.” I pour a shot for me and Bryce, then wave the bottle in the air as I glance at the twins.

Bryce shakes her head when they check with her. “I don’t care if you drink, but I do care if Coyote finds out I was

involved.”

“He’s owning you,” Maddy says with a furrowed brow.

For the first time, Bryce’s face lights up. “Yeah.”

My heart twinges as I think of the man of my fantasies. I wouldn’t mind being owned by Trigger. My body hums its agreement.

“Forty-nine percent?” Bryce asks after she takes a drink of the foul whiskey and frowns at it.

My heart leaps. Forty-nine percent would solve all my problems, but then I realize that I don’t actually know these women and I can’t let them have that kind of control of my clinic. “I’d prefer no more than 15 percent, maybe five percent from each of you. That way, I won’t be impacted should one of you decide to withdraw.”

The twins exchange huge smiles that make their blue eyes dance. “I love it!” Emma says. “I’ll be a 5 percent owner of a vet clinic. Will Freud get his check-ups for free?”

Her twin scowls. “Of course not. You have no business sense.” Already, they’re taking over.

Emma waves at the budgie and Kona, who’s sitting on the counter glaring at her. “I bet Evanee doesn’t charge these guys.”

“She’s the vet,” Bryce says in her dry tone. “It would be like Coyote charging us for beating up one of your boyfriends.”

She turns to me. “Who else do you plan to approach for funding?”

I shrug. “I’m not sure. My father isn’t a fan of my life-choices so he throws up roadblocks to any legitimate sources.”

Bryce contemplates this. “I know some other women who wouldn’t be persuaded by the men in their lives or your father. I’m sure they could be talked into investing too.”

My heart skips a beat as I glance at my shoes in thanks. If it weren’t for them, my hands would have been freed up

enough to lock the doors behind me when I came in and I'd still be a struggling vet without financing.

“Who?” Maddy asks.

“Haley and Jess,” Bryce replies then steps outside with her phone in hand. A few minutes later, she returns with her version of a smile.

“Well?” the twins ask at the same time.

“They're on their way,” Bryce replies with a secretive grin. She stretches like a cat and says under her breath, “Pissing off Hangman. It's going to be a good day.”

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## CHAPTER FIVE

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## Evanee



The doors are open thanks to my investors, the customers are trickling in, no one's discovered Lullaby, and my rescue pets now include a cat with one eye that we call Pirate Jack because he came without a name. It's costing me though, more than I'm making and the money in my savings is slowly dwindling. I've given up my apartment and moved into the clinic – the room where I kennel the animals.

Wendy, bless her heart, will be the ultimate reason I jump off a bridge. She started smoking again, then just as we opened the doors, inexplicably stopped. In her normal state, I wouldn't describe her as a friendly postcard to the clients we're trying to lure, but the withdrawal from nicotine puts her on a whole other level of miserable. On more than one occasion I've had to send her home part-way through the day.

Today is one of those days and I'm minding the reception, but it's mid-afternoon, I have no clients, not even walk-ins so I'm not exactly overwhelmed. I'm in the back – my bedroom now, trying on a new pair of therapeutic shoes when Cujo gives a sharp bark. I slip on my Louboutin's, take a few seconds to admire them, check the mirror to make sure there's no lipstick on my teeth, give my breasts a little lift, then head out to meet my new customers.

Two bikers are standing at the counter. One is about as tall as I am, the other over six feet. They're scruffy, wearing vests that identify them as prospects, but not the biker club they belong to. There's a deep burn inside me as they remind me of my man in the food court. I still haven't looked for Trigger,

though I think about him all the time. He's a complication I don't need in my life no matter how badly I want it. I think the sex would be fantastic, but I'm worried the relationship would end in heartbreak.

These two though, are younger, neither bearded, though one has spotty whiskers. Cujo and Blackie are dancing around them, and Singalong has joined in with a squawking chorus. The bikers seem oblivious to my greeters because they're having a heated conversation. They don't immediately notice my arrival.

"I'll handle it," the tall one says. "I'm better with conversation."

"Because you never shut up," the shorter one grumbles. His arms are beautifully tattooed and whoever the inker was is a first-rate artist. It makes me want my own tattoo.

Still, there's a time and a place and this is clearly not it.

"Hello," I say, which gets their attention.

They turn towards me, their eyes growing round, their faces red. I have that affect on men, young, old, hard of sight.

"Uh," says the tattooed one. "Uh," he says again.

"Welcome to my clinic." I look around them and try to find the animal the bikers belong to, but there's nothing. Not even a cage. "You didn't leave the poor darling in the car, did you?" A peek through the window answers my question. There is no car, just a couple of Harleys. "Hmmm. Can't be dog."

The taller one attempts to intimidate me by scowling. "There is no dog." His voice is deep and gruff, but it lacks menace.

I smile as I slink past them, then sit on one of the reception room chairs, crossing my legs, my back straight, showing my girls to their best advantage. It seems to be something I can't help when it comes to men, and I fully admit a little therapy would serve me well. Even if it is a compulsion, in this case, I think perhaps I may need to use my assets because these guys aren't here to get their chameleon neutered.



“How can I help you then?”

“You’re new in the neighbourhood,” the tatted one says, somewhat aggressively.

It’s an odd start to the conversation, but I’m intrigued. “Indeed I am.”

He glares at what I assume is my nonreaction to their big, bad, biker personas. “We’re assurance salesmen.”

“Insurance,” the other one corrects, glancing sheepishly at me.

“I like that you get to the point, boys,” I say in a silky voice. “But I already have insurance.”

“Yeah,” tatted one says. He seems to think he’s the leader, but I’m doubtful he truly is. “But ours is special.”

Hmm, special insurance. “My name is Dr. Whittaker or Evanee if you prefer. And you are?”

“Uh, I’m Crank,” he replies, then points a thumb in the taller biker’s direction. “He’s Zero.”

“How interesting,” I say looking at Zero with a smile. “I’d love to hear how you came upon that road name.”

His face reddens. “We don’t have time to talk, ma’am.”

I try not to bristle. “Ma’am? I don’t mind being called a babe, not baby though. I like doll too. Sweetheart.” I think of my mall biker. “Darlin’.” I shrug as I slightly wrinkle my nose. “Just not ma’am.”

Zero rubs at the back of his neck. “Sorry, ma... uh, doctor.”

Crank scowls at Zero as I reply, “Not a problem. What matters is that in future, you don’t make the mistake again.” They can’t be much younger than I am, but they’re clearly out of their depth. “You were saying about being short on time?”

“Yeah,” says Crank trying to look mean. “We ain’t here to call you pretty names. We’re here to sell you insurance.”

I shift positions, recrossing my legs, which draws their eyes downward. “Okay. You’ve got my attention. What will this insurance get me?”

Zero’s face clears in relief. “It’s to prevent your place from being burned down or robbed.”

“Or trashed,” Crank adds.

“Sheep fucker,” Singalong interjects.

They jump, then look at the budgie.

Wonder of all wonders. The bird can talk!

I call their attention back to me. “How wonderful. My other insurance only deals with those kinds of things after the fact.” I pause. “You know, you had it right the first time, Crank. It’s assurance.”

They look at each other thinking they have me cornered. “Yeah,” says Crank. “Assurance. You gotta buy it if you want to open a business in this area.”

I affect a glower. “Stupid city council didn’t tell me that.” I stand, heading behind the counter. “Plus, I’ve already opened the business.”

“They don’t—”

I hold up a hand as I leaf through a folder, then pull out the business authorization and wave it at them. “I’m licensed you see so I thought I could open a business without needing anything else.” I shake my head like I’m mad. “I’ll be calling the city after we’re done here. This is bullshit.”

“Bullshite,” Singalong echoes. He appears to have a Scottish accent.

Crank gulps and looks at Zero who seems to be trying to think his way out of the situation. “Look ma’am... uh doll, this don’t got anything to do with the city council. This is Hell’s Jury turf, and they protect their own.”

Hell’s Jury! I think about my sexy biker. He’s within arms reach and my heart skips a beat as I imagine what he looks like under his biker clothes. “Does that make me one of their

own?" I kind of get a little wet as I conjure an image of Trigger making me one of his own.

Crank squeezes his eyes shut and scratches at his head. "Yeah. You're one of ours now." They're both holding their breath waiting for me to reply.

"Sheep fucker," the budgie says.

"What the fuck is wrong with that bird?" Zero asks as both men stare at it.

I scowl at them. "Are you questioning my abilities as a vet?" Granted, the bird could have picked a better time to declare itself verbal.

"Of course not," Crank quickly replies. "You're probably a very good vet."

Probably very good? "I'm a great vet despite what you might hear about my ability with rabbits. It's a bullshit rumour."

Cujo skitters across the floor with his teddy in his mouth, slamming into Crank's legs and almost knocking him off-balance. He drops the teddy at his feet and woofs as his tail wags. Crank tries to ignore him, but he woof-woofs this time.

"You'll have to toss it if you want him to leave you alone."

"Fine!" Crank picks up the teddy and wings it down the hall.

Cujo's nails rake the floor as he scrambles after it, mouths it a few times, then picks it and looks back at Crank.

I shake my head at Cujo, and for a change he decides to listen. Alternatively, it could be that Crank threw the teddy wrong and Cujo will simply not tolerate a man without dexterity. Either way, he lopes into my examining room.

"Where were we?" I turn towards my two extortionists (or is it extorters?).

"We were talking about how you were one of us."

"Of course. I can't tell you how pleased I am that you're looking out for my welfare." I pause like I'm thinking

everything over. “Exactly how much is this assurance?”

“Five-hundred a month,” Crank says like he’s rehearsed it. “More as your business grows.”

I pretend to think about it. “Does your fee take into account how much I’m making already?”

Zero and Crank exchange glances.

“Uh, not sure. How much are you making?” Zero asks.

I walk behind the counter again, rustle around, then produce my account book. I’m not old-fashioned, I prefer using the computer, but Wendy doesn’t trust the book-keeping programs – she refuses to believe they add the totals correctly, so she has to check them on her calculator. In the end, she told me to fuck off and let her do what I hired her to do, which was actually not the books, but since I don’t have to pay her a higher wage to be my amateur accountant, I follow her advice and fuck off.

I flip open the black book as I wave Crank and Zero to the counter. They crowd up on either side and follow my finger while I draw it down a column of numbers in red that match the polish on my fingernails. “You see here? I still don’t have the capital I need to open the business, but I secured the property, and it isn’t good business to pay rent without a return on investment. I’m still building my client base, so the intake currently does not exceed the output, which unfortunately means I have to supplement my operations by accessing my savings, which are getting more meager by the day.”

Lullaby whinnies and the boys are temporarily distracted. “What’s that?” Crank asks.

Shit. “Baby monitor,” I improvise quickly.

His eyes widen. “You have a baby?”

I think about lying, but don’t really like to especially because saying I have a baby is too big a whopper. I don’t know anyone who would lend me theirs should I need it. “No. Just the monitor.”

Their confusion keeps them from asking further and I recall their attention to the accounts book. I point at the total in red. “Anyway, you see this line? It’s how much debt I’m in.” I shake my head. “I’m going backwards.”

Crank scratches at his face as he thinks about this. “So if we base the assurance on your income, then you’re saying you don’t have to pay any.”

Zero looks like he’s about to kick Crank, so I intercede. “I am definitely not saying that.”

He narrows his eyes at me. “You’re gonna pay some assurance... I mean insurance, but not the whole amount the Jury is askin’ for?” He walks over to the window, looks out while he frowns. “You’re saying that we go back to the boss and tell him you’re only going to pay some.”

I shake my head at them. “No. I’m not saying that at all.” I walk over to the window, stand beside Zero, and follow his line of sight. “I’m saying that your organization should be paying for my assurance because if I’m one of yours and you look out for me, it only stands to reason that if I’m in the black, I pay you assurance and if I’m in the red, you pay me.”

Crank opens his mouth to protest when Lullaby whinnies again. “Oh dear. The baby monitor again. I better go check it.” I take a few steps towards the surgery, then stop and look back. “You boys can find your way out, can’t you?”

“Sheep fucker,” the budgie sings as the bell over the door tinkles.

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# CHAPTER SIX

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# Trigger



I'm in Hangman's office cleaning my nails with my favourite knife. I'm fastidious that way, especially after a skinnin'. I'm bored, restless and in need of a fuck, but every time I close my eyes, I see the woman from the mall. I gotta find her soon or my balls will drop off.

Hangman and I are shooting the shit about nothin' in particular when Zero and Crank knock on the doorframe. We both turn our heads in their direction with varying degrees of curiosity. It ain't often the prospects come straight to Hangman. I grin to my inner self. Whatever happens next is gonna relieve some of my boredom.

"What the fuck do you want?" Hangman says. He sounds hostile, but he's as curious as I am.

Zero clears his throat. "Reaper asked us to stop by the new business on Front Street and put the squeeze on the vet."

"She's a woman," Crank interrupts.

Hangman shrugs. "I know. She the owner?"

"Yeah," Zero nods.

"It makes no difference if she's a broad. Get to the point."

"Uhm. The woman," Crank starts.

"Dr. Whittaker," Zero clarifies.

Crank turns to Zero. "What was her first name again?"

"Doesn't fuckin' matter!" Hangman's getting impatient.

“Right,” Zero replies with a nod. “She thinks the insurance should be based on net income.”

I snigger, no longer bored. “Does she now?”

“She thinks she fuckin’ makes the rules?” Hangman snarls looking between the prospects and me.

Crank quickly comes to her defence. “No. She was very nice. She was just makin’ a point.”

Zero adds, “She showed us her books.”

“Account books,” Crank interrupts.

“Yeah. Anyway, she’s in the red.”

“So the fuck what?” I say, mirroring Hangman’s growing impatience.

Crank shifts uncomfortably. “Well she said we should pay her until she’s in the black.”

My head swims at the conversation. “What the fuck are you talkin’ about?”

Zero seems to have a death wish. “It makes sense though, doesn’t it? Like we don’t want her business to go under, so we shouldn’t make her spend money she don’t have.”

“Are you fuckin’ kidding me!” Hangman sputters. He looks at me. “Where the fuck are Reaper and Eight?”

I shrug. “I ain’t their babysitter.”

Maybe those weren’t the right words to use because Hangman goes ballistic. “I got two fuckin’ useless prospects and a jackass who thinks he’s funny.”

I try a frown on for size, but I know it’s a smirking frown. “I don’t think I’m funny—” I start.

“Good thing you don’t think it because you’re gonna fuckin’ go read the riot act to that fuckin’ vet.”

This time I give a real frown. Fuck. Now I’m gonna have to strong arm some old biddy into payin’ her proper respect to the Jury. There goes my day. “I ain’t got time, Hangman.”



He sees through my lie. “Take these two turd piles, get your ass down to the vet place and show them how it’s done.”

I try to stare him down, open my mouth to argue, but he looks like he’s about to throw one of us through the wall and there’s a 33.33 percent chance it could be me.

I sigh as I head out to the parking lot, Zero and Crank on my heels. “You fuck-ups,” I growl, but my heart’s not in it.

“Wait’ll you see her,” Crank says. “You’ll get it then.”

“Let’s go,” I snap as I mount my Harley and roar out of the compound.

When we get to the clinic, I stomp to the door and slam it open. The bell tinkles overhead but no one comes out so I bang on the reception counter. “Where the fuck is everyone!” I yell in my best impression of Hangman on a good day.

“Coming,” a sweet voice sweeps over me from down the hall. Shivers invade my body and it’s like I’m in slow motion as I turn towards the hallway.

Then she’s standing there, stopped dead in the hall, her head tilted, a bemused smile on her lips. She’s as fuckin’ gorgeous as the last time I saw her. Dressed almost the same except she’s wearing a white lab coat and has straw in her hair.

“Trigger!” she exclaims in delight as she sashays up to me, takes my face in her hands and kisses me soundly on the lips.

Fuck me.

When she tries to draw back, I don’t let her. I wrap my hands around her waist, thread my fingers through her hair and kiss her like a drowning man. My dick is a fence post as I press it into her pelvis and stick my tongue down her throat.

She lets me ravage her for a half-minute, then untangles herself from me, touching her hair like she’s tryin’ to fix it, but she’s rattled at my response to her greeting. “You’re very bad,” she says breathlessly.

“Evanee,” I smirk at her. “You gonna fuckin’ kiss me, what do’ya think I’m gonna do?” I lean into her, inhaling, and

say under my breath. “I’ve been thinkin’ of doing that since I met you at the mall. Thank you for lettin’ me.”

She takes a step backward, her eyes dancing, then they startle as she looks past me and sees Crank and Zero. “You’re back. So soon.” She recovers quickly. “This time I think we really should have a drink.”

I realize the rock and hard place I suddenly find myself in. “Evanee,” I start, but she’s disappeared down the hall. Less than a minute later, she emerges with a half-bottle of spiced whiskey and four glasses – uh not really glasses, but what appear to be urine sample holders. “I have the need to celebrate our reunion,” she murmurs as she concentrates on pouring a shot into each of the glasses. She passes them around, raises hers into the air then knocks it back like a bad-ass biker. I’m in awe, probably in love.

I grin as I clink her empty glass and follow suit.

There’s a pregnant pause as I look around at the bare walls, the faded linoleum on the floor, then back to her. I touch her hair and pull out a piece of straw. “Who you been rollin’ around in the hay with?” I’m sayin’ it with a smirk but there’s a dangerous undertone that she picks up on.

“My babies,” she replies. “Out back. We need our exercise.”

“Dogs are out back then?” Zero asks.

She nods at him, before returning her attention to me “I’m so glad to see you again.” She runs a finger down my chest to the zipper on my jeans as she peers up at me through her thick black eyelashes.

“Me too,” I reply as I shift uncomfortably. “This ain’t a social call, Evanee.”

“Of course.” She tucks a piece of my hair behind my ear. “I didn’t think it was since Zero and Crank came with you”. She gives them a beaming smile that makes me wanna punch them.

“Maybe we could talk alone?” I venture, thinking I might make more headway if the prospects are gone.

“We can hang with the dogs in the backyard,” Zero says hopefully, but Evanee’s eyes get guarded.

“Perhaps another time, Zero. They get fussy when they’re hungry. Cujo, as you know, is a monster.”

Crank and Zero look at each other in confusion.

I jerk my head towards the deli across the street. “Go buy yourselves a sandwich. I’ll handle this myself.”

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# CHAPTER SEVEN

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## Evaneer



After Zero and Crank leave, Trigger looks long and hard at me. “I forgot to tell you that you’re the most beautiful women in the world.”

It’s not original, but it is coming from my future husband so I’m more flattered than I’d typically be. “And I forgot to tell you that you’re the sexiest man alive.”

“Imagine the babies we’ll make.”

I almost melt into a pool of simpering estrogen. “Yes,” I agree, a smile hovering on my lips. “Imagine how we’ll make those babies.”

He grins and presses me up against the counter, pushing his very hard, very big erection into my belly. “I haven’t been the same since the food court. My dick ain’t interested in anyone but you and monkhood doesn’t suit me.”

Shit he’s good. “I’ve never had a virgin before.” I trace the valleys of his biceps as I look up at him through my eyelashes.

He grins and winks. “You’ll have to show me the ropes, gorgeous.”

I decide he’s right, but not the way he means. I slide away from him despite my body’s objection and sit in the old office chair behind the counter. The springs squeak in protest. “As you said, this isn’t a social call.” I blink at him. “And I’m not the kind of girl who exchanges sex for money.”

His eyes narrow dangerously. “You better fucking not be.”

“I just said I’m not.” I add a measure of ice to my voice to dampen the fire his possessive words evoke. “But like I told your prospects, I can’t pay your extortion rates, and I won’t.” I can toy with the prospects, but I know that won’t wash with the tall man leaning over the counter, all tats, piercings, and muscle. I shiver as I think of what’s under his clothes.

“The Jury don’t take no for an answer.”

“Even if I’m your wife?” I flutter my eyelashes coquettishly.

His eyes get wide. “I think we’re at the dating stage, not the wedding stage.”

I like that he isn’t running for the hills. “The unfortunate part of all this is that we can’t even be at the dating stage because it would be like I’m prostituting myself.” I too can be an extortionist when I want to be and this time, yes, I’m using the word in the proper context.

He growls and bangs the flat of his palm on the counter hard enough to make me jump. “One has nothing to do with the other.”

“You really are unfamiliar with the concept of boyfriend/girlfriend.”

Trigger’s beautiful brown eyes lose their spark. “It’s bad enough you sent Zero and Crank back to the prez with their tails between their legs. You ain’t gonna do it to me.”

My stomach lurches at the thought of Trigger turning his back on me and walking out the door. “Maybe I should meet this president of yours.” I pause, furrow my forehead though I know it’s bad for my face, but I need the effect. “It’s a conflict of interest for you. If you insist I pay, we can’t pursue a relationship.” I hesitate again, then with a measure of insecurity in my voice that’s far too real, say, “Unless, I’m misinterpreting your interest.” Shit, I’m getting emotional. “Maybe you see me as a conquest.”

Never have I ever shown this kind of weakness to a man, but this one? I can’t fight my attraction to him. He’s everything I want.

He stalks around the reception counter, grabs my arms in a solid grip and yanks me to my feet. His face is hostile. “You already know I don’t fuckin’ see you as a conquest.” Then he kisses me hard, long, and lusty. It’s good that he’s holding me upright, because his passion streaks past my lady bits to my knees, which start to buckle.

“Trigger,” I moan as he wraps his arms around me and holds me like I’m the sweetest thing he’s ever touched.

His aggression gives way to soft kisses that make me believe in happy ever after. “The day we met was the best day of my life and I’ve had some pretty fuckin’ good days,” he murmurs, his lips a hairsbreadth away from mine. “I couldn’t find you anywhere, didn’t know enough about you, but you were in my thoughts every fucking minute of every fucking day.”

I slide my hands around his shoulders. “I know. Me too. But how’s this going to work? We’re on opposing sides of a dilemma.”

He lets me go and I grab the edge of the desk to keep from falling back into the chair. “I don’t know,” he says as he runs his hand through his long curly hair and paces towards the window. “I don’t fuckin’ know.”

I follow him, slide my arms around him from the back, press my face between his shoulder blades, and inhale the smoky leather of his cut. The subtle scent of danger burns through me. “It’s like I’ve known you forever and I’ll know you forever, but even if this ends in heartbreak, I’d like to give us a try.”

He turns and crushes me against him, his strong arms cocooning me. “There won’t be heartbreak, won’t be tryin’. We’re not walkin’ away from each other, even if the going gets rough.”

I nod into his chest, resisting the urge to yank his T-shirt up and lick his well-defined pecs. “Then take me to your leader.”

He sighs in resignation. “I don’t like how this is gonna go down if Hangman decides to play hardball.”

Hangman? I wonder what he did to merit such an ominous club name. “We’ll figure it out,” I tell him, but despite his promises, I don’t deceive myself. Trigger barely knows me and Hell’s Jury is his club. His loyalty will lie with them over a woman he’s met twice.

“Okay.” He nods as his eyes rake me. “Best you change.”

I’m wearing my Alexander Wang studded platform sandals, my white lab coat over a black Valentino crepe couture skirt and a lovely emerald-green button-up sleeveless silk shirt that I found in the bargain bin at Saks.

“Into what?” I ask, genuinely confused. “And why?”

“You’ll be riding with me on my Sturgis.”

“Sturgis?”

“Yeah. My Harley. Vintage,” he replies proudly.

I’m still not getting it. “And...?”

He waves his hand from my chest to my feet. “You ain’t dressed for it.”

“Oh.” The light comes on. “Of course.”

I slip out of my lab coat, draping it over the reception chair, then grab my Saint Laurent hobo bag, and head for the door. “Let’s go,” I toss him a sultry smile as I walk past him.



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# CHAPTER EIGHT

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# Trigger



I help Evanee on the back of my sled as Crank and Zero head towards me. Crank is chewing on a hotdog. “What’s happenin’ now?” he says as he swallows the last half of it whole and then burps.

Evanee smiles at them in a way that makes me wanna punch them. “We’re going to your president,” she tells them. She’s got her skirt hiked up around her thighs, the front of her high heels on the passenger foot pegs, and she’s tuggin’ on the helmet I handed her. It’s like she was born to ride a bike.

This is the woman of my dreams I tell myself ignoring the asswipes who can’t stop looking at her long legs. She wraps her arms around my waist and presses up against me as I climb on in front of her. “I’m ready,” she whispers in my ear in way that speaks to my dick. I will it to behave because riding a bike with a boner is fucking uncomfortable.

“You ride?”

She nods into my shoulder blades. “I used to have a 1998 Valkyrie.”

“Are you fucking kiddin’ me?” I twist my head to look at her. “GL1500C?”

She grins at my enthusiasm. “Yes, that’s the one.”

“What happened to it?”

“My father decided it was too dangerous for me. He replaced it with my BMW, and call me shallow, but who can say no to an i8 Roadster.”

My nipples get hard as I think of her drivin' her own bike next to me, decked out in black leather from head to toe.

The four of us roar away from the curb and head to the clubhouse. I'm having trouble thinking with Evanee pressed into me. I can feel her tits against my back and want to be naked with her lying on my back, feelin' her body touching mine. I don't know how I'd fuck her that way, but I'd been willin' to give it a try.

My head ain't where it needs to be. It should be focused on the fact that I'm taking her to an unplanned meeting with Hangman. He's gonna kick my ass, but I'm obsessed with her and even if I don't know her all that well, I'm gonna have to talk the prez into leaving her alone. If I can't get through to him, I'll never have sex with her and my dick will get so depressed it'll fall off, run away from home, and find someone who's willing to ride it.

When we get to the clubhouse, there's no one around to open the gates.

"What the fuck?" I snarl at Zero as if it's his fault the gate isn't manned.

He boots down his kickstand and swings himself off his bike. "I swear to god you guys have your heads up your asses sometimes," he grumbles as he walks to the gate, climbs six feet up the fence, then punches the buttons on a keypad that's practically invisible unless you know where it is. The gate slowly slides open.

"I didn't know we had that," I say, feeling like maybe I was told and then forgot.

"It's new!" Crank yells over the noise of his idling bikes. "Coyote installed it two weeks ago."

"Fucking asshole," I say under my breath wondering if I'm the only that didn't know.

After we park, I get off the bike, then turn to Evanee who's still straddling it. I lose my breath as she takes off her helmet, then shakes out her hair. It's beautiful – the rich color, the

curls, the way it frames her face. Windblown, it's so sexy I want to bury my face in it.

She smiles like she knows what I'm thinking, then holds my arm as she dismounts. She's grace personified, balancing on one heel while she slides her leg over the seat, then gives a little hop as she lands. Her breasts bounce, the cleavage peeking out from behind the straining buttons of her top like it's shy.

She wiggles her hips as she straightens her skirt, then tugs at the sleeves of her blouse and adjusts the front. "You're a good ride," she says with a sultry smile.

Goosebumps race up my arms. "You have no idea, baby." I grab her by the waist and tuck her into my body. She's a temptress and I like that she's teasing me, but I got a feeling that it's almost a compulsion with her. I can't tell if she's playing with me or if she's genuine.

I decide the conundrum is something I can contemplate later as Blood catches my attention coming out of the clubhouse. "What's going on?" he asks as he strolls up to us, his hands tucked into the pockets on his jeans. He scans Evanee. "So this is what all the fuss is about."

"Fuss?" Evanee asks in her smooth sultry voice.

"You got the prospects tied up in knots and Prez is spittin' fire. It's a fuss."

She nods thoughtfully. "But not unsalvageable?"

"Days not over," he says with a wink and heads towards the Chamber.

Evanee raises her perfect eyebrows. "I like him."

"He's taken," I grumble.

"So are you," she smirks as she links her arm in mine. "Take me to your leader."

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## CHAPTER NINE

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## Evaneer



There are two men in the office when Trigger and I walk in. I assume the president is the one who's sitting behind the desk.

The other man, who's tucked into a space between the desk and wall, is tall and swarthy with penetrating eyes that linger on me. He smirks at Trigger. "You've outdone yourself this time, bro."

Trigger scowls. "Mind your fuckin' manners, Reaper, or we'll take it outside."

Reaper raises his brows, but simply nods, then looks at me again, this time with speculation in his eyes.

"Have a seat, sweetheart," Hangman says in a gruff voice as he gestures to a hardwood kitchen chair. The man behind the desk is larger-than-life and the hard lines on his face tell me he has a personality to match. He's probably over forty, has long sandy blonde hair that's braided, and his unkempt beard is sprinkled with strands of gray, but it's his eyes that give me the most information. They're flinty grey, magnetic, and intelligent. I understand why he's the president of Hell's Jury and under different circumstances, I might consider him a challenge, but I've already got my tall, dark, and dangerous next to me, his big hand resting possessively on the small of my back.

I consider the chair as I recover my equilibrium. I'm not about to sit in it. My bottom is so well-defined I could bounce a quarter off it, but even I know that if I sit on that hard seat,

I'll start squirming in less than five minutes. I don't squirm for any man unless he's got his head between my thighs.

I glance over my shoulder at Trigger. Yes. He'd make me squirm.

I decide not to tell the president about my antipathy towards squirming. Instead, I improvise. "Can you please have someone wipe it off for me. I don't want to get anything on my new Valentino skirt." I glance at Reaper as if he's Hangman's bitch and he tries to stare me down. He almost succeeds.

Like Reaper, Hangman isn't onboard with my request. "Sit the fuck down," he says with gritted teeth that gets Trigger glaring.

I look at the chair again. "No thank you, sir. The only chair in this office that I would be willing to sit in is the one you're currently using."

"You want my fuckin' chair?" Hangman sputters.

"Well, not for keeps, but yes." I draw his attention to my studded platform sandals. They were more comfortable when I tried them on at the store and I'm wishing I was wearing my Louboutin's instead. They're worked in, know the shape of my feet, and love me in spite of it. But I simply say, "If you don't mind."

"I fuckin' mind."

I nod. "I understand. As an enlightened, forward-thinking female, I can't expect you to consider me anything less than your equal, therefore it's important not to indulge me."

He scowls at Reaper, throws an if-looks-could-kill glare at Trigger and shoots to his feet. "Sit in the fuckin' chair!"

I've never been the kind of girl who asks 'are you sure' or gives someone a chance to rescind their offer. I smile brightly at him as I squeeze between his and Trigger's bodies, then take a seat in the chair. It's as comfortable as an office chair can be. "Thank you, sir," I tell him as I cross my legs and straighten my back.

I glance at Trigger who's glaring at Hangman who's staring at my legs, then my guy turns his ire on me. "Quit fuckin' around, Evanee. You don't know me well enough to test me." The threat loses a little of its edge because his eyes are also focused on my legs.

I throw him my brightest smile. "I would never fuck around on you, Trigger."

Hangman stalks out of the office, down the hall, then back again. "I don't like you," he snarls as he points at me with a heavily tattooed finger graced with a huge gold skull ring.

Since it has never been my goal to be liked by everyone, I don't feel his burn. However, I think it's important that he thinks I think it matters that he like me. "I've never been good at first impressions, sir."

"Stop callin' him sir," Trigger interjects aggressively as he leans against the wall on the opposite side of the room from Reaper. Trigger's close enough to me that I inhale the oil of his leather cut, the faint smell of cigarette, and his musky attractive scent. He's the entire package and I shiver inside.

Hangman, however, isn't nearly as impressed. "I like sir."

"I don't. She's gonna call anyone sir, it's gonna be me." He turns his glare on me. "Call him Hangman," he commands.

I shiver and know my nipples have peaked. "Sorry, sir," I say to Trigger in a sultry voice.

"Fuck," they both say together while Reaper snorts a laugh.

Clearly, I'm going to have to take the reins on the conversation. "My name is Dr. Evanee Whittaker, but it would be my pleasure if you called me Evanee." I grin at Trigger. "Although, you, handsome, can call me anything you want."

Hangman tires of the banter. "Enough!" His command makes me jump and I almost let him have his chair back. If only I'd worn different shoes. "You fuckin' listen to me." He jabs the finger again. "I don't care if Trigger has a hard-on for you, you don't open a business in my town without my say so."



He's serious so I decide to be too. I turn the chair so I'm facing forward and lean my arms on the desk, clasping my hands. "Unfortunately, I wasn't aware of that caveat and so I went ahead and opened the business without checking with you first. Having said that, like all new businesses, it takes time to get on one's feet and frankly, I don't see the point of paying for protection because at the moment, there's no threat."

I pause to give Hangman a chance to interject, but he offers nothing other than a stare of incredulity.

I take this as permission to carry on. "Even if there was one, what would I get for my money? I've not seen the paperwork for this so-called insurance, and as I already mentioned, I'm not turning a profit on the clinic, partly because I'm not set up for surgeries. I can't do that until I have funds in place, and it's been a trial trying to find investors that I'm comfortable enough to work with."

"My heart bleeds for you," Hangman sneers. "I don't give a fuck about your problems."

Trigger clears his throat as he pushes off the wall. His arms are crossed, his eyes are dark, and he straightens his back as he gets in Hangman's face. "I do give a fuck about her problems, boss, so a little respect would go a long way with me."

Out of the blue, Hangman punches him in the face. "You don't come into my fuckin' office talking about respect, you cunt."

To Trigger's credit, he takes the punch like the Hulk. It barely moves him, though it splits his lip. He wipes away the blood with his tongue. "I ain't disrespectin' you, Prez, but this woman is my happy ever after." There's no apology in his voice for the way he talked to Hangman.

Reaper throws back his head and gives a full-throated laugh. To me he says, "I hate to be the one to deliver the bad news, gorgeous, but Trigger's idea of happy ever after is having three girls in his bed."

Trigger looks like he's about to leap over Hangman's desk to get to Reaper, so I think it's time to diffuse the situation. "As long as I'm one of them, I can live with that."

My reply has the intended effect as all three men stare at me with varying degrees of interest. I uncross my legs, stand and demurely run my hands down my thighs to smooth the wrinkles out of my skirt. "Maybe you should sit down, sir."

I slip out of the chair and press my back against Trigger, subtly pushing him against the wall. I grope around for his bandana perhaps longer than I should.

Trigger squeezes my biceps and whispers, "Now's not the time, baby."

"It's always the time," I tell him softly as I find the bandana in his back pocket, whip it out and face him, then wipe blood off his chin.

He slaps my hand away as he glares. "Don't fuckin' coddle me."

Coddle him? He doesn't know me if he thinks I coddle anyone. I don't even fuss over babies. "This isn't about you, Trigger. This blouse is a Tove original made from silk. It's essentially irreplaceable and I am not about to let you bleed on it."

"Jesus fucking Christ," Hangman bellows at Trigger, bumping my hip and knocking my pelvis into Trigger's groin as he slides by and throws himself in the chair. "If I knew you were gonna turn this into a shit show, I'd have sent Reaper in the first place."

Trigger has a giant-sized man-penis that's getting bigger by the second. "Jesus," he exhales.

Reaper snorts at Hangman. "I know it's my business, but I'm thinkin' maybe you sent the right guy for the job."

I move my hips back an inch as I take hold of Trigger's face and inspect it. The bleeding has stopped and he's back to his handsome self, so I turn to face Hangman. "I have an easy solution to our mutual problem," I tell him. "I need more

money and based on what little I know of your organization, your club could easily afford to invest in my business.”

I’ve never been uncomfortable with lengthy silences, but this time I subtly twitch. It’s too quiet, Hangman’s face looks like it’s one shade of red away from a heart attack, and Trigger’s grip on my upper arms hurts more than my feet do.

“You fuckin’ want Hell’s Jury to invest in your pet shop?” Hangman bellows.

The man is pushing the edges of my patience and no one, not even the president of Hell’s Jury, wants to piss me off. To centre myself, I squeeze my fingernails into the palms of my hands and let the pain remind me of my mission. Still, I can’t let a remark like that pass. “I take issue with you calling Sweet Tidings Animal Hospital a pet shop. Not only is it demeaning to myself as a certified veterinarian who worked her ass off to get her degrees, pet shops are notorious for selling dogs that come from puppy mills. The puppy mills themselves can be negligent of the animals, and some are downright abusive.”

I take a breath, but no one interjects.

“And you are so keen on protecting the businesses of Sagebrush, yet you allow Wally’s Pet Emporium free hand to sell these poor animals in your town.” My palms thank me as I unclench my hands. “As a potential investor in a legitimate, well-run, and animal-welfare focused clinic, you may want to consider emancipating the animals at Wally’s and maybe breaking his legs for good measure.”

Tigger squeezes my arms tighter, and I try to keep the wince on the inside as Hangman explodes. “I ain’t investing in your fucking *legitimate* vet shop, you crazy bitch, and I’m not about to close down a business that is profitable to this club!”

Perhaps I should not consider him a good candidate, especially since his club turns a blind eye to Wally’s bullshit, but the little devil on my shoulder whispers that once I have him on board, I can talk him around to my way of thinking.

This seems like a reasonable plan of attack, so instead of responding to Hangman’s aggressiveness, I reply as if he never

uttered a word. “If you invest in my veterinarian business, then, of course, when the business turns a profit, you will see a return on your money. At that point, I think we could pay protection, but like any other expense it would have to come out of the bottom line. Also, and forgive me for stating the obvious, paying protection for a business you’ve invested in would be like me charging myself when I have to express the anal glands of one of my own dogs.”

Reaper groans and looks a little green. I throw a bright smile at him for knowing what I’m talking about.

Hangman puts the conversation back on track. “Why the fuck open a business if you don’t have enough money? Why not just work for someone?” He looks at Reaper. “Isn’t there another vet store in Sagebrush?”

Reaper shrugs. “I have no need for a vet, so how would I know?”

“Because you’re in charge of the fuckin’ collection agency!” Hangman snarls.

“Eight’s more involved than me. I got the legit business to run.”

“There is another clinic,” I interject before Hangman gets sidetracked. The man has a remarkably short attention span. Maybe not that of a goldfish, but still. “Dr. Broughton is not only a moon-sized asshole, but he’s also my ex. In addition, so there’s no misunderstanding, I have no wish to work for another vet.”

“Why’s he an asshole?” Reaper asks.

“Too many reasons to list,” I say to Reaper.

“List them anyway,” Trigger growls.

I’m immediately pissed off at Trigger. Turning so we’re almost nose-to-nose, I say, “We’re not beyond the sexual tension part of our relationship to have meaningful conversations about our personal lives.”

It appears I’ve offended him. He shoves his face in mine as he leans his big body over me in an effort to intimidate me.

“Be careful with me Evanee. We don’t know each other well enough for you to start being disrespectful.”

“My point exactly,” I say for the benefit of Hangman and Reaper, but at the same time I can’t help but be a little turned on so I lean closer to Trigger and whisper in his ear, “If I were wearing panties, they’d be so wet by now.”

Trigger rears back, his eyes darkening. “You’re playing with fire.”

I smirk. “I certainly hope so.”

Reaper clears his throat. “Move on. I got places to be.”

Hangman gets all growly. “Trigger, step back!” He points his finger to the wall and Trigger gives me space as he redirects his scowl to Hangman.

I turn my back on my future lover. “I forgot where we were.”

Reaper heaves a sigh.

I’m not entirely sure why he’s here in the first place but decide not to redirect the conversation. I don’t need to strike a match to the testosterone-fueled discussion.

Hangman pulls our attention back to him. “So you don’t got the money to open the shop, but you’re gonna anyway.”

I clear up his misapprehension. “I’ve already opened the business. The problem is that I can’t afford to set up the surgery and until I do, I have no choice but to send my patients to Erik.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Trigger exclaims as he whirls me around to face him. “You’re fucking around with your ex-boyfriend?”

It’s like we’ve known each other for years. “I’m not exactly fucking around with him,” I say in answer to both questions. “But what else can I do?”

“Find some fuckin’ investors,” he snarls.

I raise an eyebrow at the irony. “Is that not the reason we’re meeting with your president?”

“No, it’s not the fucking reason you’re here. You’re here because you refuse to pay protection,” Hangman barks.

I turn towards him and flash my teeth in a big but somewhat condescending smile. “I am not refusing to pay protection. I simply do not see how paying protection will increase the viability of my business.”

He rakes his eyes over me. “You look like a posh bitch. Why aren’t you getting your money from a bank or your family?”

“Hey!” Trigger and I say at the same time. It’s the second time Hangman has called me a bitch, and I don’t mind dirty talk – actually, I love it, but that’s between me and the handsome devil I’ve got my ass pushed into.

“Jesus Christ.” Hangman runs a hand through his hair, but it gets stuck because it’s braided. He looks at his fingers like they deserve to die. “Answer the fuckin’ question.”

I shift uncomfortably because I don’t want the Jury to engage my father. That would start a war and my daddy may seem like a nice guy, but deep down, he’s a bastard. Plus, I’m not quite ready to introduce him to my future husband. “My father is unhappy with my chosen career as well as where I’ve located my business. He has several influential banking friends who prefer not to get involved in our family feud. Father offered to front the money, but I said, ‘No thank you,’ because even if he only owned a 49 percent share, he would be overinvolved and eventually ruin me.

The office goes quiet as Hangman calms himself. “You got no other investors?”

“Of course, I do. If it were only my money, the clinic would still be closed. I have put up 51 percent, so I remain in control of the company. My other investors have offered up 25 percent of what I need to get started. I only need 24 percent more, then I will have the sufficient capital to get the business off the ground in a significant way.”

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# CHAPTER TEN

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# Trigger



Hangman furrows his brow as he looks from Reaper to me as if this conversation is our faults. I guess it is in a way since Reaper's responsible for the 'insurance' collection and I'm responsible for Evanee. Yep, now that I've found her, she and all her baggage belong to me.

The silence grows and I half expect the prez to tell us to get out of his office because he needs some thinkin' time. Instead, he belligerently says to Evanee. "Who the fuck are your other investors?"

Evanee considers his question. "Well, I guess, if you're investing—"

Hangman cuts her off. "We're considerin' it, sweetheart. Nothing's been decided on."

She continues as if he hasn't interrupted. "— in my clinic, I'll have to be transparent. My assistant—"

Hangman cuts her off again. "If you got no money, how the hell can you afford an assistant?"

My girl narrows her eyes and flares her nostrils. For the first time since we arrived, I see her composure slip. Cold dread slips through me. Hangman won't put up with her hostility towards him and I won't put up with his aggression towards her.

My worry is unnecessary because the anger falls from her face, and she offers Hangman a charming smile. "My assistant invested her life savings, which equates to five percent of the required capital." She pauses as her eyes rest on the prez.



“And of course, the reason I need to continue as the major investor is so I don’t have to justify how I run my business to my investors.” She moves away from me and sits in the chair in front of the desk.

*Come back*, my dick begs.

Hangman’s fist curls and I think the only reason he isn’t shouting down the clubhouse is because Evanee shifts in the chair so she’s showing him a side profile and uses her tits to distract him. I scowl at the universe, then say to Evanee. “Face front!”

She startles as she looks at me, then purses her lips before she offers me up the same smile that she gave Hangman a moment ago. The chick needs a bit of tuning in if she thinks she can fuck around with me. I mean, yeah, I’m not above being manipulated, but she’s putting me in the same boat as all the other men and I’m not okay with that. Plus, it’s bullshit that she uses her sexiness to get her way.

My lust grows when she obeys, shifting her ass so she’s facing forward. Reaper gets a nice side-view, but he isn’t looking, though by the expression on his face, it’s taking effort.

“If the club invests and that’s a big fuckin’ if, you’re fucking around with our money. You do that, you’re gonna answer to me.”

She glances my way with some confusion on her face. It’s like she’s unbalanced because I won’t let her use her usual way of operating. Still, she gathers herself, straightens her shoulders, which of course gets us all looking at her tits again, but I forgive her this time, because she can’t make them smaller. “Sir.”

“Evanee,” I growl.

She sighs. “Hangman. We will draw up an agreement that outlines how much you can expect as a return on investment and when you can expect to receive it. An agreement, right? Something that will satisfy both of us.”

Hangman starts to interject but she shakes her head at him like he's a naughty schoolboy. "Every investment is a risk, and as you are well aware, small businesses fail everyday."

"None of my fucking businesses fail!" Hangman blusters.

The smile she bestows on him lights up the room. "Of course not. It's apparent that you are a great businessman, otherwise you wouldn't be considering investing in my clinic."

Hangman isn't stupid, can see someone manipulating him a mile away, but he almost preens at the compliment. "I know a losing cause when I see one. Same as a good one."

She nods. "And this is a good one, I assure you."

He frowns as he looks at Reaper and me. "Where the fuck were we before she started flashin' her tits?"

Evanee flushes because she's been called out. "I was answering your question about who the other investors are. As I said, my assistant has invested her life savings into the business, so that tells you how much she believes in me."

"That, or she doesn't want to lose her job," Reaper says. His interjection startles Evanee as she glances at him.

"Perhaps," she says in a chilly voice. "Bryce Atwood, Emma Chambers and Maddy Chambers have each invested 5 percent."

"Hold the fuck up!" Hangman almost shouts. "Coyote's sisters and the thief have invested in your clinic?"

Evanee widens her eyes. "Yes. Of course, they did. The girls have a Neapolitan Mastiff. Do you know how delicate they are?"

Reaper laughs. "That fuckin' mutt needs a plastic surgeon not a vet."

Evanee shoots to her feet. "You can say anything you want about humans, but I will not tolerate the physical or mental abuse of an animal. Dogs are extremely sensitive, so you watch what you say in front of it."

“Fuck that!” Reaper replies then looks at me. “The woman needs to be committed.” He turns to Hangman. “No way the club’s gonna agree to this bullshit.”

Hangman and I are taken aback by Reaper’s vehement response. He’s the chilliest guy I know.

“Don’t you fucking tell me what to do!” Hangman snarls. Yep, that’s the prez. He never met an argument he couldn’t escalate.

Apparently, neither has Reaper. “It’s in the fucking charter. You wanna spend money, you gotta bring it to the club.”

Hangman tries unsuccessfully to stare Reaper down, then when that doesn’t work, turns on me. “Did you fuckin’ know that Coyote’s women invested?” Before I can answer, he says, “Does Coyote fuckin’ know?”

Evanee enters the fray with her gentle, charming voice. “The women have their own money and do not need permission from a man to spend it.”

Her words don’t appease Prez. “Coyote, get in here!”

Evanee twists her lips. “Then you may as well invite Haley and Jess’s men to join us because their lovely ladies have a 5 percent interest in the clinic.”

“Jesus fucking Christ!” Hangman shouts at her. “Don’t you have any fucking friends outside this club?”

“Hey,” I snarl at Hangman. “Back the fuck off.”

Before Hangman can punch my lights out, Coyote arrives.

Hangman turns on him. “Church now! King and Rocky too!”

Evanee starts to rise, but he says, “Not you. No women in church.”

She opens her mouth to reply, but I get in front of her. Literally. I pull her up by her arms and give her a little shake. “Cut it out,” I say under my breath. “You’re treading on thin ice.”

If she's affronted by my aggression, she doesn't show it. "Okay," she whispers in my ear. "Later, when we're alone, you can punish me for it."

My dick salutes her and if it weren't for Hangman shouting in the background, I'd have flipped her over, heaved her on his desk and shoved my dick in her, but the prez has a way of ruining a good fuck. "Get her out of my office before I throw her out. She can hang with her other fuckin' investors." He stabs at Evanee with his fingers. "And keep away from the rest of the women."

He stomps out, Reaper following him.

I press Evanee up against a wall. "Baby, you're so much fucking trouble."

"I certainly hope so," she answers, her lips curling at the corners. "Otherwise, you'd get tired of me in an hour."

"Nah," I say as I run a finger through the tight centre of her cleavage. "I'll never fucking get tired of you." I punctuate this with an aggressive kiss, pushing my boner into her pelvis.

We're interrupted by Hangman's pissed off voice echoing down the hall. "Where the fuck is Trigger?"

"My cue," I growl, "But we're not finished here."

"I second that." She gives me a bright smile. "I'll need to use the ladies' room so can you please point the way before you abandon me?"

I wonder what game she's playin' now as I lead her out of the office and over to the can. "Didn't see Haley and Jess when we came in, but it don't matter. When you're done peeing, you park your ass on a barstool and stay there."

Her eyes half close as she considers me. "Be careful, sexy."

It's all she says, and I don't know if I've pissed her off or if she's flirting with me. We're gonna have to talk about that too.

Hangman is furious when I walk into church. "What the fuck is wrong with you fuckers?" He half-shouts.

Coyote frowns at me, wondering what I got him into as King and Rocky exchange puzzled glances.

Finally, King says, “Coyote’s got a stick up his ass, Rocky’s got his head up his girlfriend’s cunt, Trigger’s a whore, and I’m fucking perfect.”

We all glare at him. It’s not that he’s wrong, it’s just that some things don’t need saying out loud.

“What’s going on?” Coyote asks.

“The women – your women – are spending your fucking money, investing in his,” he jerks his head in my direction, “current whore’s bullshit business.”

I jerk to my feet, round the table before Hangman can get up, and punch him hard in the face. It’s a sucker punch and I know I’m going to pay for it, but respect’s a two-way street. “She’s my happy ever after, you cocksucker. You show some respect,” I demand as Hangman rocks back in his chair.

“Fuck,” King says as he shoots to his feet, Rocky and Coyote on his heels. They don’t make it in time as Hangman instantly recovers and lunges. We hit the floor like an unruly sack of chickens, fists and curse words flying. I’d like to say I was elegant, taking the prez down like a ninja, but the truth is that Hangman, despite his bulk, dances like a butterfly.

I take a few solid punches to the head before Rocky and King wrestle Hangman off me. I’m wheezing as I scramble to my feet and prepare to launch myself, but Coyote gets between me and the prez, shoving me hard in the chest. “Have you fucking gone mad?” he shouts.

“What would you do, you fucks, if Hangman disrespected your woman?”

That doesn’t make any of them pause. Rocky and King are too busy wrestling with Hangman.

“I’ll fucking destroy you!” Hangman shouts as it takes everything Rocky and King have to keep him from launching himself at me again. “You and your goddamn whore of the month.”

I try to break loose, but Coyote kicks my feet out from under me. The posh bugger comes across as a weak motherfucker, but he knows how to take down an elephant. I land on my ass and before I can get up, he stomps me in the side, enough to render me numb.

“Fuck,” I shout as I grab my ribs, thinking Hangman’s going to get the advantage and destroy me.

I’m saved from certain death as Joker bolts in and grabs Hangman in a bear hug, hauling him out of the room. “Lock the fucking door behind me,” he snarls as he wrestles with the prez.

Rocky slams the door and twists the lock. It won’t keep Prez out, but Joker will talk him down. That’s why he’s VP. He’s the only one who can get through to Hangman when he’s on a rampage.

King turns on me as Hangman’s curses fade. “Jesus Christ, asshole. What was that about?”

I climb to my feet and drag my abused body over to a chair, slumping in it. “What the fuck do you think? I’m gonna let him get away with calling my girl a whore?”

Quiet settles over the room, then Coyote clears his throat. “Trigger—” he starts in a patronizing entitled tone, but I cut him off.

“I don’t give a fuck,” I say as I point a finger at Rocky. “You weren’t any better before Jess came along. Didn’t do threesomes maybe, but you spent a lot of time with your dick buried in Diamond’s cunt.”

Rocky rubs the side of his face. “Okay, got it, but it’s you we’re talkin’ about. You gotta admit—”

“Just fuckin’ stop.” I groan feeling the kick Coyote laid on me more than Hangman’s punches. “Evanee is no whore. She’s my girl, and she’s gonna stay that way for the rest of my life.”

King looks sceptical. “She okay with you cheatin’? Or have you told her about that?”

Assholes, all of them. “Have you seen her? I ain’t gonna cheat. You don’t know me, if you think I’d fuck around after I’ve made a commitment. I’ve never had a long-term girlfriend, so how the fuck do you know what I’m gonna do?”

“That’s the point, jackass,” King replies. “You’ve never had a girlfriend, so how do *you* know what you’re gonna do?”

“I know,” I tell him through gritted teeth.

Coyote closes his eyes like he’s contemplating my words. “Hangman’s going to settle, but you’re going to pay a big price for attacking him.” The bugger’s talking about the fines we have to pay when we get into it with our brothers. He fucked up big time and was hit with a ½ million dollar fine, which, given his bank account, is like takin’ a slurp of water from a pool.

“I get fined, he gets fined,” I say petulantly. “He escalated it.” Coyote being the exception, the club fines don’t get above a grand or two so they’re not much of a deterrent.

King takes over. “Enough of this bullshit. What the fuck’s going on?” King’s an original member, on the wrong side of 40 and a cool dude until he’s pissed off. Also, props to him that Haley, his wife, is this sweet little thing who’s half his age.

I draw a breath. “I met her before today, but then lost her. Then when we tried to shake her down for protection, I found her.”

A smirk plays on Rocky’s lips. “In the lost and found bin?”

“Fuck off,” I snap.

“How long have you known this woman?” King asks with scepticism.

“Weeks,” I reply. “Fuckin’ weeks.”

“It explains why the passarounds are so pissed off,” Rocky says, still grinning.

Coyote shakes his head. “I don’t think that’s what King’s asking.”

“It’s ain’t,” King responds. “I wanna know exactly how much time you and the vet have spent together?”

“Ah.” I do the mental arithmetic. One hour in food court, give or take, maybe a ½ hour at her clinic, 20-minute bike ride, 30 minutes in Hangman’s office. I round up. “Three hours.”

Coyote snorts out a laugh. “Three hours! That’s a new record.”

I get defensive. “Bullshit. You guys fell heads-over-dicks the minute you saw your chicks.”

They look at each other and smirk. “Nope.” Rocky says. “Took me a day or two.”

Coyote taps his fingers on the table. “Me too. I was afraid Bryce was going to slit my throat.”

King nods at Coyote. “Think your fear was legit.” He looks at me. “Haley turned my head but it took a while before my heart got involved because she was barely legit at the time. In the end, I couldn’t resist.” He grins and his eyes get that faraway look, like he just got fucked.

“Well, I don’t fuckin’ care. Evanee was it the minute I saw her.” I’m makin’ me sound shallow, which I am, but it’s more than her beauty. It’s her confidence, the bold way she looks at me, and the fuckin’ sway of her hips as she walks. I start to get a boner just thinkin’ about it. “You guys gotta have seen her when we came in.”

Coyote shakes his head. “Was in my tech room making a bomb.”

That gets our attention. “Who’re we blowin’ up?” King asks.

Coyote grins. “Hangman hasn’t said yet. I’m planning ahead.”

Rocky sighs. “Bomb aside, I was upstairs with Jess.”

“Lucky you,” King says. “Haley and I got into it over me forgetting to meet her for lunch, so I wasn’t paying attention.” He crosses his arms and frowns.



I'm incredulous. "You walked by Evanee, but didn't see her?"

King shakes his head. "I was in misery. Still am. Haley's sweet but possessed. Don't ever piss her off."

I shoot to my feet. "C'mon. She's at the bar but be discreet. She doesn't need to know she's my show and tell."

I tread softly down the hall, the other guys trailing after me so quiet I think they're tip-toing. We peek around the corner, Rocky crouching low while Coyote leans over him. King is next and then me.

Evanee's sitting at the bar, a bottle of scotch next to her. Her back's turned and she's watching something goin' on across the room. In profile, she's breathtaking. Her glorious hair curls down her straight back, her breasts are straining against her blouse, her long, perfect legs are crossed, her skirt riding up her thighs. She's cradling a glass in her hand then raises it and takes a small swallow, her pink tongue darting out and licking her lips. One of the guys sucks in his breath and as she starts to turn her head, we all duck back.

"Fuck," Coyote swears softly. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

I draw my eyebrows together. "What?"

King jerks his head towards church, and we shuffle back, me last. I close and lock the door again in case Joker hasn't got Hangman under control yet.

Rocky slumps in his seat, rubbing at his face. "She's pretty, I'll admit."

I'm outraged. "Pretty? That's all you fucking got? That woman out there," I point my finger in case they don't get who I'm talking about, "is the best-looking fucking woman in the world."

Rocky sighs. "Trig, all you're seein' is her legs and tits."

Blood rushes to my face and I curl my fists.

Coyote tries to talk me down. "You said yourself, that you've known her for three hours." He stops, thinks about it.

“And I’ve never met anyone shallower than you.”

Brutal fuck. “Well, I’m not no more. She’s more than her looks. Trust me. I’m gonna marry her and we’re gonna have gorgeous babies.”

King raises his eyebrows. “Okay. Gotta concede you’ve never got this fucked up over a bird before.”

“What year were you born?” Rocky sneers at King.

“I’m trying somethin’ new,” King defends. “With the new women coming into the club and you two takin’ exception to us calling them cunts and bitches, we gotta freshen up our language.”

“Christ,” Coyote interjects with exasperation. “You guys have the attention spans of snails. Can we focus.”

We all glare at Coyote, but he’s right. Evanee, in all her perfect glory, is distracting. “Here’s the thing,” I say. “The reason Hangman called the meeting is because Evanee needs investors in her business and turns out your girls have bought in.”

Rocky chokes. “What the fuck?”

“What?” King says at the same time. “Haley put money into the business?”

“A vet clinic? That’s weird.” Coyote says as he knits his eyebrows. “It is a vet clinic, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” I nod.

“How’s she running without the money?”

Rocky sneers at Coyote. “That’s not the question we should be askin’, you fuck. Who gives a shit why she doesn’t have the cash. How the fuck does she know Jess?”

“And Haley?”

“And Bryce?”

I hesitate, then say to Coyote, “Your sisters took their mutt in for a checkup. Apparently, they’ve also invested 5 percent each.”

Coyote rubs at his face. “Fifteen percent. I wonder where they got the money?”

King states what we’re all thinking. “How many fucking degrees do you have, you idiot? You’re tapping a fuckin’ thief.”

I try to corral the conversation. “Evanee’s assistant also has a piece, and Evanee wants the club to contribute the rest.”

“Explains why Hangman’s so pissed.”

Well, it’s more likely the punch I laid on him, but I don’t state the obvious. “I can’t understand why it’s an issue—” I start, but then the doorframe splinters as the door slams open against the wall.

Hangman stalks into the room, his face red and his fists curled.

Joker follows him. “You’re gonna fucking pay for a new door!” he says to me.

“I didn’t fuckin’ break the door!” I snarl as I cross my arms and casually slide down in my chair. Yeah, it’s posturing, but I’m not gonna quiver like a schoolgirl in the bully’s presence.

“We talked,” Joker says. He’s Robin to Hangman’s Batman, but not the ass-kissing kind. “The club’ll take it to a vote. If we get majority agreement, we’ll invest the money.”

“It has nothin’ to do with you fuckin’ her,” Hangman says stabbing his finger at me. “It’s business. You got that, you motherfucker? We don’t get the votes, you keep your fuckin’ nose out of it?”

“Got it,” I lie, already planning my campaign.

“Get out,” Hangman snarls at all of us. “I got some thinkin’ to do.”

Joker stops me outside the door. “You’re a fuckin’ idiot. That posh piece of tail isn’t worth getting into it with Hangman.”

I stare at him coolly. “Fuck off, asshole.”

As parting shots go, I've done better, but I've got a posh piece of tail waiting for me. Evanee isn't where I left her, but I find her quickly. She's sitting on the couch holding court with Hangman's boys, Max and Ash, Eight's kid, Oscar, and Sean, the thief's son. Can't hear what she's sayin' but she's got them hanging on every word, the little fucks.

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# CHAPTER ELEVEN

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## Evanee



I do as Trigger asks and hang out at the bar watching a couple of bikers watch me as they play pool. One of them is tatted from head to toe in the most amazing ink I've ever seen. Clearly, he's an artist because he has the taste of one. The other is keeping up an ongoing monologue. Older, a little portly, and not nearly as good at pool as the tatted one. Mind you, as skill goes, neither are impressing me, but then they are distracted.

I swing the barstool around propping my elbows behind me on the bar. The tatted one misses his shot as I straighten my back and cross my legs. I smirk inside. I'm not flirting or teasing. I'm bored and this is my amusement.

After a few minutes of watching them, yelling breaks out down the hall. I see a bearded man fly down the stairs then disappear. A moment later, he's dragging Hangman down the hall in a bear hug.

"Get the fuck off you me, you motherfucker!" Hangman yells as he struggles.

"When you fuckin' settle down," the man doing the dragging snarls.

I'm trying to keep my jaw from dropping at the sheer strength of the man keeping Hangman under control. He could wrestle bulls and win.

I look over at the two who are playing pool. They haven't even acknowledged the commotion, although the talkative one

misses the four-ball to the left corner. He catches my eyes, smiles and winks, then shrugs his shoulders.

I'm not in the mood to engage so I twist out of my chair and stroll behind the bar, perusing the alcohol on display. There's an Aberfeldy single malt bottle of scotch and given that all I've been able to afford lately is rotgut, I get excited. I grab it and one of the glasses stacked behind the bar, then return to my bar stool.

The scotch is heaven as it slides down my throat. I finish the shot and pour another, this time nursing it. A sound behind me catches my attention, but when I look over my shoulder, no one's there.

I sigh as I finish my second shot of scotch and contemplate a third, but then things get interesting as three young boys enter the clubhouse, all carrying back packs and deep in conversation.

"Charlie needs a lesson," a mini-Hangman exclaims. "You gotta do something, man."

"Don't know what to do. I get into a fist fight, Dad'll have my ass."

They're 11, maybe 12 years old. The third boy says nothing as he follows them in, but his eyes are darting, looking around, checking corners. When they land on me, he stops in his tracks. I brighten up his life with a smile.

"Guys," he says. His friends are oblivious, so deep in conversation with each other. He elbows the Hangman look-alike, then when he has the kid's attention, lifts his chin my way.

The kid looks up, his jaw drops and words fail him for the first time since he walked into the room. His friend follows his line of sight to me. I don't get the typical reaction I get from men. Instead, he scowls, turns his back, and dumps his pack onto a corner of the couch.

I love a challenge, but before I stand, a fourth boy walks in, fair, lean, maybe 16. He sees me right away, looks startled,

glances around, then leans toward the Hangman kid and whispers in his ear. The kid shrugs his shoulders.

It's time to get to know the breakfast club.

I slide off the barstool and walk towards them, keeping my sashaying to a minimum. They're kids after all, even if they are boys.

"Hi," I say as I hold out my hand to the quiet one first. "I'm Evanee."

He hesitates, then takes my hand lightly, gives it quick shake and drops it like it's on fire. He says nothing, so I prompt him. "And you are?"

"Sean," he mumbles.

"I'm Max," the Hangman clone chirps as he offers his hand.

"Ah," I say as he gives me a firm handshake. "Guess the prez is your dad."

He preens. "Yeah. He runs the show."

"Yes, he does." No one needs to be told that Hangman's in charge and while it's clear Max is proud of his father, the boy comes across as obnoxious.

The teenager nudges Max out of the way and takes my hand, his eyes glued to my face in a forced way that makes me respect him. "I'm Ash."

"Hi Ash," I say with a winning smile.

"I'm Hangman's son too," he says shyly.

"I could tell," I lie, because I can see the similarities now that I know who he belongs to, but he's fine-boned and less stocky than Max. Of course, that could be a growth spurt.

I turn to the cranky boy, who's glaring at all of us. "And you are?"

"That's Oscar," Max answers as he plops down on the couch. "Ignore him. He's having a bad day."

"It's none of her business," Oscar mutters.



“I’m kind of having a bad day too,” I say as I sit primly next to him but making sure there’s a cushion of space between us.

Oscar rolls his eyes, but the rest of the boys turn to me. Clearly, Max is the bold one. “Who do you belong to?”

I wonder if boys are born sexist or if it’s acquired. To be fair, Hell’s Jury reeks of misogyny. “Mmhh,” I say. “Lullaby, Cujo, Kona, Blackie, Singalong, and my new guy, Pirate Jack.”

“What?” Oscar says as his upper lips curls.

“It’s my contention that one doesn’t own pets, they own you. Those are my animals.”

Ash grins at me. “I think Max was asking who you’re with, because you’re clearly not a passaround.”

Passaround? “And who are these passarounds?”

Max shrugs dismissively. “Just girls.”

I lean forward towards Max. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I’m a girl.”

“We noticed,” Sean is moved to say, then clams up again.

I decide to quit messing with them. “I’m here with Trigger.”

Oscar creases his forehead in confusion. “He your brother?”

I’m pretty sure I mirror his expression. “Why? Do I look like him?”

“Hell, no,” Max says. “But if you’re not a passaround, why are you with Trigger?”

Why? What an odd question. “I’m here on business.”

Sean looks like a light has clicked on. “I think she’s a stripper,” he says softly to Max.

Max eyes me and nods. “That makes sense.”

I’m startled. First passarounds, then a stripper. I’m starting to realize how little I know about Trigger. “I’m not a stripper.”

Fortunately, I'm rescued by Jess, who enters holding hands with a darling girl who has the same grey eyes as Max and Hangman.

"Evanee!" Jess exclaims. "What brings you here?" We hug like we're long-lost friends.

"You know her?" Oscar says to Jess.

"Of course, I do. Evanee's the new vet in town."

Eyes swing towards me again. "You're a vet?" It's the young girl, her tone full of skepticism.

I sigh. Veterinarians are so stereotyped. "I am. And who might you be?"

She steps slightly behind Jess, but before she can answer, Max says, "She's Brielle."

"I see. And you're her big brother."

"Half-brother," Max corrects. "We have different moms."

Trigger walks in at that moment and I'm happy to see him. Adults I can handle, but children in large quantities unsettle me. As a vet, I've had direct conversations with them, one or two at a time, but I have little skill in socializing with them.

"Hello," I say with a smile that fades when I see blood on his beard and T-shirt. However, I don't ask or comment. I'm not the swooning type and I'm not going to bring attention to it unless he does.

Jess, however, has no such compunction as she gives him a concerned pat down. "What happened to you?" For a minute I think I'm going to have to punch her for touching my man, but Trigger disentangles himself from her.

His eyes are flat as he replies. "Ran into a brick wall."

Max smirks. "I bet my dad hit him."

First of all, I am not aggressive in the conventional sense, but when something or someone I care about is attacked, I get agitated. Usually, that only extends to my furry and feathered darlings, but it turns out no one shits on my man either.

“You’re a disrespectful little jerk, aren’t you?” I say to him in the same tone of voice he uses on others.

“Evanee!” Jess exclaims. “He’s a kid.” She has mad protective skills, which is something to admire, but not in this situation.

“He’s old enough to know better,” I murmur to her, but my eyes, as flat as Trigger’s, are pinned on him.

“Evanee,” Trigger says in a low voice, but doesn’t otherwise intervene.

Max opens his mouth to retort, but I stall him. “You’ve earned nothing but bragging rights because of your relationship to your father. You think it makes you powerful, but it doesn’t. Respect is what gives you power.”

He shoots to his feet. “I have respect!”

“So far, all I’ve seen is an entitled bully with a big mouth.”

Oscar snorts and I move my attention to him. “You’re no better, pretending you don’t give a fuck about anyone or anything.”

“Holy,” Brielle says breathlessly.

“Stop swearing in front of the kids!” Jess exclaims as she glares at me.

Trigger wraps his big meaty hand around my upper arm, making me shiver. “Let’s go.”

I smile up at him. “I’m not quite done.”

“You’re done,” a deep voice says from behind me. I turn towards him and see that the voice matches the man. Tall, hard, dark hair, eyes, clean shaven but tatted. There’s no denying he’s Oscar’s dad.

I give him my best fuck-off smile. “I’m Evanee,” I tell him. “It’s important for you to know that strangers don’t tell me what I can and cannot do.”

“Control her,” Eight snaps at Trigger.

I give him a throaty laugh as I turn back to Max. “Power is something to use not abuse. Your father might be the king of the world, but that doesn’t give you the right to ride on his coattails. You want respect, be your own man and stop hiding behind who your dad is.”

“What the fuck’s going on?” Hangman snarls as he enters the room. “Why’re you talking to my kid?”

I see the bruises on his face and feel thrilled that the fight with Trigger wasn’t one-sided. “Because he pissed me off and I’m not really the strong silent type.”

“Get her out of here,” Hangman snaps at Trigger like I don’t exist.

“You’re done, baby,” Trigger growls as he pulls me away.

I let him, because I don’t want to undermine him in front of his colleagues and also my feet are hurting from my goddamned shoes, and I don’t really care about the little bastard unless his bullshit is aimed my way.

“See you all soon,” I say in my usual sultry tone as Trigger practically drags me down the hall.

Outside, the sun temporarily blinds me, but my man seems not to notice as he hauls me over to his bike and gives me his helmet. “Put it on.”

Tension rolls off him, aimed at me, but also not really. His shoulders are bunched as I use them to climb on the bike, but they relax after a mile or two of riding. We’re not headed into Sagebrush, and for a single moment, I worry about who the man I’m with is. After all, I barely know him. I quickly dismiss my feeling of vulnerability. The hours we’ve spent together were the best in my life. This man was meant for me.

He drives aimlessly for twenty-some minutes, then pulls off the road to a small picnic area. There’s a family there. Mom, dad, two kids, and a Shih tzu all look up. Dad and mom are wary, the kids are curious, and the dog is wagging his tail. Shih tzu’s are such darlings.

Trigger parks the bike a distance from them and helps me off. We stare at each other as I remove my helmet and wait for

him to say something. The next moment will determine our future.

He seems to know because he says, “You’re good with kids. We gotta get ourselves one.”

I love you, I think, but don’t say. “Thank you.” I’m not particularly proud of what I did, because while I won’t hesitate to humiliate someone who deserves it, I prefer to do so privately. I decide I’ve given the kid enough airtime, so I lean into Trigger and kiss him gently so as not to aggravate his split lip.

He pulls me closer, tangling his fingers through my hair and kisses me harder. No tongue though. “Think it might be too soon to swap blood,” he justifies in a low voice. “Maybe tomorrow.”

“I can wait. In fact, I think we should wait.”

His face falls. “Wait to fuck?”

He’s got such a way with words. “Could we at least have a date? Dinner out?”

“Why?” he replies. He looks suspicious.

“So we can get to know each other a little bit.” I smile slyly. “I promise, I’ll invite you in for coffee after.”

The suspicion gives way to confusion. “Wasn’t what I was thinkin’ we’d do.”

Our worlds are so different. “Coffee is not coffee. It’s code for sex.”

His face clears. “So why not say fucking?”

I think about it. “I honestly don’t know.” I run my hand over his chest as I consider his lip. “Waiting gives you time to heal because kissing like this is good, but I do like tongue during intimacy.”

He runs a hand down his mouth as he considers me. “Makes sense, I guess.” He stops. “You’re not blowing me off, are you?”

I have to admit I'm a little outraged. "That first kiss back in my clinic? Did that feel like I was blowing you off?"

He grins. "Best kiss I ever had."

"Me too." I brush his lips again. "Best everything."

He sits on the bench of the picnic table we're parked next to and pats the seat.

It's dusty and the paint is peeling. "If you don't mind," I tell him as I wrap my arm around his neck and sit in his lap.

He groans pulling me tight against him. "Don't fuck with me, sweetheart." The evidence of his lust is apparent under my ass.

"I wouldn't," I tell him slyly as I wiggle my ass.

"Better not," he murmurs as he nibbles my neck.

I brush my hand down his cheek. "What happened?"

He sighs. "Just another day in the Jury circus. Nothing that matters."

I don't press him. If he doesn't want to talk about it, that's his choice. "Can you at least tell me what was decided regarding the investment?" I have to admit I'm anxious over the outcome.

"The prez is gonna to take it to church. Majority vote. You get it, you got the club's backing."

That makes me very happy and if there weren't a family across the little picnic area, I might have waved my one-date rule and blew my man right where he's sitting.

He helps me to my feet and laces his fingers through mine as we walk back to the bike. His hands are big, calloused, and strong. I shiver at the thought of them on my soft skin as he ravages me.

He seems to be having similar thoughts. "I better take you home before I turn you over this bike and fuck you senseless."

I smile at him, envisioning the scene. "I suppose you should but hold onto that idea for later."

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

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# Trigger



I haven't seen Evanee for three days and I spend more time nutting off than anything else. I'm right in the middle of an image of my girl on her knees in front of me, naked of course, sucking my dick, when Rocky's asshole voice bursts my bubble.

"Hey Trig," he says from inside my room. "Are you here?"

"Yeah. Bathroom."

"Shitting?"

"Jacking."

I hear his chuckle. "Who're you thinking about?"

"Fuck off," I say as I hit the jackpot with a grunt. I wash the jizz off my hands, pull my jeans up over my ass, then come out of the bathroom.

I live at the clubhouse because there's never been a reason not to. Stuff is a thing other people have. Me, I need my cut, gun, knife, bike, and bed. Passarounds wash my clothes and keep my room neat.

I look around and realize they're still doing it even if I've stopped fucking them. "You think I should tell the girls to stop cleaning up in here?"

Rocky is parked on my mattress, leaning up against the wall, a cold one tucked in his hand. "Jess pretty much ripped me a new one for letting Diamond near my shit, even though it was happening before I met her, so yeah, you probably should lock the passarounds out."



“You owe me a lock, you fuck,” I tell him as I light a cigarette, take a drag and blow the smoke in the air. This used to be his bedroom until he met Jess. He had to bust down the door when she locked him out. We switched rooms because she didn’t want to fuck in the bed he and the passarounds fucked in. Don’t make sense to me, but I fully admit I’m not an expert.

Rocky laughs. “I owe you a shit-kickin’ too, but you ain’t getting neither from me.”

“What am I going to do if Evanee won’t fuck me in this bedroom? Trade with Hash or Red?” They’re the only other brothers who live at the clubhouse full time.

“Why not fuck at her place?”

I think about it as I flick the ash of my cigarette into an empty beer bottle. “Not sure she has a place. I think she’s squattin’ at her clinic.”

Rocky sits upright. “Christ. Can you imagine the things you could do in that clinic.”

“I’m not banging a sheep, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“You’re a fucking idiot.”

I laugh because I don’t take offence to shit like that. I *am* a fucking idiot at times. “You didn’t come here to watch me jack off, did you? What do you want?”

“The snitch is back in town. Fender saw him. Time to shake him down.”

I’m pissed that the fuckin’ weasel is messing with my social life. “Evanee and me got plans tonight.”

Rocky raises his eyebrows. “She’s making you posh like Coyote. Fucking is fucking. Just say it.”

“It isn’t fucking,” I tell him as I take another drag on the cigarette then drop the rest into the bottle. “It’s a date.”

Rocky throws his head back and laughs. “Jesus Christ, she’s already got you twisted around her little finger.”

“Like Jess doesn’t own you.” As comebacks go, it sucks, but I don’t have the patience to be clever. I’ve waited three days for this date with Evanee. Three fucking agonizing days.

He shrugs like he’s cool with Jess leading him around by his dick. “Whatever. We got a date with Figaro tonight, so you’re gonna have to cancel the one you got with Evanee.”

“Can’t it wait until tomorrow?” I’m fully aware I sound like a whiny bitch.

“Nope. Hangman says now and he’s been pissy ever since the club voted to invest in your bird’s business. He doesn’t like her.”

“He doesn’t like anyone,” I reply with a sneer. “And what the fuck is with this ‘bird’ business?”

Rocky laughs. He’s too fucking mellow. “Jess likes it and that’s good enough for me.”

I curl my lip. “I don’t even know who you are anymore. All that tail’s making you lose your edge.”

Even that doesn’t get a rise out of him. “If it was just fucking, I’d have lost my edge a long time ago. It’s love, brother. Jess is perfect for me.”

I think of Evanee. She’s perfect for me, but there’s this sense of insecurity that she’s gonna realize that the only things I’m good at are fucking and violence. My brothers are right. I don’t have a whole lot of depth. “This conversation ain’t helping my problem. I haven’t seen her for three days, man! Three fucking days. I can’t wait any longer.”

“Bring her along,” Rocky says with a wide grin. “It’ll be fun.”

I actually think about it for a minute, that’s how much of an idiot I am. “No. She ain’t hanging around you fucks.” Yeah, that’s me. I don’t worry that I might piss her off by takin’ her with me on a job. Nope, I don’t want her in my brothers’ heads as they jerk off.

“You really serious about this chick?”

“Yeah man.” I don’t do feels conversations, but I decide to make an exception with Rocky because he has more relationship experience than I do. He and Jess have been hooked up for a few months and there’s a whole lot of heat even when they’re not fucking. Jess ain’t one to take shit from anyone or shy about voicin’ her opinion. Like the laundry thing. That’s good advice. “I think she’s it.”

I know she’s it, but I don’t want to deal with Rocky’s skepticism.

Rocky nods. “Gonna be weird, us both having girls. We might have to have barbeques.”

I look at my room in dismay. “At your place.”

He grins. “You’ll have to move somewhere else. Get a love nest for the bird.”

“I didn’t realize it would be so complicated.”

“Yeah. It kind of is, but we’ll barbecue at my place. Drink beer. Do some kayaking.”

“Kayaking? I didn’t think you could swim.”

“Can’t.” Rocky swallows the last of his beer and sets the empty on the bedside table. “Jess likes it and she makes me wear a life jacket.”

“This is fucked,” I say as I run my hand through my tangled hair, then I conjure Evanee in my head and realize he doesn’t know the half of it. “I don’t have to worry about that shit with Evanee.”

“She might surprise you.”

I think of Evanee in a kayak with her stilettos on, then imagine her naked in a kayak with her stilettos on and I get a boner. “Hope so.” I adjust myself as I glance out the window. It’s past noon. “If Hangman wants us to talk to Figaro, we better get on it. I’m pickin’ Evanee up at seven and I wanna be on time.”

Rocky grins. “I’m gonna enjoy watching you getting led around by your dick for a change, but we’re not gonna find Figaro this early in the day.”

I start pacing, trying to think of a solution to this mess. “You and Red could handle it without me.”

Rocky shakes his head like I’ve got shit for brains. “Hangman ain’t too happy with you right now, so my advice is not to piss him off. You know he’ll jump you.”

“Evanee’s worth it,” I declare.

“You’re nasty enough already. You want Evanee to see you full-blown ugly?”

“This is shit!” I yell. “He’s fuckin’ doing this on purpose.”

Rocky grins as he heads for the door. “Figure it out asshole. I say we head out at eleven.”

When I call Evanee to tell her I’m gonna be tied up tonight, there’s no pissiness in her voice when she asks, “Why?”

I don’t want to start our relationship with a lie, so I tell her the truth.

There’s a momentary lapse and then she says sweetly, “I totally understand, sexy. If I had a pet emergency, I’d have to do the same.”

I’ve hit the fuckin’ jackpot with her. Too soon to say I love you, so instead I say, “You’re fuckin’ perfect.”

“Why not go on the date as planned? You know, just dinner, then after you’ve finished your meeting with your snitch, you can come over for coffee.”

That gets my curiosity goin’. “Where’s home exactly?”

There’s a pause. “Maybe I should come over to your place.”

Fuck. “Evanee, I don’t have a place. I stay at the clubhouse.” I think of other options. There’s a bedroom in a back room at Hook’s, but I’m not sure the strip club is a good idea for a first date.

Dick’s Picks has possibilities because it’s as five-star as it gets. Still, it is a brothel, and I don’t know Evanee well enough to know how she’s gonna take it. Shawshank, the nearby hotel,

won't have a free room – Saturday nights are usually booked up.

“This is a problem.” She’s clearly thinkin’ so I let her. “How about over dinner, we can discuss where we can go for coffee.”

“You’re better than a cold beer on a hot Sunday.” I wince inwardly. My kind of charm might work on the passerby, but with Evanee, I’m gonna need some new material.

She doesn’t seem to take offence. “And you’re like a hot fudge Sundae after a hard workout.”

I don’t exactly get what she means, but it don’t make me less happy when I hang up the phone.

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# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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## Evanee



When I was a teenager, I'd agonize over a first date. What to wear, how to do my hair and what color to paint my nails. I'd rehearse how I was going to say hello, what I would talk about. I'd even kiss my pillow in hopes that we'd make out.

I quickly grew out of those insecurities, mostly because I realized that boys didn't really indulge in that kind of preparation, but also because I decided that they were the lucky ones for dating me and they could take me or leave me.

Most of them chose the former.

But with Trigger, those familiar teenage feelings come back. Both of my previous meetings with tall, tanned, and sexy were serendipitous and what I was wearing was what he was seeing. For our first date, I want to be breathtaking.

"How do I look?" I ask Wendy as I stand in front of her in Saint Laurent black glazed-leather boots and an Ena Pelly matching leather jacket. The skirt I was wearing last time Trigger and I met was a little too tight for riding on the back of a bike, so the flare from the pleated denim skirt I'm wearing tonight will have enough give to straddle the bike seat. The problem is that it's so tight across my backside that I have to wear a seamless thong. I'm not really a thong kind of girl, but this is an emergency. Hopefully, Trigger will appreciate my compromise.

"Great, hon, like always," she rasps.

The roar of a bike tells me my date has arrived right on time. I'm relieved that he brought his Harley, because if he showed up in a vehicle, then the skirt would be a fail.

"Hey," I say as he struts through the door of the clinic looking like the sexy confident man he is. My butterflies can't help but respond to his fineness.

"Hey," he echoes. He marches up to me, grabs me by the hips and yanks me so I'm flush to his body, then kisses me like we haven't seen each other in a year. "You're a fuckin' sight for sore eyes." He stops, frowns, then says, "I mean you're beautiful."

I tuck a strand of his hair behind his ear. "You are too."

Wendy clears her throat and we both turn towards her as she stands.

"Trigger, this is Wendy, my assistant. Wendy, this is Trigger."

Trigger grins at her. "I bet you were a Vegas stripper when you were younger."

A bright smile breaks out on Wendy's face. "How did you know?"

I'm wondering the same thing.

Trigger shrugs. "Beauty like yours don't fade with the years."

I can't tell how sincere he's being, but Wendy is eating it up. "If I were 20 years younger..."

"If I weren't already taken by gorgeous here, you'd be next on my list."

My cranky receptionist giggles like a high school girl. "Oh, go on." She looks at me. "He's a keeper, hon. Now you two get out of here, before I make a fool of myself."

Trigger holds my hand as we walk out the door, then gives me another passionate kiss before he helps me onto his bike. "You braided your hair," he comments. He gives it a little tug and says, "It's a fuckin' turn on."



“You’re looking mighty fine yourself,” I tell him as he straddles the bike in front of me. He smells like tanned leather, no scent of cigarette smoke, and his jeans are faded, but clean. He’s wearing a Henly under his vest and his hair is pulled back into a ponytail though a few strands have escaped. He’s the hottest man I’ve ever dated.

“We’re going to the Mad Greek’s,” he says, then starts his bike. He whips out of the parking lot full throttle, and I hug myself against him. I’m exhilarated by the wind in my hair, his hard muscles against my chest. I see my future unfold before me and it’s better than I ever imagined.

The restaurant is one I’ve never been to before and almost too classy for our attire, but the host doesn’t blink an eye when he sees us. In fact, the guy in the suit and tie greets my soon-to-be lover like he’s a long-lost friend. “Good to see you, my man,” he says with a light accent. “Been a while.”

“You too, Christos.” Trigger glances around. “Looks like business is hopping.”

“Couldn’t be better.” Christos picks up menus as he looks at me. “Hello.” Appreciation is written on his face, but his voice is respectful and cautious. He side-eyes Trigger who’s watching him like he’ll kick his ass if he tries to flirt with me.

“Evanee, Christos is an old friend.”

“Hello,” I say and offer my hand.

He takes it, lingering a fraction too long. Trigger yanks me out of the grip as he scowls at the owner. “I’ll eat your fuckin’ hand if you don’t watch yourself.”

Wow. Imagine what he does to his enemies.

Christo’s expression remains neutral. “Would you like your usual table?”

“Yeah,” Trigger replies as I feel a flare of something... wait... could it be jealousy?

“Sounds like you come here a lot,” I murmur, trying to keep the peevishness out of my voice as we sit across from each other at a table for four.

“Yeah,” he replies. He kisses my knuckles, then turns my hand palm up and licks it.

I shiver, deciding I don't care how many girls he's brought here.

“Thought this was a good place for someone as fine of you. Wasn't sure because I haven't had a real date in years.”

Again, with the wow. “So then who do you bring here?”

His eyes roam the room as he thinks. “Rocky and me eat here sometimes, but not since Jess. Red a couple of times. Once I brought Hash, but the fucker's an animal.” He stops, thinks about it. “My dad.”

That surprises me. “You have a dad?”

He laughs like I've said something funny. “You must've missed baby-makin' 101. Everyone has a dad, darlin'.”

I laugh too. “You're right.”

I pop open the menu. “What's good?” I'm highly conscious that our time together is limited and I'm hoping for some heavy petting before our date is interrupted.

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# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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# Trigger



We've barely started our meal when my night goes to shit.

I'm watchin' Evanee as she tucks into her Greek salad. I barely remember the first time I saw her chow down in the food court, mostly because I was lookin' at her tits, but the way she eats is hard-on inducing. She's holdin' her fork delicately as she half-fills it – just the front part of it – then slowly slides it off with her lips, but that's only half the show. I don't know if she knows it, but just before she swallows, she closes her eyes for a second, appreciation on her face. I wanna see her do that when I eat her out. Don't know how it's gonna work. Maybe mirrors.

Me, I'm eating a rare steak to make sure she understands I don't knock back power bowls as a rule. The beer's cold, the conversations golden, and my woman is a vision. Life is fucking good.

Then my phone rings. I look at the caller ID. Its Amara, the madam at my brothel.

Amara's fantastic. Never calls unless something's serious. "Shit," I tell Evanee as I jerk to my feet. "I gotta take this."

She gives me an understanding smile. "You go ahead, but don't be long or I'll eat your steak."

I don't know why her eating my steak is a turn on, but my dick jerks anyway.

I wander towards the kitchen as I answer the phone. "Better be good, Amara," I growl at her. That's me. I come across as a prick, but Amara knows I'm not.

“It’s good. One of the new john’s took a few swipes at Kit, then tried to drag her out the back door.”

A chill invades my spine. Kit’s a beautiful petite Japanese woman, so delicate, one swipe would hurt her. “How bad?”

“Gonna take her out of commission for a while. Bruises, fingermarks where he covered her mouth, all scraped up because she was fighting him while he was dragging her down the hall. He fucked her hard too.”

“Who’s the cocksucker?” My girls at the brothel are golden and they know it. We treat them like royalty, keep them clean and healthy. The johns wear condoms and the regulars fucking know what they can and cannot do. Kit does the usual, but nothing kinky. That’s reserved for a few of the other girls.

“A new guy. His ID seemed legit. He asked for Kit specifically, so we assumed he was told about her through one of our regulars.”

“Probably was.” I’m steaming. Now I have two pricks to deal with; the asshole who fucked up Kit, and the asshole who recommended him. “Did he take off?”

“No. Cheetah heard the commotion and broke into the room. She put the guy in a choke hold until I got there.” Cheetah’s one of the best we have, strong like an ox, but some of the guys are into that.

“Where’s he at then?”

“A couple of johns helped us wrestle him into the cooler. It’s airless so we can’t keep him in there indefinitely.”

Let the sonofabitch suffocate, I think, but know I can’t let that happen. Some of our clients are high profile, so we don’t know the connections this guy has, and until we do, he gets to walk the planet. Don’t mean he won’t get a shit-kicking.

“Coming right now,” I say as a picture of Evanee flashes through my mind. Not sure she’s gonna understand this aspect of my work.

When I get back to our table, she’s wiping the sides of her lips with her napkin. My steak’s half eaten, and she throws this

mischievous grin my way. Both me and my dick groan.

“Is everything all right?” she asks.

“It isn’t,” I reply “I gotta go, baby.”

She frowns as she stands. “Where are we going?”

I suck in a breath as I think of her and me at the brothel in one of the rooms. “I’m gonna drop you back home. It’s no place for a lady.”

She runs a finger down the centre of my chest, stopping at the front of my jeans and giving them a little tug. “Why don’t you let me decide where I should or shouldn’t be.”

I hesitate, having neither the time nor desire to get into it here, but if we’re gonna have a future, she’s gotta learn where my line is.

I glance at my watch. Rocky and Red are expectin’ me in another two hours so there isn’t much time to dick around with an argument.

“A john at the brothel beat the shit out of one of my girls and I gotta go explain to him the fuckin’ facts of life.” My voice is aggressive, pissed at him and not happy with Evanee for pushin’ me.

Her gorgeous eyes light up. “I’ve never been to a brothel before.”

“And you ain’t fuckin’ comin’ in,” I growl. “You come with me, but you wait outside until I’m done.”

“That’s fair,” she says with a sly smile.

I should’ve known better than to think she was gonna listen to me. When we get there, she climbs off the bike, removes her helmet and heads towards the building.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

She stops and waits for me to catch up. “As your date and your girl, I understand that you wouldn’t want me to see the seedy side of your life, but as an independent woman interested in the workings of this place of business, I am allowed to enter of my own free will.”

“It’s a whore house for men,” I exclaim, my patience running out.

“Really?” she says drily. “So you don’t entertain women?”

Through my pissiness, I get an image of her and one of the girls in bed with me, and my dick turns to steel. Still, I gotta draw the line. “I’m not fuckin’ sharing you. Man or woman. And if you think that’s negotiable, I’ll show you just how much it isn’t.”

She cups the side of my face. “I’m just interested in looking at the menu. You’re the only one for me.” She stops as she flicks her eyes past my shoulder, then back to mine. “I don’t share either, Trigger. Man or woman, so understand that when we wake up in the morning, the only two people in the bed will be us.”

“I can live with that,” I tell her, shelving my thoughts of a three-way. It wouldn’t work anyway. I don’t think my dick would perform for anyone but Evanee.

Short of tying her to my bike, I have no choice but to let her through the doors. I nod at the bouncers – two thugs with more brawn than brain. Their eyes follow Evanee as she walks past them.

“She’s a vet,” I growl, fully aware of how lame that sounds. “So fucking keep your eyes off her or I’ll cut them out.”

They nod gravely, but don’t take me seriously. I can’t cut the eyes out of every fucking guy that looks at Evanee. I see her ass as the door closes behind her and know what they’re thinking. *It’s worth the risk.*

Inside, it’s as serene as a high-class spa. That’s why Amara’s the best there is. It’s Saturday, our busiest night of the week and she’s not about to shut things down because a john got out of hand. It’s business as usual except Kit’s out of commission and the johns who booked her will have to take a different girl or go home and fuck their wives.

“Hey,” I say as I lean on the counter.

Amara's a knock-out in her late 30s. Tall, slim, and leggy. Still active, though she only takes a couple of long-time johns who always ask for her. She frowns at me as her eyes stray to Evanee, who's lookin' around like it's her first time at Disneyland. "She's gorgeous but she won't do as a replacement for Kit."

I narrow my eyes at the implication. "Evanee's my girl, not a hooker."

She narrows her eyes back. "You brought your girl to the brothel? Jesus, Trigger, that's over the top even for you."

"Let's not go there, Amara," I say feeling defensive, but she's not done.

"Since when do you have a girl, anyway?" She flicks her eyes to Evanee. "Yeah, I can see the allure, but is she enough to keep your dick in your pants around other women?" She pauses, then almost to herself, says, "Or maybe she doesn't care, or likes to watch." Her eyes light up. "Or participate."

"Enough," I tell her as I lightly swat the counter. "She's none of that. We were on a date and got interrupted by your fuckin' phone call."

Amara laughs. "You're kidding me. A date? You? Hell has frozen over."

"Yeah, I get that a lot," I tell her as we watch Evanee seat herself on the chaise, edging her curvy body between Cheetah and Valentine and elegantly crossing her legs. The three are talking like they're long-lost friends. I'm not sure how I feel about her ease with people. Seems she doesn't differentiate and I kind of like that, considering she comes from money.

"Where're the johns who helped Kit out?"

"Back with their girls," Amara says. "I've comped them for the night and the next time too."

I nod my approval. "Good girl. Appreciate ya."

She smiles at my praise. It matters to the girls and I like to treat them well. They get well-paid, looked after, and have a good retirement package when they age out. Still, I don't



tolerate bullshit, so they're carefully vetted and those that get past the interview but bring poison to the brothel get kicked out on their asses pretty fuckin' fast. I don't fuck any of them despite what my brothers might think. It's a rule of mine. Fucking the help leads to a whole lot of headache.

I saunter over to Evanee and all three girls look up at me with delighted smiles on their faces. "You have good taste in women," Cheetah tells me.

"Don't I know it. Thanks for intervening, darlin'. You're golden."

I nod at Valentine, so she doesn't feel left out. "Okay if I leave my girl in your hands for a while?"

Cheetah stands and tugs her short skirt down over her long shapely legs. "I've got a client in a few and have to freshen up."

"I'll stay," Valentine says as she shyly glances at Evanee. "I'm in-between."

I pull Evanee to her feet and lay a hard kiss on her lips as I grip her ass. "You fuckin' behave," I tell her as me and my boner reluctantly let her go. "Stay here."

"Of course," she agrees, but I fuckin' know that the minute I'm out of her sight, she's gonna go lookin'.

I sigh because I know I won't win this round, but I can't let her think she can walk all over me. "You step outside this lobby and I'm gonna take you over my knee."

Her face lights up. "I'm looking forward to that."

I head off to the kitchen. Harry, a big guy with a perpetual scowl barely looks up from the stove as I pass him. He's the chef, makes up the menus, feeds the girls and johns. No one ever complains including me on the few occasions I've eaten here. Might be because he'd stomp you into the floor if you did, but the food's good too.

I bang open the cooler to see the fuck that beat on Kit slumped on the floor, a bloody towel in his hand. "You missed

a spot,” I snarl as I drag him up by his hair, then punch him in the gut.

He doubles over and grunts, but I gotta give it to him, he rallies quickly. “Hey man,” he mumbles. “I thought she was into that shit.”

Someone broke his mouth, and it wasn’t Cheetah because she wouldn’t risk breaking a nail. In fact, she wouldn’t climb down a rope ladder to escape a burning building if her manicure was at risk. I gotta thank those johns for roughing the prick up. Most of them are soft bastards. “Who told you that?” I slam him against the shelves, making the Smurf-coloured cocksucker shake.

“No one,” he whines. “Just a rumour I heard.”

“Just a rumour you heard,” I sneer as I slam him again. “You don’t start talkin’, I’m gonna shove your balls down your throat.”

He gasps from the pain. “A guy in Reno. Speaks highly of the place.” He stops and raises his eyes to mine.

“Spit out the fuckin’ name.”

“My name? Dean Henderson.”

I box his ears hard enough that he screams as he grabs his head. He’d have fallen if it wasn’t for the grip I now have on his throat. “You don’t wanna fuck around with me. I want names – your fucking real one, the guy who sent you, and what the fuck your angle is.”

He widens his eyes like he’s scared, but I’m starting to think it’s all for show. “Listen man, I tell you, he’ll kill me.” The bastard is lying. It’s clear in his wooden reply, the way he’s darting his eyes.

“You don’t understand the situation you’re in, asshole. Start talkin’ or I’ll kill you. Capeche?”

He stiffens his body, a signal that he’s about to attack. I’ve had enough. I punch him in the side of the head, and he falls like a sack of bricks. “You fuckin’ cunt,” I shout at him as I give him three hard kicks to the ribs then slam a foot down on

his chest. “You interrupted my date with the best-looking woman in the world, beat up sweet little Kit, then tried to run off with her.” I stomp on his fingers. “You don’t wanna talk here, I’ll take you someplace and convince you.”

I head to the door, but stop when he says, “Wait man.”

“You had your chance,” I sneer as I step out of the cooler and slam the door behind me.

Harry looks up. “Want a sandwich?”

My stomach growls, reminding me of the meal I missed and the gorgeous woman waitin’ for me. Unfortunately, Evanee’s gonna have to wait a little longer. “Yeah.”

I call Joker for a pick-up while Harry makes the sandwich. The VP arrives with Reaper while I’m still chowing down on the beef and tomato sub. Neither are wearing their cuts, which doesn’t surprise me. They brought a van to haul the trash and none of us is disrespectful enough to wear our colours in a cage.

“Hey,” I say after I swallow the last bite. “Fuck’s in the cooler. Won’t talk. I figure we lock him up in the Chamber, let him cool his jets for a day. See what he says then.”

Joker nods. “He’s your guy. You call the shots.”

“He deserves a fucking funeral.”

Reaper’s checking out the room. He ain’t ever been here before because he’s not a hooker kind of guy. “We’ll shove him in the van. You can follow on your bike.”

I shake my head. “Can’t come with you. On a date with Evanee.”

Harry laughs under his breath as Reaper turns to me, his eyebrows raised. “You brought her to a whorehouse? Jesus, Trigger.”

“Fucking brothel, you bastard. These girls aren’t whores!” They kind of are, but they’re my whores and no one trashes them. Not even me.

Reaper looks around the kitchen like she's sitting in a corner. "Where is she, then?"

"Sitting in the lobby. Didn't you see her?"

Joker breaks out in unaccustomed laughter. "She's not in the lobby."

I feel the blood drain from my face as I bolt out the door.

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# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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## Evanee



After a few threats about what he'll do if I don't stay in the lobby of the brothel, Trigger heads into the back.

"Where's he going?" I ask Valentine.

She's wearing a Harem princess bedroom costume. The pale blue bralette is trimmed in gold coins and matches the sheer genie pants. A gold lamé head band completes the ensemble. "He's got an asshole john to deal with."

Yes, I knew that. It was not what I asked but I decide it doesn't matter. "How long will that take?"

Valentine shrugs. "Depends on how thorough he wants to be."

I know one-percenter clubs don't plant daisies for a living but realize it'll take a little time to get used to how they deal with trouble. I decide I need a distraction to settle my barely-there anxiety. "Would you take me on a tour? I'd like to see the inner workings."

Valentine looks past me to the gorgeous woman standing behind the half-moon counter that's set up on one side of what could pass for a five-star hotel lobby. The only item of clothing she appears to be wearing is a silk and linen three-button pale mint suit blazer that drops to her thighs. The deep dip of the single-breasted collar shows off her ample and still perky cleavage to its best advantage. "Is it okay, Amara?"

Amara grins brightly and I get the sense that she likes to tease Trigger. That's all she better be doing, that voice inside

me snarls. I don't like it – the jealousy. It's a new emotion that I don't find endearing.

“Sure,” she tells Valentine, then turns her attention to me. “Have fun, but if you get caught, you didn't get my permission.”

I don't tell her that I never ask permission. I simply nod. It's not that I don't like the madam, but I really want her to never talk to Trigger again.

Valentine takes me to her room first. There are intricate patterned cushions strewn across the floor, unlit candles everywhere, bottles of red wine next to bowls of fruit. Vases are scattered on the tables and hardwood, the tall ones holding feathers and palm leaves and the smaller filled with fresh flowers. A round plush mattress on a three-foot pedestal is covered with a silk duvet and varying sized pillows. The canopy of sheer silk hangings matches the ones adorning the walls and other parts of the room. The low lighting and the scent of warm, sweet myrrh are the finishing touches.

In awe, I turn in a circle. The detail is phenomenal.

“What do you think?” Valentine asks in a way that suggests my opinion will make or break her day.

“I love it!” I exclaim as I test the softness of the mattress bed by bouncing my ass on it. It's a bit of a turn-on to think of all the fucking that's been done in here. I drop down, turn on my side and prop my hand under my head. “What's your kink?”

She sits next to me. “Don't really have one, I guess. I'm feminine and there are a lot of guys that are into this kind of role-play. They're the sultan, I'm part of a harem.”

“Hmm. A one-woman harem.”

“Most of the time. They can have a two- or three-woman harem, but it's costly.”

“Rich guys,” I murmur. “Are you ever tempted to run off with one of them?”

Her eyes shadow as she looks past me to a tall vase on the floor. “No. Never. This job pays well enough for me to save money.” She waves her hand around the room. “I stay here so no rent. Don’t have to cook or clean. When I’m tired of it or get too old, I’ll have enough to retire on.”

I can’t imagine living the rest of my life alone. “Why not a man?” She cocks her head and I realize I’ve wandered into territory I have no business being. “Don’t answer that. It’s none of my business.”

“It isn’t,” she agrees, but tells me anyway. “The men I spend time with here are decent enough, but they still pay for sex and some of them are married, so I can’t trust them. The rest, those guys outside these walls, too many of them are pricks and I have no instincts. I always pick the wrong kind.”

I want to help her so badly. “Get a girlfriend to help. Someone with good instincts.”

It’s clear I’ve offended her. “Not all of us need men in our lives to be satisfied.”

I try to see her point of view. I’ve never met a man like Trigger and if I lost him, I wouldn’t replace him. He’s it for me. “I guess you’re right.”

Her eyes take on a lost look. “Amara doesn’t expect more of me and I can’t give it.”

I nod in understanding. This kitten’s had a rough life and Trigger’s taken in a stray. My heart softens. “So it’s the easy going straight guys that drop by then.”

She smiles. “Yeah. There’s a lot of men who like it that way.” She jumps up and offers her hand. “I have another job. Let me show you.”

I let her haul me from the bed, which takes effort on her part. She’s sly and soft and I’m sure I outweigh her by 25 pounds. “Okay!”

She leads me down a hall to a one-way window where a woman and guy are fucking. Holy shit hotness. He’s got her bent over a bench, his hands in her hair, pulling her head back. “Why the window?”



“Well, that’s the kink. He loves being watched.” She flicks on an intercom next to the window. “Holy fuck,” she says in a sultry voice. “Jesus. I’m gonna come just watching.”

This sends him over the edge and my legs tremble as he hits his peak. Sure, I’ve watched porn, but this beats it hands down.

Valentine grins. “We have these little booths where guys just like to watch and so we pair them up with the johns that like to be watched. It works.”

“Where the fuck is she?” Trigger’s aggressive voice invades the hall as he rounds the corner. “I told you to stay put,” he snarls as approaches me.

“I tried, handsome, but the allure was too strong. Are you sure we can’t stay here instead of going into Reno?” I look my man over. His knuckles are bruised and there’s some blood on his shirt. I don’t ask – it’s better than lipstick stains.

He tilts his head and I see the indecision on his face. The idea of fucking in a brothel holds appeal for him, but his responsibilities win out. “No. Can’t.”

I sashay up to him and tease his chest. “I’ll be your whore, however you want me.”

He groans as he grips my arms and shoves me up against his hard body. “You’re gonna be my death.”

He glances at Valentine. “You and me are gonna be talking.”

I watch her eyes widen and not in a good way, so I cradle Trigger’s chin and bring his attention back to me. “You know Valentine had nothing to do with my wandering. Leave her alone.”

He’s forgotten her anyway as he catches my braid and tugs it hard. “I gotta get into Reno and I guess you’re comin’ with me. I’m not gonna fuckin’ leave you here and don’t have the time to take you home.”

He grabs my hand and hauls me back to the lobby. To Amara, he says, “Joker and Reaper are escorting the

sonofabitch out. Give them his wallet and any other shit he had with him.”

“Will do,” Amara says as she smiles at him. “See you later.”

Trigger’s still holding my hand as we head back to his bike, but I can’t let go of a vision of him and Amara, so despite myself, I casually ask, “How many of them have you slept with?”

Trigger grins like he sees right through me. “None, sweetheart. I don’t shit where I eat.”

I run a fingernail down the side of his face. “You have a way with words that gets me wet.”

He huffs as he hands me my helmet. “You’re a fuckin’ cat, you know that. Every time I turn my back, you’re somewhere you’re not supposed to be.”

“If I didn’t check the brothel out tonight, I would have had to come back. I’m a curious little kitten.”

When we get to Reno, he heads straight to the Gold Dust Casino. Two Hell’s Jury bikers approach us. One of them is this huge almost-perfect red-haired man. Trigger is the only man for me, but this guy would be a close second providing he had the personality to match his looks. However, both men glare when they see me.

Trigger struts up to them as if they didn’t have murderous looks on their faces. “Evanee, this Rocky and Red.”

Ah, Rocky, Jess’s man. “Of course,” I say as I smile up at Red.

I catch the dangerous scowl on Trigger’s face, like he’s trying to figure out how he’s going to bring the big guy down.

Red blandly considers him, but Rocky’s not so tactful. “What the fuck, Trig?”

I start to talk, but Trigger gives me a little shake. “Long story. Evanee’s gonna play some slots while we talk to Figaro.”

This time it's my turn to frown. "I don't play slots, love." It's not that I think they're beneath me, but I find them boring. I glance over at the poker table. "Will I have enough time for a round or two of hold-em?"

Trigger follows my gaze. There are five men seated and they're all watching us. "No." he says tersely, then jerks his chin towards the blackjack table. There's no one there but the dealer. "Play blackjack."

I decide to let him have his way because I find his possessiveness charming.

"Hey!" Red shouts. He stalks over to a little man who's trying to sneak out of the casino and grabs him by the back of his shirt hauling him up off his feet. "Where the fuck do you think you're going?"

The man hangs limply, his feet dangling six inches off the floor. "I needed some fresh air."

"So do I," Red grumbles as he carries him out the door like he's holding a puppy.

"Blackjack," Trigger says to me, then turns and follows his brothers outside.

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# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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## Trigger



“Hangman’s gonna fuckin’ destroy you,” Rocky says as we enter the alley that Red’s hauled Figaro down.

I glare at my supposed best friend. “What he don’t know, won’t hurt me.”

“Well, he aint’ gonna hear it from me or Red, but you know how it is. Some fuck will tell someone and so on, until word gets back to him.”

Red’s got Figaro shoved up against the wall, his gigantic hand on the stoolie’s neck.

“Easy buddy,” I say as I force my body between him and Red.

“We don’t wanna hurt him yet,” Rocky tells Red.

The comment was meant to intimidate Figaro, but Red takes it the wrong way. “Says you! I thought this was a democracy.”

I try not to react but Rocky’s not so diplomatic. “Jesus! What’s wrong with you?” He bumps chests with Red.

“Would you guys fucking stop!” It doesn’t often happen that I’m the voice of reason, but for fuck’s sake, I got a hot girl waiting in the casino and my dick is bitching about not getting enough ‘me’ time with her.

They turn their venomous eyes on me as if I’m the asshole. “Who put you in charge!” Red growls.

“It’s not a fuckin’ democracy, you assholes!” I shout.  
“Focus!”

“Stop fucking yelling,” Rocky hisses as he elbows me out of the way and gives Figaro a hard shove. “You’re gonna draw attention.” He looks down at Figaro. “Now where were we?”

Figaro grunts. “You were saying you don’t want to hurt me.”

“Yeah,” Rocky says, then stops like it’s the only word he knows.

I look heavenward. “Naw, little man. We don’t want to hurt you. But we ain’t gonna have to, are we?”

Figaro shakes his head. “What do you guys want? I ain’t heard anything.”

“Not lookin’ for news!” Red snarls.

Rocky and I turn to him. “Got a thorn in your paw, asshole?” I say. “Figaro’s a friend.”

Red furrows his forehead and for a moment, I think I’m gonna have to find a way to knock him on his ass. “I’m being the bad guy,” he pouts. “I never get to do that.”

Rocky sighs as he steps back from Figaro. “Fine.” To Figaro, he says, “You don’t mind takin’ a punch, do you?” He motions to Red. “If we don’t let him do it, we’ll never hear the end of it.”

Even in the shadows, I can see the blood drain from Figaro’s face as he stares up at Red. “Yes! Yes, I do mind taking a punch!” He slides his eyes towards me as if I’m the sane one. “What do you want? Anything. Just keep him away from me.”

Rocky turns to Red. “You okay with waiting? We can find someone else to beat up after.”

Red narrows his eyes. “I want to beat this fuck up, not some other guy.”

“Come on, buddy. Figaro’s like chewing on a chihuahua. He ain’t even a challenge.”

Figaro nods his head. “Yeah. Exactly. No challenge. One punch and I’d be out.”

Rocky winks at me. “He’s a weasel, Red. We’ll find a pit bull for you.”

I give Red a shove to get him out of our space. “Enough with the bad guy act, Red. I gotta get back to Evanee.” What a fuckin’ night for him to assert himself.

He looks down at my hand, then up into my eyes. “Not an act, asshole. You shits are still treating me like I’m a prospect.”

“Jesus,” Rocky says as he runs a hand through his beard. “Can we talk about this back at the clubhouse?”

“Hey!” Red shouts as he shoves his way between us, sending Rocky to his ass, and grabbing Figaro, who’s trying to slip away. “You fucking stay where you are until this discussion is over.” He shakes the poor guy a few times then slams him up against the wall.

“C’mon!” I snarl at Red as Figaro groans, his knees buckling. “I ain’t got time for your PMS.”

Back on his feet, Rocky manhandles Red off Figaro with several grunts.

I pull a wad of C-notes from my pocket and count off twenty. “There’s another \$2k if you get it done.”

Figaro pushes the money away. “Whatever you want, man, I’m not doing it.”

I smirk as I shove the bills in his shirt pocket. “You wanna tell big Red over there?”

I twist my head to see Rocky piggybacking Red, his arms choke holding his neck, his feet around the giant’s stomach.

“Fuckin’ cocksucker,” Rocky snarls as he sucks in a lungful of air.

“You’re a dead man, you fucker!” Red roars as he twists and turns like a wild stallion.

“What do you want?” Figaro whispers, his eyes darting between me and the circus goin’ on behind me.

I smirk at the little shit. “Want you to put word out that the Jury has hard evidence on a couple of Feebs who did a journalist.”

“Jesus,” Figaro unaccustomedly swears. “You want me dead?”

“You ain’t gonna get dead,” Rocky snarls. He’s on his ass on the ground glaring up at Red. “It’s a fucking rumour. Tell someone with a big mouth or a couple of someones. It’s that easy.”

Red snaps his teeth at Rocky and goes to kick him in the ribs.

Rocky grabs Red around the ankle and pulls his feet out from under him. Red goes down like a sack of bricks, but that don’t stop him from taking Rocky down with him.

“Fuckin’ clowns,” I mutter as I return my attention to Figaro. “We wanna smoke out the assholes. They’re not gonna come after you. It’s us they’ll be looking for.”

Figaro’s lips turn down. “How will they know it’s you?”

Red, back on his feet, shoves me out of the way. “Tell everyone it’s us, asshole,” he snarls. “Jesus, do we gotta do all your thinkin’ for you?”

“Chill, man,” I say carefully as Rocky lays on his back on the ground, his hands clutched around his ribs, groaning like he’s having bad sex. I return my attention to the little stoolie. “All you gotta do is put the word out. No critical thinking skills involved. Any info about these guys makes its way back to us, we’ll be very appreciative.”

“Let’s go,” Red grumbles as he stalks down the alley.

Rocky slowly climbs to his feet. “We gotta get him a girl.”

“He’s got girls.”

“Not the passarounds. A real girl. Like we have.”



I watch as Figaro scurries off. “Would be nice if the little weasel could dig up some info on who these assholes are.”

“Yeah. Sick of this bullshit,” Rocky replies as we head back inside the club.

First thing I see is Evanee sitting dutifully at the blackjack table but it ain’t empty anymore. She’s surrounded by pricks.

“Hey!” I shout across the casino. “Get the fuck away from her!”

Everyone looks up startled. I mean everyone, from the people on the slots, to the security, to the players at the tables. I’m all cleaned up for the date, but between my bruised knuckles and the blood on my shirt, I look like I could eat all of them for lunch. Don’t help that Red’s following me. Rocky’s disappeared. Has a play-date with Jess, I guess.

A beefy security guy steps in front of me. “Bring it down a decibel.”

“He’s gettin’ his girl,” Red snarls, his big hand spanning the guy’s chest as he nudges him out of my path.

“Cool, dude,” I nod at my brother in appreciation. I ain’t never had a bodyguard before but I could get used to it.

Red crosses his arms and glares at everyone.

Evanee slides off the stool she’d been sitting on and walks towards me like she’s a fashion model. “I’m his girl,” she says to the security guy with a seductive smile. I don’t think she knows how not to smile like that with men and I decide I’m gonna have to teach her. That fuckin’ smile should only be flashed at me.

“Let’s go,” I say to her. Red follows us out.

“What the fuck are you doing?” I tell him as he sandwiches himself between us.

“Taggin’ along. Got nothin’ better to do.”

Jesus, the giant is missing all the cues. “No, you’re fuckin’ not. Go back to the clubhouse. Fuck a passaround.”

He scowls as he pokes me in the chest with a finger. “See that right there – I get no respect.” He stalks off.

“And don’t you fucking be thinking about Evanee when you do it!” I yell at his retreating back.

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# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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# Trigger



I rub my face as I turn to Evanee. “What now?”

She brightens up. “Let’s have a picnic. Get some sandwiches, a six-pack of beer. Is there a place we can go where we can have some privacy?”

I don’t tell her about the sandwich I ate back at the brothel as I think about where we could go. Not the club for sure. A hotel doesn’t appeal. Then an idea occurs to me. The Jury’s auto shop will be deserted this time of night and there’s a cot in the back. I wonder why I didn’t think of it before.

We make a quick stop for a couple of subs, some chips, and the beer, then head over to the garage. I got a key for a reason I can’t remember, and hold Evanee’s hand as I haul her and the grub inside. Fuckin’ alone at last and I don’t give a shit about the food or beer. I flip on the lights, drop the bag I’m carrying and slam Evanee up against the wall, smothering every single gorgeous curve. I can’t believe I’m here, with her. This perfect woman who eclipses me and my world.

My mouth is on hers, my tongue frenzied, my teeth mashed against my gums. I want to crawl inside her.

“Trigger,” she moans as moves her face to the side, exposing her neck, which I go down on. My teeth nip everywhere, a trail of pain that my tongue soothes.

We grind into each other like teenagers, our hands on each others’ bodies, not gentle.

I’ve hiked her skirt up to her waist and have a handful of curvy ass while she pulls open her top and shoves down her

bra to expose her breasts. I barely have time to admire the ripe, juicy mounds before she mashes my face between them then gropes my crotch through my jeans.

I lick between her mounds, then pull one of her nipples into my mouth, nipping, sucking, trying to swallow her entire fucking tit, my hand squeezing it hard, trying to stuff it down my throat.

She's tall, curvy, ripe. Perfect. She smells like every fruit I've ever eaten, with a hint of motor oil that rockets my need for her into overdrive. I'm pumping into her hand. "Open my fucking jeans and do it right," I growl.

"Fuck off, asshole," she breathes. "You do it your way, I'll do it mine."

I get harder. She's this sexy, put-together woman by day, and this dirty-talkin' she-devil when she's turned on. I've hit the fuckin' jackpot.

"You want me to fuckin' do it my way?" I grab the hand she was using to play with me and nip her fingers hard enough to make her gasp, then twist around, overpowering her as I walk her backwards and flatten her on the hood of a blue '65 Mustang Shelby GT350 Fastback.

She bounces on top of it with a moan. "Bastard!"

"Potty mouth," I snarl. "Let's see how much you got to say when you're being fucked."

"I'm not being fucked yet, am I?" she snarls breathlessly. "Seems like you're all mouth and no action."

Her skirt is still shoved up around her waist and I rip off her panties as I stare into her eyes. "That a fucking challenge?"

I swallow her answer with a hard kiss, then drop to my knees and yank open her thighs.

"Gaddamn it, Trigger!" she shouts in pain as I shove two fingers into her tight cunt.

That little yelp gets me harder. I sink my face into her heated pussy, my mouth sucking her wetness, swallowing it

down like I've been roamin' around a desert for the last three days. I find her clit—it's big and inviting— and run my tongue over it again and a-fucking-gain.

She squeezes her thighs around my head and shoves my face against her so tight, I can't breathe. Don't matter. If I die, it'll be with a smile on my face. As she gyrates her hips, she rubs her cunt over my face and beard, an invitation I don't resist as I lick and suck, even take a few bites. Then she freezes, screams her fucking head off as she comes on my face. She's still bucking and coming when I pry her legs off me and stand up, unzippin' my jeans.

“Condom,” she gasps, her body writhing on the hood as she fingers her nipples.

I feel like I'm in a porn, she's so fucking hot. I dig into my back pocket and fumble for a condom, dropping the three I have on the concrete.

“Fuck,” I mutter as I dive after them, my dick waving in the air like the American flag. They've scattered everywhere and I crawl to grab the nearest one, my jeans tripping me up.

“What the hell are you doing?” I hear her breathless voice from above.

“Dropped the condoms.”

“How many do you have?”

“Three,” I say as I struggle to my feet tearing the wrapper with my teeth.

“Optimistic, aren't you?”

“The way you just came on my face, it's justified.”

She throws back her head and laughs. Her exposed neck gets me distracted and I bite the side of it, making her jerk and swat at me. Then I step back and run the condom over my dick.

She's still on her back, propped up on her elbows, staring at it. Then she touches the tip of her tongue to her top lip. “It's huge, it's pieced, it's ready. Get to work, handsome!”

I smirk. “Every inch for you, baby.”

Apparently, those were the wrong words as her face falls.

“What?” I say sounding way too aggressive for the look on her face, but in my defense, I’ve got my hands on her hips and I’m poking at her entrance. This is not the time for her to get shy.

“Don’t worry, I’m not letting that hard-on go to waste,” she assures.

I grin.

She doesn’t. “I gotta know if this is a one-time thing.”

Is she fuckin’ kidding me? “Are you fuckin’ kidding me? You asking me that? You’re so fuckin’ perfect that I’ll die if we don’t do this more than once.”

She nods, like I’ve said the right answer. I get lined up again, then she goes and says, “But no women in between, Trigger. I won’t tolerate that.”

I freeze, realizing this is getting real. I’m making promises and commitments for the first time in my life. What if I fuck it up? What if I ruin the best thing that’s ever happened to me?

I stare at the most beautiful woman in the world, who’s waiting like she’s got all the time in the world. Nothin’ in her face that says she’s pissed about how long I’m taking thinking about it. Instead, she grabs my dick with her hand and strokes while she pins me with her emerald gaze.

I’m breathin’ so hard I think I’m gonna need an ambulance if I don’t fuck her soon.

I look down at my aching dick. It looks back at me. We nod at each other.

I shove her back on the hood, slam my hands down on each side of her shoulders and drill my eyes into her. “I don’t break promises, princess. I’m done with other women. You’re it. But you fucking touch another guy and I’ll cut off his dick, make him eat it, then eviscerate him.” I slam my hands down on the hood again for effect.

She jumps at the echoing sound. At my aggression. “I don’t break promises either. I haven’t wanted another guy since I laid eyes on you in the food court, even if you were eating a power bowl.”

“You’re a fuckin’ poet,” I sneer, then fumble for my dick and shove it into her, hard and fast enough to make her grunt.

“Bastard,” she snarls as she digs her long red fingernails into my biceps.

I grunt. “You want pain?” I’m slamming into her and she’s meeting me thrust for thrust as she wraps her legs around my hips.

Suddenly she jerks and I smugly think she coming, but then she shouts, “Goddamn! My fingernail!” She pops the finger into her mouth.”

“What the hell are doin’ to me?” I grab the finger and pop it into my mouth, sucking it like I sucked her nipple.

Her eyes glaze over. “I’m going to come. Oh, shit, oh god.” Then she bucks her body hard and throws back her head, cursing and screaming. It tips me off the fuckin’ mountain and I come so hard my legs give out, but I stay buried so I bring her down with me. My head bounces off the concrete and her head bounces off my chin. I see stars.

“I’m gonna fucking marry you,” I say just before I pass out.



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# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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## Evanee



I t's the first time I've injured a guy while having sex, so I'm not quite sure what to do as I stare at Trigger's unmoving body. He's magnificent, his cock still stiff, the Prince Albert piercing poking at the end of the condom. His hard lean body, covered in tats, is a feast for starving eyes. The problem is that Trigger's eyes are closed and he's not moving.

My first thought is to call 9-1-1, but I'm doubtful his president would approve.

I slide my panties on and tidy myself up as I think of what to do. I have to say, I'm disappointed that the evening ended this way. I was sure Trigger had a couple of more rounds in him. As it is, his cock has finally gone flaccid. I decide giving him a blowjob in his current state might be considered illegal under the eyes of the law, so I hover next to him, on my knees, running the tips of my fingers over his skull.

Yes, I'm a vet and sometimes that translates to human, but it's rare that an animal comes in with a concussion.

"My poor baby," I say as I cradle his head in my lap, then kiss him gently on the lips. My brain's still in post-coitus bliss and my thinking is sluggish. What to do? What to do? I shake Trigger again. "Wake up, Sweetie."

He moans but doesn't otherwise move.

Shit.

As I stare down at him, an idea hits me. I pat him down, find his cell phone, then hold it in front of his face to open it. I

find Red in Trigger's contact list and hit the number. It rings and rings, then goes to voice mail.

"Damn." I try again. Still no answer but third time's the charm.

"What the fuck do you want?" Red's aggressive voice snarls at me. He's out of breath and I have this thought that he took Trigger's advice.

"Hi Red. This is Evanee. I'm afraid I need a little help."

Suddenly, the aggression is gone and his voice is serious. "What's wrong?"

"Uh. Well." I'm not often at a loss for words, but then again, this scenario is a first for me. "It requires discretion."

There's an uncomfortable stretch of silence, then he says, "What the fuck is goin' on?"

"Trigger fell and knocked himself out." I rush the words.

"How'd he do that?"

Now, I could lie, but Red doesn't appear to be stupid. He'll know the minute he walks in on the scene. "We were having sex and he... uhm... fell."

There's silence on the line, then a grunt of laughter. "This I gotta see. Where're you at?"

I look around. Where are we at? I was so busy anticipating the rest of our night that I wasn't paying a lot of attention to the address. "We're at a garage. Not sure where it is."

"You're at the fuckin' garage?" He almost shouts. "My fuckin' garage?"

Oh dear. "Well, to be fair, Trigger didn't tell me we were at your garage."

"Just exactly what happened?"

"He rolled off the hood of a car."

Trigger's groaning and I'm starting to panic. Red needs to stop asking questions and come help me.

"What car?"

He's missing the point. "It's a Mustang. Blue. Older model."

"Fuck!" he shouts. "That car's worth a fortune and the hood is fiberglass. He better not have fucking dented it."

I rise up on my knees and look at where I just had the best sex of my life. "It seems okay. Should I call 9-1-1?"

"No," he says grimly. "I'm on my way. Fifteen." The line goes dead.

"Trigger," I say, slapping gently at his face after I've removed the condom and tucked him back into place. I have this image of Red roaring into the garage and throwing Trigger against a wall. "Trigger, I called Red and I think he's mad about us having sex on the hood of his car."

I get no response, so I slap him again. "It would be good if you woke up. Maybe we could be gone before he gets here."

Trigger isn't cooperating and true to Red's words, I hear the roar of a bike almost to the minute.

He's not alone though. He's got a drunk guy with him, forties, holding a black bag. "Hey sweetheart," he slurs when he sees me.

I look past him to Red. "Who's he?"

"Dicer," Red grunts, bent over, studying the hood of the mustang. "Doc."

My head swivels from him to the drunken man and back. "You're kidding, right?"

"He isn't," Dicer says as he plops down next to Trigger and opens his bag.

"He'll fix him up." Red rubs at a spot on the hood, then frowns as he looks at his fingers.

Dicer stares at Trigger, his bloodshot eyes half-closed. "He's passed out," he declares.

I'm losing patience with both of them. "Is that your professional opinion, *Doctor*?"

He's too drunk to pick up on the sarcasm in my voice. "How much has he had to drink?"

"I'll wager considerably less than you have." The hostility is leaking into my tone and I'm annoyed at myself. I do get mad, but I manage it. It's Trigger though and I find myself outraged.

The doctor doesn't seem to notice my agitation. "That doesn't tell me anything. Everyone I know drinks less than I do."

I turn my attention to Red, who's now sitting in the Mustang. "We didn't actually enter the car!" I snap.

Red glares at me. "Checking anyway."

When I turn back to Dicer, he's holding Trigger's head in his hands, feeling the underside. "No bump, so I'm sure he'll be fine. Red, get me some water."

Red climbs out of the car, stalks over to a sink, fills a bucket with water and passes it to Dicer.

Dicer takes it with unsteady hands, then tosses it into Trigger's face. "There that should do it!"

Trigger gasps, then shoots upright. "What the fuck happened?"

"Are you fucking kidding me!" I shout. "How the hell are you a doctor?"

Red's staring down at us. "Got a mail order degree is what I heard."

I look between the two. "You're both idiots!" I point to the door. "Leave!"

"A thanks would have been nice," Dicer mumbles as he heads out the door.

"She seems stressed. Let it go." Red replies. At the doorway, he stops. "Stay the fuck away from my mustang. You hear me?"

He's talking to Trigger, not me, but I answer for him. "Understood, now get out!"

Trigger groans and cradles his head between his hands.  
“What happened?”

“You fell off the hood of the car and hit your head.”

“Did I come?”

“Like Seabiscuit on a racetrack.”

He grins weakly as I help him to his feet. “I remember now. I gotta buy you a ring.”

I smile at him as I help him limp over to a chair next to a table. There’s a half-full bottle of Old Crow Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey on the top of it, which is as close to poison as one can get, but I consider it medicinal. Trigger needs a wake-up shot, and I don’t want him to drink alone. I find a couple of barely used glasses, sit in the chair across the table from him, pour a bit of the rot gut into each and toast him. “Are you seeing double?” I ask after I toss mine back.

He grins. “Yeah, but I’m lookin’ at your tits.”

I throw my head back and laugh. “You’re back, baby.”

“Almost. I hate to say it, but I have a serious headache. I don’t think I can manage a second helping.”

“You think that, but I’m very persuasive.” I refill our glasses, wince as the foul stuff slides over my tongue, then drop down on my knees between his thighs.

He sucks in his breath as I take his cock out of his jeans.  
“Ah fuck. You’re killing me here.”

“Just sit back and enjoy the ride,” I tell him before I slide his growing erection between my lips.

My approach to life is if I’m going to do something, I’m going to do it well – school, appearance, relationships. And yes, I’m scary good at blowjobs.

He groans as I take him deep, run my tongue up his cock while he hardens. He’s a decent size flaccid, but hard, he’s magnificent. I grip him at the base of his dick, pumping it in tandem with my mouth, feeling a wave of heat slide down to my pussy as he tangles his fingers in my hair.

I pull gently at the piercing with my teeth, then slide my tongue down to the root of his cock, then up the seam on the underside of it.

“Fuck, Jesus that’s good,” he rasps as his hips buck.

“Mm hmm.” I file that move away for future reference as I gently pump his cock. My lips seal around him as I take him in and out of his mouth. Goosebumps erupt on his skin as my hand slides under his shirt.

He bucks his body, pushing his pelvis forward, holding my head steady. He wants to fuck my mouth; maybe I’ll let him and maybe I won’t. Right now, I’m the one in control.

I pull my mouth off his cock.

“Hey!” he protests.

“Easy, lover. There’s more to a blowjob than straight up sucking.” I prove this by running his cock over my face, taking small licks at the tip as it slides by my mouth. I stretch up on my knees and slide the shaft between my breasts, squeezing them together with my hands and sliding my body up and down.

“Fuck!” he gasps. “You’re fucking tits are perfect.”

I give him a few more pumps, then put a little space between us, holding his eyes as I jerk him with my fingers. I smile seductively while I suck a finger into my mouth, my eyes glued to his.

“Quick fucking with me baby,” he says hoarsely.

I wink as I pull his jeans down and run my tongue up the inside of his thigh then slide it under his balls, and towards his back hole. I back off just before I get there, then back and forth until he’s almost ripping my hair out.

“Jesus Christ,” he shouts as he jerks. “What the fuck are you doing to me?”

“Shh, Lover. You’re never going to be the same when I’m done with you.” I give each of my palms a sloppy lick, then grip his shaft as I guide his cock back into his mouth, twisting

my wrist back and forth as I move my lips up and down. My other hand slides down to his balls and massages them gently.

“Fuck, Fuck, Fuck,” he gurgles.

“You like how this feels, do you?” I murmur as I come up for air. I hold his eyes as I drop his testicles and bring my hand to my burning pussy. “You’re cock in my mouth is making me so needy. Another day, I want your lips sucking my clit.”

I slide the tip of his cock into my mouth and gently pull at his piercing with my teeth while tonguing the seam under the flared head.

“I’m gonna fucking come!” he shouts, bucking his hips.

“You don’t mind if I swallow, do you?” I say just before I lap at the semen leaking from him.

“I fucking expect it!” He shoves his cock to the back of my throat and I grab his wrists as I take him as deep as I can. I hold him there until I run out of breath then I push his hands back and come up for air.

“Not yet,” I tell him as I shove my hand into my panties. “I’m want to come with you.”

“Jesus,” he splutters. “Get there fast!”

I lick him slowly from base to tip to settle him down as I climb higher toward my orgasm. My mouth is full of saliva and some drips down my chin as I come up for air.

Trigger slides his fingers through it, drawing it up my cheeks, then leans over and licks it. “Get your fucking mouth working, baby. I can’t take any more of this.”

Me neither, I decide as I take him as deep as I can. Then he takes over, pumping his cock in and out of my mouth as he grips my braid. It’s so fucking amazing.

“Shit, I’m coming,” he shouts.

Me too, I think, because my mouth is too full to talk. As he spurts his semen down my throat, I hit the peak. My orgasm races through my body, making my hair stand on end and my skin break out in goose bumps. It lasts forever and when I



apply a little more pressure with my fingers, lightening streaks to my feet, then back up my legs to my vagina, which right now is totally jealous of my tongue.

Trigger releases my hair and slides down to his knees in front of me.

I let a little of his come dribble down my chin. “You taste like a 4-star Michelin chef made you,” I say as I swallow the rest.

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# CHAPTER NINETEEN

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## Trigger



The day after the best fuckin' blowjob of my life, I walk into church still feelin' boneless.

Red raises his eyebrows. "Guessing the goddess woke you up with a little hide the pickle."

Under different circumstances, I might tell him to go fuck himself, but today I just grin. "It's okay to be jealous, brother. If I were you, I'd be jealous too." I sit and rest my head on my elbow as I smirk at him. "She's the best of everything and I ain't gonna say otherwise."

King and Jawbone exchange glances, Jawbone quirking his eyebrows. "Give us the blow-by-blow." He mimes fucking with his fingers.

I give him a quick raise of my eyebrows. "If I told you, old man, you'd have a stroke."

The rest of the guys laugh as Hangman storms into the room. He sees me and glares, which is fair. His cheek still has a livid bruise on it. "You fucking prick," he snarls as he jabs his finger at me.

"Love you too, boss," I reply lightly, but straighten up. Don't want to be too loose around the prez. He'll take advantage.

"Fuck off," he tells me as he redundantly raises his middle finger.

I salute him back. "Fucking off, Sir!"

“What the fuck is wrong with him?” Hangman snarls to Joker.

“He’s getting his brains fucked out is what’s wrong,” Red tells everyone, his lips turned down in a petulant frown.

“Have a little fuckin’ respect,” I growl, because even though I like the banter, it’s getting close to bein’ impolite.

Hash saves me from further harassment by walking into the room, which distracts Hangman. “What the fuck made you late, you cocksucker? Better not have been pussy.”

Hash ambles up to a chair against the wall, flips it around and straddles it. “Wish it was. Got cornered by Mad Max outside Sailor Jerry’s. Blackbeards lost one of theirs. Thinks we might have the asshole.”

Grumbles filter around the room. None of us appreciate the VP of the Blackbeards sniffing around our ink shop. He’s a pretty-boy with more mouth than brains and we got a pool going on about which one of us will kill him in the end.

“Funny you should mention that,” Joker smirks, trading glances with Reaper. “We got someone cooling his heels in the Chamber.”

I nod. “Took a run at Kit last night at Dick’s Picks. I fucked him up good.”

Reaper nods. “You did. He bitched and moaned all the way back here.”

There are a few side conversations about this latest development, but Hangman’s impatient. “What else did Mad Max say?” he demands, his temper teetering on the edge.

“Apparently the missing ballsac’s club name is Dino for some fuckin’ reason,” Hash replies.

Dino. Dean Henderson. “That’s the bastard!” I exclaim with a malicious grin. “We went and caught ourselves a Blackbeard.”

Hangman rubs his chin as he looks at me with approval, and I know I’m forgiven for hittin’ him. Well, forgiven might be too strong a word because Hangman don’t forget.

We're distracted as two guys wander in, both of them wearing Las Vegas Hell's Jury colours. The reinforcements have arrived.

"Thanks for fucking showin' up," Hangman says, his moment of calm evaporating.

"Lost our way." Rider fist bumps Rocky as he slumps into a chair next to him. Rider is a valued Jury member, a little under six feet, strong and wiry. Not that easy on the eyes because his favourite hobby is brawling, but his personality makes up for it. He's riddled with tats and scars and will proudly tell you where he got each one.

Mothman, the Vegas prez's son, nods at Coyote as he takes a seat next to him. Unlike Rider, who has a sense of humour and a reckless attitude, Mothman is solemn and seems to like his own company best. He's good at negotiation and better skilled at diplomacy than most guys, including Joker. To Hangman, he says, "Got a late start this morning. Some fuck took a shot at Stark on our way out of town and we tried to chase him down."

Stark is Mothman's prospect, but he's no one's bitch and Mothman will be the first to warn you that it's best not to fuck around with him. He might be a prospect, but he won't take shit from anyone.

"You catch up to him?" Fender asks.

"Nah," Rider says. "Motherfucker was skilled on a bike."

Joker narrows his eyes. "You guys are here to support us, not bring more fuckin' trouble."

Mothman throws a disinterested glance Joker's way. "Stark says it has nothing to do with the Jury. He'll find the fuck and sort it out himself."

"Jesus," King grumbles. "Even if it's personal, it's still a Jury problem."

"Tell that to Stark," Mothman replies then says to Hangman, "Won't be late again."

“Where’s Viking?” Coyote asks. “Thought he was coming too.”

Mothman glances at him with disinterest. “Got delayed.” He turns back to Hangman. “What’d we miss?”

Joker inhales a breath as he glares at Hangman, and I have a sudden insight into the tension between Pres and VP. Joker doesn’t like having Vegas royalty join the club, even if it’s temporary. Still, you wouldn’t know it from the tone of his voice. “Accidentally caught us a Blackbeard last night. We got him locked up in the Chamber.”

Hangman grins ferally. “Let him sweat for a couple of days. Hash, get word to Mad Max that we don’t know what the fuck he’s talking about.”

“Said that already because I didn’t know what the fuck he was talking about. But I’ll put the word out there.” He scratches the side of his face. “Also heard a lot of rumours about Feebs running wild.” He looks at me and Rocky. “Your snitch works fast.”

“Yeah, their fuckin’ snitch,” Red grumbles under his breath.

Rocky snickers and I outright laugh. “Gotta get fucked, man. You’re too tense.”

“Don’t have time to get fucked, you asshole,” he snarls at me. “Too busy picking your sorry ass off the concrete.”

I ignore him as I explain the current situation to Mothman and Rider. “We’re reeling in the feds, lettin’ them know we got evidence linking them to a murder. Might be the only way to get them out in the daylight.”

“Sounds like they’re vampires,” Rider sniggers.

Joker looks down at his notepad, then across the table at Hangman. “We gonna talk about fines?”

Hangman narrows his eyes, first at Joker, then at me. “Not yet. I want to get a few more punches in before the end of the month. Figure I may as well get my money’s worth.”

“And the broken door?”

“Asshole pays for it.” He jerks his chin towards me.

“We’re up to our ass in renos. We were going to replace it anyway,” Fender says.

“When are they gonna start?” Hash asks. “Are we gonna have to move out?”

It’s a legitimate question. Hash, Red, me, and Peyton, a stray we picked up while rescuing Coyote’s sisters from a human trafficker, live at the clubhouse.

“Maybe shift around a bit. We’re givin’ the upstairs a facelift, so we’ll do it in stages,” Fender replies.

“Good,” Red pouts. “I got no place to go.”

“Get yourself a fucking apartment,” I say. “Not that hard.”

He narrows his eyes. “Working on it, fuck face. Looking for a house to buy.” He turns to Rocky. “Asshole’s a fuckin’ hypocrite.”

Reaper sighs. “Can you idiots fight on your own time.”

“You got somewhere to be?” Red attacks him.

Reaper looks across the table at me. “You’re right. He needs to get fucked.”

“Shut it, all of you,” Hangman growls as he tugs at his braid. “Gotta talk about the vet clinic.”

“Trigger’s banging a veterinarian,” Coyote tells Mothman and Rider.

Rider snorts. “He can’t even spell the fucking word.”

I think about it. Maybe he’s right.

“Shut up!” Hangman shouts. “Who gives a fuck who Trigger’s banging. It’s just another day in his life.”

Rocky raises his eyebrows at me, a quick up and down, daring me to take on Hangman again. Good thing I’m stilled blissed out from last night. The prez can say whatever the fuck he wants. I’m banging the best girl in the world and he’s giving himself a five-finger fuck when the passarounds are busy.

“We can’t make her pay protection,” Joker points out, “Not while she’s sucking off Trigger.”

I think about the blowjob, catch Hangman’s eyes and wink.

His face grows red as he stabs his finger at me. “I will fuckin’ turn you into dog food, you shit.”

His threat is kind of ironic if you think about it, but Joker cuts me off before I can think of a comeback. “For fuck’s sake, would you two take it outside.” To the rest of the boys, he says, “She needs investors and wants us for 24 percent. Any objections?”

“Why not lend her the money?” Fender asks. He used to be an accountant before he got tagged for skimming off the top. Now he’s the club’s treasurer.

“She won’t take it,” I say. “She doesn’t want to owe anyone.”

“Ain’t investing the same as owning?” Hash asks, proving he’s not as stupid as he looks.

“Not according to the vet,” Hangman says. “We’ll get a return on the money when she’s making a profit and a say in how she runs her business.”

For the first time since the meeting started, I get uncomfortable. “Not a say. We’ll be silent partners.”

“Fuck that,” Fender interjects. “We don’t just give away money without making sure our investment is solid.”

My zen from last night is wearing off. “I say it’s solid, it’s solid.”

Fender doesn’t like being contradicted. “You’ve known the b..., uh, fuck, whatever she is, for a couple of days. What the fuck do you know about her?”

“I know enough,” I snarl back at him. “So shut the fuck up or I’ll make you uglier than you already are.” I’m gonna get fined big-time anyway, so I may as well make it worth my while.



“Jesus Christ!” Joker interjects. “I’m working with juveniles. My thinking is that we invest in the club, give her a year to turn a profit, if she doesn’t, we get involved.” He looks at me. “That work for you, lover boy?”

I think it over. Why not? Evanee is as smart as she is gorgeous. I’ve no doubt she’ll have the pet-owning people of Sagebrush lining up at her door. “Sure. I got no problem with that.”

We take a vote, and pass the motion 100 percent, which makes me feel all warm inside. The brothers support the brothers, which is the way it should be in a one-percenter club.

We end church by talking about the blow-out party we plan to have. Sort of an out with the old, in with the new as if we needed excuses. Gives the Vegas guys a chance to meet everyone else and get to know us on a more personal level.

I call Evanee as I head to my bike. “Should I send flowers?” I ask when she picks up.

“Maybe you could drop by the clinic, lover.”

Fuck me. “I’m on my way.”

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

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## Evanee



It's another slow day at the clinic when Trigger calls. Wendy's already left, and I've polished my vet instruments for the tenth time. It's almost 5 PM, which is closing time, and since there doesn't seem to be an animal limping down the sidewalk, I figure I can lock up early.

I cover Singalong's cage so he's down for the night, give Lullaby a few oats to tide her over until feeding time. She gets cranky when she misses her meals. The dogs and Pirate Jack dutifully follow me into my 'bedroom' which doubles as a nursery with cages. I lock each one of them up, then go in search of Kona, who seems to know that she's about to get sent to prison. She streaks around the clinic, screaming like a banshee. It takes me ten minutes and some reassuring lies to catch her. I'm panicking now because I have a plan and I don't want Trigger to arrive before I'm fully ready.

Kona curses me out for being such a bitch as I put her in her cage, but I assure her it's temporary. After she moons me, I strip off my clothes, kick off my shoes, and brush out my hair. Next, I slide on black sheer lace briefs, matching them with a Marilyn Monroe Rosette Lace Balconette bra. A pair of black leather Louboutin pumps add four inches to my height and the top-of-the-head bun I pull my hair into, adds another two. I slip out my contacts and pull on my black-framed prescription glasses. I finish the look with one of my white lab coats, buttoning it up to cover everything underneath, then look in the mirror. Gazing back at me is this cool collected fantasy sex doll. None of the nerves and butterflies that are currently coursing through my body show on my face.

I can't wait until Trigger sees me. And better yet, I can't wait until I see Trigger.

I'm putting the finishing touches on my lipstick when I hear the roar of a bike. Trigger's bike. I'm starting to recognize the sound of it.

I quickly unlock the front door, then jump up on the counter, straightening my back, and crossing my legs. I slide my hands around my knee and leisurely kick my leg back and forth as I watch Trigger stride up the sidewalk. He's so sexy that licks of flame curl in my stomach. This is my man and I get to keep him.

His eyes widen as he sees me through the glass of the front door, then a slow predatory smile spreads over his face, making me shiver.

Stepping inside, he waits for the door to swing shut, then locks it behind him not once taking his eyes off me. He crosses his arms, his thighs spread, the menacing grin still aimed my way.

My nipples peak. Physically hurt. I want him so bad.

"Hi lover," I say in a sultry voice. I hold my breath anticipating his next move.

His smile fades as he watches me. The seconds tick by and I force myself not to move. Finally, he stalks toward me, a lion tracking prey, each step measured, slow. Stopping about a foot from me, he lowers his head like a bull about to charge and moves his eyes over me starting at my shoes and slowly, oh so slowly, making his way up until he meets my eyes. His are dark, dangerous, and sexy with thick eyelashes under a thicker brow.

"Hello *Doctor* Whittaker," he growls, emphasizing doctor.

My breath leaks out of me as I shiver at the deep timbre of his voice. "Hello, handsome."

I expect him to attack me, but he surprises me by sliding a slow hand under the hem of my lab coat, inching it up my thigh. His eyes are boring into mine as he reaches the hem line

of my panties. He twists it, running a finger between it and the crease in my thigh. That's it, one single touch and I'm undone.

I make a move toward him, but he stops me with a sharp shake of his head. "Unbutton the coat." His voice is deep, commanding, all business. "Slowly."

My fingers are literally shaking as I start at the top of the coat and fumble with the button, then the next and the next. I swallow, try to think of something to say, but only manage shallow puffs of air.

His eyes flick to my body, following the line of buttons as I reveal myself to him. His hands are no longer idle. He slides the one fingering my panties to the waist of it, then snakes inside, pressing on my pelvis as he drags a finger down my slit. My legs are still crossed, making him force his access to my pussy, making his stroking painful.

He sees my grimace, hears my gasp, but doesn't stop. Instead, he finds my clit and presses on it, still watching my face, studying it, waiting for something.

I start to close my eyes as my bliss builds but flash them wide as he whips his hand out of my panties, then in one fluid movement, yanks my top leg off my bottom, grasps my thighs and jerks them apart. It's so fast, I start to topple, but he catches me with finely honed reflexes, yanking me upright by the collar of my lab coat.

I exhale a deep breath as he presses on the small of my back to hold me steady while the fingers on his other hand find their way back to my vagina, not slow this time, not gentle. His strokes are meant to hurt, the pinch on my clit meant to brutalize. He plays my body like a fiddle, watching my face as he lets go.

The rush of blood makes me moan and arch my back. He grins dangerously, waits a few seconds than snaps his fingers against the sensitive button. Again and again.

The pain of each flick makes me jerk and I grip his shoulders for support. I look down so I can watch him strum

me, but he grips my chin and raises my face to his. “Eyes on me baby. I’ll take care of the rest.”

“Fuck,” I whimper, trying to keep my gaze locked with his. It takes effort not to tilt my face to the ceiling, squeeze my eyes shut, and let the pleasure flow over me.

His hot breath brushes me as he leans closer and runs a tongue up my cheek. At the same time, he shoves two fingers in me. “Wet,” he murmurs as I jolt at the unexpected attack. He pumps in and out. His thumb stays steady though, flicking at my clit.

Too steady, too slow. It’s torture. “Faster,” I breathe.

“Patience, baby,” he rumbles. He releases his hold on my back, and I hear him fumble with the button on his jeans, the rasp of the zipper.

His hard as steel cock presses against the inside of my thigh and I close my eyes and groan. I fumble to take my glasses off, but a sharp slap on the side of my ass brings my attention back to his face. “Keep those fucking glasses on, sweetheart. Don’t you fucking change a thing.”

Not once has he increased the rhythm of his fingers inside me, his thumb on my clit. “Please, Trigger,” I whisper. “I need more.”

He grins. “I think I’ll make you wait. You wanna play dress-up, then I’m gonna give you what you asked for.”

He abandons my pussy and grabs my waist, twisting me into the air and over his shoulder. A groan falls out of my mouth as my belly bounces on his shoulder and my thigh burns under his bruising grip.

He strides down the hall and into my examining room, where he sets me on my feet, grasps my chin, and mashes his lips on mine. I open my mouth to take him, but he jerks his head back, his eyes impaling me.

I gasp for breath as he twists me around and slams me belly down on the cushioned table. I jerk at the pain.

One of his massive hands presses on the small of my back, the other wraps around the bun in my hair. “Face to the side,” he demands. “I wanna see you when I fuck you.”

I moan at the hotness in his tone and press my ass against his cock.

“Want it, do you?” he says, his hot breath in my ear as he presses me into the cushion with his weight. “You’re a fucking tease, *Doctor*. Inviting me over, looking all prim and proper. What’d you expect?”

“Please,” I whimper, playing my part. “I just wanted—”

Cool air rushes over my back, as he straightens up, then yanks my lab coat up over my ass. A sharp slap makes me jerk.

“Trigger!” I shriek.

“You like that?” He slaps me again, on the other cheek, then once more, before he shoves the crotch of my panties to the side and slams his way home.

“Shit, shit, shit,” I chant as I grapple at the sides of the table for purchase. He’s so huge I can feel him all the way down to my toes. “You’re too big for me!” I gasp.

“Yeah, baby,” he replies, once again flattening me with his weight, capturing my wrists, and stretching my arms along the mat. “I’m gonna use you up and then maybe, if you beg, I’ll let you come.”

The pressure in me is building, but his cock slamming into me isn’t enough to topple me.

I struggle out of his grip, but when I slide my hand towards my pussy, he yanks my arm behind my back. His breath is hot on my ear. “Beg, bitch,” he hisses.

“Please,” I whimper. “Please, Trigger, let me come.”

He doesn’t. He holds me steady, still forcing my arm up, brutally yanking on the bun in my hair, fucking me so hard, my thighs, hitting the top of the table, are screaming. “Oh god, Trigger.”

He seems to know that I'm at my breaking point, or maybe it's my vulnerability, inability to fight back that tips him over the edge. He digs his fingers into my hips, slams into me once, twice, then grunts loudly as he freezes, then withdraws. "Fuck!" he snarls as hot semen spills down my thighs.

My body sags against the table as he steps back, but it's a brief reprieve. I hear the zip of his fly as he tucks himself in, then his hands are on my waist. He flips me onto my back, then shoves my legs open and forward crushing them against me. "Take your tits out," he commands.

I grapple with the bra, shoving it down so that my breasts pop out. My nipples, hard nuggets, strain towards him, begging him to suck them.

As I grip his huge biceps, he gives them what they want, taking one into his mouth, sucking with the same intensity he's using on my pussy with his fingers as three of them slam into me, hammering in and out almost as brutal as his cock was a minute ago. His other hand finds my clit and grinds against it. The callouses feel like sandpaper against the sensitive button.

White fire streaks downward as he increases the suction on my nipple and upward as his fingers fuck me with no mercy. The two fireballs collide and explode into strikes of intense lightening that bolt through my body, turning it into a boneless bundle of smouldering coals. I scream as I buck my hips, then whimper as I come down from the best orgasm of my life.

Trigger drops my thighs as he slumps down on my body, then clutches my face with hands that smell like me, plundering my mouth with his tongue, mashing his lips against mine.

My fingernails dig into his back at his frenzied attack, and then something switches off, and his kisses gentle, his bruising grip on my cheeks become a cradle and his gaze softens. "You are...", he breathes as he searches the depth of my eyes. "I don't know. There aren't enough words in the world that can begin to describe how amazing you are."

I stroke his cheek and for once in my life, I grope for words. "I... you... us...."



“Yeah,” he replies with a soft smile. “Exactly.” He helps me up and my knees buckle but he catches me. He picks me up and walks over to a wall where he slides down until he’s on his ass, holding me on his lap.

I take a deep breath. “Was it good?” I stretch my neck back so I can see his face. He makes me this way, vulnerable, needy for reassurance. I don’t understand it, maybe don’t like it, but I need the validation.

“Fuck, baby. You’re the best.”

I crawl off his lap and slump next to him, splaying my legs out in front of me. “So are you.”

We mutely let the moment wash over us, then he says, “I’m not joking about us getting married, baby. I’m gonna buy you a giant diamond and we’re gonna have a wedding.”

I cuddle into him, splaying a hand on his muscled abdomen, laying my head against his chest, listening to his heartbeat under his ear. “I will. I do. I want to get married to you too.”

He hugs me close, then reaches for my glasses. “I didn’t know you wore glasses.” He props them on his face and blinks down at me.

“Yes. Slightly myopic.”

“I love them.” His hot breath brushes the top of my head. “Love you.” It’s an uncomfortable admission, but I eat it up.

“I love you too, Trigger. So much it hurts.”

He chuckles. “You know I’ve never said those words to anyone before.”

I laugh, thankful he’s lightened the mood. “I haven’t either.” It’s not a lie. I’ve never been in love, never been told it either. Frankly, before Trigger, I never expected to hear the words. I swallow the tears forming in my throat as I think of who I am and realize until I met this man, this biker, I was never enough. Now, for the first time in my life, I feel complete.

There's nothing more to say and yet so much to discuss. "I need a drink," I tell him as I slowly climb to my feet. I feel his lovemaking everywhere. He's marked me, owned me, made me his. I don't need a diamond. Well, that's not true. I need his diamond. I need him.

"I do too," he says as he follows me upright. "Take me to your bar."

My so-called bar is Wendy's bottom drawer on the reception desk and I pour a couple of shots into specimen glasses as Trigger carries a reception chair around the desk and straddles it at the same time I sit in the office chair.

"Here's to us," he says as we clink glasses and knock it back.

"Another?" I ask in a voice made husky by the liquor.

"Yeah." He grins, then slams the second shot as I sip mine. He rolls the empty glass between the magnificent fingers that just moments ago were inside me.

I have a realization as my eyes crawl over him. "I've never seen you naked."

He laughs. "I haven't seen you stripped down either." He walks his fingers across the desk then slides them over my breast. Of course, my nipple peaks. "Should we rectify that?"

Oh, I want to. I so want to. "Yes. I want to see everything."

He whips his T-shirt over his head and my eyes feast on his body. Tattoos—skulls, snakes, weapons, & roses riddle his slightly furred torso. And his nipples, oh my god.... Rings of gold, exactly like his penis piercing, wink at me. "You are so hot," I say on a weak breath as I tug one of the rings.

He catches my hand and moves it away from his chest. "You up for another fuck already, baby? 'cause if you keep doin' that, you'll get one."

My pussy burns at the thought of my teeth tugging those piercings while he impales me with his cock, but my body cries out for mercy. I find myself blushing as I admit, "I might need a small intermission."

He crosses his arms, drawing my eyes to his magnificent bi-ceps. Maybe if we go slow, carefully. But no. We'll start that way and then combust. There's nothing gentle about my man and my body pulses at the thought.

He laughs like he knows what I'm thinking. "We'll have a lifetime, gorgeous."

"Yeah," I sigh, taking a sip of scotch. "I want a big wedding. Designer gown, white roses, white everything. My mom will want that too."

He frowns and I think we're about to have our first fight, but he surprises me by saying, "Then I better meet the parents."

I can't contain the brilliant smile that forms on my lips. This man, my man, isn't afraid of anything including walking into a den of vipers. "Yeah. I guess you should. And I'd like to meet your family too."

"It's just me and my old man," he replies as his eyes stroke over me. It's not a smouldering gaze though. I see the doubt in the furrow of his forehead, the small frown on his lips. "Me and him, we're not your people."

"You are my people, lover," I tell him and then punctuate it with a whiskey-flavoured kiss. "You are the only people I want."

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

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# Trigger



I park my bike on the concrete pavement of the driveway of my dad's house in Reno. There are ancient cracks in it, weeds claiming them, a mirror of the overgrown yard, all dandelions and junk. The house that I grew up in is a shack surrounded by other shacks in a part of Reno that no one gives a fuck about. Didn't matter then and it don't matter now.

I never had much when I was a kid except a few friends and parents that didn't hate me. I had a superman complex back then, always thinkin' I could help change the shit area we lived in. I thought I'd become a lawyer or advocate or something, but after mom offed herself when I was fifteen, me and the old man kinda fell apart. Dad quit talkin' and I lost interest in tryin' to save the world. We both started drinking more than we should. I was into the soft drugs, and finally dropped out of school at 17. Rocky and I were friends at the time and as soon as he got vested, he sponsored me. The Jury straightened me out and I straightened my dad out.

The old man's sittin' in his usual chair on the porch as I approach. It's an old recliner, the once black leather so faded in places it looks like a jersey cow. I offer him money to replace it, offer to move him into a better neighbourhood, but he says, "I was born here and I'm gonna die here. I never took handouts from anyone and I'm not about to start."

He lives on a government pension that keeps him in groceries and beer. Keeps his clunker of a car runnin' and insured, lets him drink with his friends at the neighborhood pub once a week.

He never wants anything from me except new shoes, which I get him for his birthday, Father's Day, and Christmas. "A man's gotta have good shoes," he says whenever one of those days rolls around.

"Hey," I say as I amble up to the porch with my fingers tucked into the top of my jean pockets. With all the shit that's been going down with the Jury, I haven't seen him in a while.

He nods at me. "Beer's in the fridge. Grab me one while you're in there."

I step inside the time capsule that I grew up in. Dad keeps it neat, but there's dust everywhere and the floor needs sweeping. He won't let me hire him a housekeeper and I don't do that kind of domestic shit for anyone. He wouldn't let me anyway.

The fridge is empty except for beer, cream for his coffee, and leftover lasagna, the kind from the freezer that you stick in a microwave. He never was a cook – that was mom's job. After she died, the frozen food section of the supermarket became our hunting grounds.

I grab two Buds and head back outside, handing him one and then popping the top on mine as I sit down gingerly in a weather-beaten lawn chair. I'm not a lightweight and the rusted legs protest.

"Cheers, my boy," dad says as he raises his can in the air and we clink them together, then take a long draught. We're father and son, there's no doubt, although it's hard to tell since I'm covered in ink and hair. He's got a couple of small tats, a grizzled shadow of a beard and short grey hair that's starting to fall out. It bodes well for me in terms of keeping my fur cap for another 30 plus years. He's 62 but looks older. Life's been hard on him.

I pull a smoke from my pack, offer him one, which he takes, then I light both.

He coughs as he inhales. "Should quit this poison," he rasps as he flicks an ash.

“Me too.” I take a drag. I smoke a few a day. Maybe ten, sometimes less, sometimes more. Depends on how busy I am. But he’s right. I should quit.

“Yeah. Before your lungs turn to shit.”

“Yeah.”

Silence settles between us, but it’s companionable. I’m not a quiet guy, but around my dad I don’t have much to say, mostly because he don’t. I take another swallow of my beer.

“You eat?” he asks.

I shrug. “I’ll eat later.”

He smirks. “Got a girl yet?”

These are the two questions he always asks.

And I always answer the same way, except today I surprise him. “Yeah, I think I do.”

He shifts in his recliner so he’s almost facing me. “You shittin’ me, Casper?”

I snort out a chuckle. “Wait’ll you see her. She’s gorgeous from her toes to the top of her head.” I pause as I think about her. “I haven’t seen the arches of her feet yet, but soon, I’m thinking.”

“Not like you to be turned by a pretty face,” he grunts as he settles back in his chair. “You got dozens falling over you.”

I don’t bring girls home to dad, but I don’t sugarcoat my life. He knows who I am and what I do. He knows I’m a whore. “This one’s different. She’s more than a pretty face.”

“Not tappin’ her yet?”

What a ridiculous question. “Of course, I am.” I think about Evanee. “I’m no trophy so I gotta figure out how to make her want to stay. She’s confident, smart, and knows what she wants. Gets it too.” I grin. “I can’t really figure it out myself.”

The old man laughs. “Now she, I gotta meet.”

Fuck. This was why I was dropping by, but lookin' at my old man, the overgrown yard, the shack I grew up in, I start doubting myself. "She a veterinarian, got degrees and shit."

"Too good for your old man then?" He tries to sound casual, but there's a hurt undertone.

"Nah," I say, deciding if I have to meet her fucking county club parents, then she can slum with me for a while. Maybe she needs to know where I come from before we're settled. Maybe I need to know how she's gonna be around my pops before I get in too deep. Maybe she's not perfect. Then what?

"I'll set something up," I tell him.

He grins and I see light in his dirty dishwasher eyes. "I'll cook."

I groan and slap my forehead with the palm of my hand. "I want you to meet her, not poison her."

He laughs. "I'll throw something decent in the oven."

"Fairs fair, I guess. I gotta meet her parents and they'll make me eat some of that goose liver pate shit."

"She's posh then."

I hear the same doubt in his voice that I had a minute ago, but it's a done deal. "As they come."

He runs a critical eye over me. "You meetin' her uppity parents lookin' like that?"

I'm offended as I look down at myself. Sure, the jeans need a wash and the boots are worn, but the T-shirt's fresh out of the laundry basket. "Of course not. I'll change my clothes, leave my cut at home." I think about it. "Take a shower."

"Get a fuckin' haircut," he growls as he stabs a finger at my head.

I open my mouth, then close it. Cut my hair? "Are you fuckin' nuts? I don't do that for anyone."

It's like he hasn't heard me. "And shave off that poodle you got on your face."



I touch my beard. My face hasn't seen the light of day in six years. "I don't think I can."

"You better or her parents will hate you on sight and she might not wanna be with someone they don't like. Besides it'll make them respect you more."

"So would my gun. Maybe I'll just bring it to dinner." I drain my beer and crush the can between my hands.

Dad grunts as he faces forward again. "Cut the hair, shave, get a decent pair of jeans. You might have the girl right now, but if you wanna keep her, you gotta respect her."

He shuts the line of conversation down and I let him. For all I know, I'm so ugly under the beard that Evanee will take one look at me and run for the hills. I'll never have sex again.

We're quiet for a moment, then dad says, "What else goin' on with you? Do I gotta start watchin' my back again?"

I think about it. I try to bring him in when the Jury's in lockdown, but he refuses. "It's my time to die when it's my time to die." He's not that old, but I get it. He gave up on life when mom did. At least he stuck around, though I'm not always sure it was because of me. Still, I'm one of the lucky ones – some of my brothers had it a whole lot worse.

"You should always watch your back, old man," I reply as I toss the crushed beer can on the pile that's already there. "We have more fuckin' enemies than you have hemorrhoids."

That gets him chuckling. "Another beer?" he nods to the empty can.

"Can't," I tell him as I stand. "Gotta get a haircut."

"Won't recognize you if you do but lookin' forward to seein' your ugly puss." He pauses as he contemplates me. "Bring the girl over soon."

I grin. "I'll let you know when."

After I leave, I drive around for a while. My bike is my solace, but I'm not as obsessed as some of the guys. When I joined the Jury, I didn't have a sled and Hangman bitched

about that until I got one. He said I'd be a prospect until I showed up with a Harley.

I scrimped and saved and I'll admit, rolled a few assholes in Reno until I could afford a rusted old bucket of shit Harley that someone had stashed in a back yard. The fuckin' thing wasn't even runnin' but I walked it into the clubhouse to my brothers' applause. It got me my cut.

Jawbone got it runnin' for me and once I was part of the club, I earned enough to buy a new one. I didn't though. I bought a used one in honour of my upbringing. Nothing shiny or precious for me. If it can't take a beatin' it don't deserve to be rode.

An hour of delaying, I finally get the courage to follow my old man's advice. I roll into Sagebrush, stoppin' at the first place I see. It isn't until I'm inside and being stared at by seven women of various ages, shapes and color, that I realise I should have went lookin' for a barber.

A woman of about forty saunters up to the counter. "Can I help you, gorgeous?" she asks without a trace of fear. She's wearing a tag on her chest with the name Annie on it.

Too late to back out now. I'm not about to lose face in front of a bunch of women. "Yeah," I grunt. "Need a haircut and a clean-up on the beard."

Her face lights up, but then falls when she looks at her appointment book. "I don't have room until four o'clock."

Relief hits me like a five-ton truck until a woman older than Rocky's grandma pipes up from her chair in the waiting area. "Annie, he can have my appointment. Clearly the young man needs some TLC and I don't mind waiting."

There's a general murmur from the other women and a big smile from Annie. "You're a doll, Laura. I'll discount you."

I try to get Laura to change her mind. "Don't wanna put you out."

"Oh honey," she says with a shit-eatin' grin on her face that rivals mine just before I go down on my girl. "I wanna see the handsome under your beard."

“Mmm hmmm,” says a beauty a few years older than me. She’s one of the hairdressers and has an ass on her that I’d have tapped in a minute a few weeks ago. My dick’s droopin’ though, knowing the best ass in town belongs to Evanee and that’s the only ass I’ll be tappin’ for the rest of my life.

Before I can run like the coward I am, Annie drags me to the back of the shop and shoves me into a chair that backs onto a sink. “You’re gonna need a wash before we get started. Hair and beard.”

She whips a bib with Velcro fasteners around my neck that covers me from my arms down to my knees. I get a sense of vertigo as she reclines the chair and shoves my head back into the sink. I have this horrible feelin’ I’m about to get my throat slit, but she starts sprayin’ the tepid water on my hair, then dumps some shampoo on it and rubs it in. Fuck if it don’t feel good to have her fingers massage my scalp.

“What kind of haircut are you having?” a voice that’s smoked too many cigarettes filters over to me.

The woman with the ass says, “I think it should all go.”

“Whoa,” I choke out. The thought of not havin’ anything on the top of my head would bring me to my knees if I weren’t being held hostage by Annie and her magical fingers.

“No Jasmine, that’s too much.” This voice has a soft sweet lilt to her tone that makes me think of Haley, King’s ol’ lady. “I think he’d look gorgeous with maybe an inch on top and the sides shaved. The beard goes but leave a sexy shadow.”

The fuckin’ beard goes? Don’t I get a say?

There’s a collective sigh around the room as Annie sits me up and wraps a towel around my head. “Don’t need to wash the beard, I guess, if it’s all coming off.” She shifts her attention.

“Daisy, gonna need your chair, if you don’t mind moving to Bab’s. You have another twenty minutes before the dye gets rinsed.”

“No problem,” Daisy says as she gathers her bib with her hand and switches chairs. She’s the one with the soft voice.

Pretty too, about 50, her hair in curlers with a bunch of white papers.

“You gettin’ a dye job?” I ask because I figure I need to say something.

“Highlights,” she smiles. “Goddamnit, Babs,” she says to the middle-aged woman who’s fussing with the rollers. “Of all the times to be married.”

Babs laughs loudly. “I told you to divorce the bugger.”

“I should’ve listened.”

Shit, now they’re objectifying me.

Annie steers me to the chair and twists it so I’m looking in the mirror.

“I got an ugly mug,” I say, thinking now’s the time to escape, towel in my hair and all.

“Let me see,” Jasmine says as she puts down her scissors and turns on... I mean... to me. She shoves her hands in my beard and feels around my face, chin, and neck.

“What the hell are you doing?” I growl, thinking to swat her hands away but I’m immobilized by the fucking bib.

“Don’t worry, honey,” Laura says from the waiting room. “Jasmine’s a face whisperer.”

There’s a chorus of agreement.

I forget myself. “What the fuck’s a face whisperer?”

“Jasmine can feel a face and know just like that what works.” The lady with the smoker’s voice says from two chairs over. She’s gettin’ her nails done by a small woman who’s almost jailbait.

I catch the girl’s eye and she smiles and quirks her eyebrows at me. She ain’t flirtin’ though and I feel offended. I’m in the fuckin’ twilight zone, I decide. It’s my charm though, that gets attention and for some reason, it’s gone missing. “Mrs. Jennings is right,” she says as she nods towards her client. “Jasmine’s the best.”

Jasmine steps back. “There’s a fine face under all that hair.” She looks me over from my boots to my ripped jeans, which is all she can see ‘cause the rest of me is covered by the bib. “It’ll go nice with that fine body.”

“Hey!” I protest with ironic offence. “Kind of unprofessional talkin’ about me like I’m a piece of meat.”

“You love it, baby,” Jasmine says to the loud laughter of the women.

I’m thinkin’ I’ve just about had enough when I hear the snip of the scissors and see a large chunk of my hair fall to the floor. Fuck!

“There’s no turning back now,” Annie says like she’s reading my mind. I catch her eyes in the mirror, and become afraid, very afraid. I’ve become their project, and I won’t get to leave until they’re ready to let me go.

“Does he have scars?” Laura from the waiting room asks Jasmine.

“You could ask me,” I say with a note of irritation.

“You might lie,” Mrs. Jennings observes.

“No scars,” Jasmine confirms.

“Then why’re you hidin’ that mug under all that hair?” Babs asks.

I start to tell her it ain’t any of her business, but Mrs. Jennings gets out in front of me. “It’s clear he’s a biker.”

Annie pats my back as she snips my hair off. “Hell’s Jury, his vest says.”

“It’s a cut,” I mumble. “Not a vest.”

“Just like your hair,” Jasmine says to general titters.

The young girl looks up from buffing Mrs. Jennings nails. “He’s looking better already.”

“He was pretty gorgeous to begin with, Elsa,” Laura observes.

Then horror sets in as Annie grabs my beard and starts cutting it off.

“Fuck,” I almost scream as I jerk in my chair.

“Don’t be moving around like that,” Jasmine says. “Or you’re going to end up with a scar on your perfect face.”

Once everything is fuckin’ short, the trimmers come out. It’s too fuckin’ late to change my mind at this point, so I close my eyes thinkin’ I’m in a nightmare. Any fuckin’ minute I’m gonna wake up.

*It’s for Evanee, my dick reminds me.*

“Don’t you think he should take off his shirt?”

The clippers stop. “Mrs. Jennings’s right. You’re gonna itch like the devil.”

“Take my fuckin’ shirt off?”

“Yes,” Babs agrees. “Otherwise, the little hairs are going to get down your back.”

“Besides,” Daisy says. “I heard you’re supposed to treat those vests with respect. Getting’ hair all over them....” She tsks.

I’m thinkin’ any minute now they’re gonna start stuffin’ dollar bills in my jeans. “Really? You’re not just sayin’ that because you wanna see me stripped down?”

“Well, not entirely,” Laura says with a grin.

I stand, sling the bib off, then shrug out of my cut. “Gotta hang this somewhere,” I tell Annie.

She takes it with the reverence it deserves and carries it over to a hook on the wall next to a bunch of bibs and places it there. “Want me to hang the T-shirt too?”

“Nah,” I say with a grin as I whip it over my head. Call me vain, but I’m rock hard. Abs, chest, arms. The room seems to agree with me as there’s murmurings of approval and some gasping.

“You ever thought about becoming a stripper?” Mrs. Jennings says as she stares at my chest.

“Best ink I’ve ever seen,” Jasmine observes with an intake of breath.

“Are those nipple rings?” Laura asks stretching her neck to see me.

Jasmine nods at Laura. “Yep, they are.” To me she, asks, “Did they hurt getting them?”

“I have a nipple ring,” Mrs. Jennings announces with a wink.

“Girl, you do not!” Elsa replies, swatting Mrs. Jennings on the shoulder.

“Do they really give extra pleasure?” Daisy asks, wide-eyed.

Not to be outdone, Babs adds, “Are you pierced anywhere else?”

“I bet he has a Prince Albert piercing,” Mrs. Jennings smirks.

“What’s that?” Laura asks.

“A piercing on his penis,” Daisy says with a blush.

“Why on earth would you do that?” Annie asks me as if it’s a foregone conclusion that I have one.

“It must’ve hurt like a bitch,” Jasmine says.

I don’t confirm or deny. My dick and its accessories are between me and Evanee.

“Watch the language, Jas,” Annie tuts, but she’s ignored by all the women in the room.

“I like the entire effect,” Daisy announces. Her eyes are raking over me in a way that makes me preen. “The tats, the piercings, the bike.” She shivers.

“Sit,” Annie commands, shoving me back into the chair.

“I have a tattoo on my ass,” Mrs Jennings says. “It’s a pirate with a parrot. He’s naked with a penis hanging down to

his knees.”

“Why on earth would you choose something like that?” Laura asks, half horrified and half in awe.

“Because, when my ungrateful kids put me in the nursing home and I’m getting’ my ass wiped, I want to shock the shit out of the young girls who think old people never had a life.”

I laugh. “There a Mr. Jennings? My dad could use a woman like you in his life.”

“He look like you, honey?”

“Better,” I reply.

The clippers spring to life again and Annie goes to town, shovin’ my silver chain out of the way.

“Yeah, like that,” Jasmine says as I watch the side of my head get shorn almost down to the skin. Annie does the other side, then turns off the clippers and crops the hair on the top.

I turn my head both ways as I examine myself in the mirror. Can’t say it looks half-bad.

Neither can the women. “Beautiful,” Laura breathes.

Next goes the rest of my beard. Annie leaves a dark shadow of a moustache and sideburns and a stripe of exposed skin from my pseudo-mohawk past the front of my ear, under my chin and around the other side. She turns off the clippers, then lifts my chin up with her fingers. “See how it complements the tattoos?”

I do see. “I like it,” I tell her because it’s the truth.

“It’s sexy as hell,” Elsa says as her eyes stroke over me.

Annie brushes the hairs off on the back of my neck and shoulders. “Whoever the lucky girl is, she’s gonna love you, honey,” she says proudly.

“Stand up and show us,” Laura says. She moves next to Mrs. Jennings as I oblige.

“I know what I’m gonna be thinking about tonight,” says Babs with a quirk of her lips.



“Mmmhmm,” Jasmin agrees.

I glance in the mirror and feel my cockiness return. “Glad I could help you ladies out.”

Annie hands me my T-shirt and I tease them by slipping it on slowly. She holds my cut as I shrug into it.

My girls sigh.

“I’ve had the best day of my life,” Daisy says.

“You’re going to need maintenance,” Babs tells me. “Every six to eight weeks you come back for a trim.”

I grin, pay Annie, giving her a big tip, kiss Laura on the cheek for giving up her appointment for me and bid the rest goodbye.

I step outside and take a deep breath. It’s a fuckin’ good life.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

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# Trigger



I run a couple of important errands then head to the clubhouse.

Crank refuses to open the gates for me when I drive up.

“Who the fuck are you?” he asks as he stands on the other side of the chain link, his arms crossed, his legs spread. Little fuck thinks he’s a tough guy.

“Who the fuck do you think I am?” I growl contemplating the six ways I’m gonna kill the asshole.

He looks me over from foot to head, then sees my bike. “You stole Trigger’s bike.”

Man, this guy is three cards short of a full deck. I can’t figure out where Hash dug him up from. “I’m Trigger. Have you never seen a guy with a haircut?”

Crank still looks leery. “Sounds like you. Tats are the same, but Trig would never cut his hair and beard.”

“You’re a fuckin’ idiot.”

Jawbone sees the exchange and wanders over. “Well lookee here, Trigger’s twin brother.” He pauses. “The better lookin’ one.”

“Fuck you, Jawbone,” I snarl. “Tell this jackass to let me in.”

The jackass in question says to no one in particular. “Trigger has a twin?”

Jawbone glances at him with a slight eyeroll, then turns his attention back to me, rubbing his chin as he looks me up and down. “Guess we could let you in seein’ as you’re family and all.”

He nods to Crank, who still looks skeptical, but opens the gates anyway.

I rip through on my bike and find a place to park. Judging by the number of scoots in the yard, it looks like a lot of Jury members are hanging around today.

Steppin’ inside, loud voices and laughter greet my ears, but as I walk into the main room, the conversation dies. Three of the passarounds are clustered around Hash and Rider. Zero is tending bar and Haley, Jess, and Verity are on barstools talking to him. Fender, his wife, Chrissy, and Rocky are playing pool while Blood watches them. The Vegas prospect, Stark, is talking to Reaper and Mothman. The kids, Max and Sean, are playing a video game while Brielle and Ash look on. Red’s next to Max, talking and pointin’ at the TV screen like he’s giving instructions.

Eight is standing in a corner talking to his kid, Oscar, and by the intensity of the conversation, it looks like they’re having a disagreement. Eight catches sight of me, does a double-take, and then uncharacteristically, starts laughing. This sets the rest off and the insults and cat calls at my expense come fast and furious.

I tuck my fingers into the pockets of my jeans and bark, “What the fuck! You never seen a guy with a haircut before?”

“It ain’t the haircut, buddy. It’s the shaved cunt on your face,” fuckin’ Hash says.

“Is that what it is?” Rocky replies with a shit-eatin’ grin. “Thought it was one of those hairless Mexican pussies.”

“They’re dogs, not cats. The Mexican ones,” Verity snickers.

“Are you sure?” Rocky says.

Jess nods with a huge smile. “Yeah. It’s a dog.”

“I think there’s a Sphinx cat,” Haley giggles.

“Doesn’t have the same cache,” Verity replies.

Reaper’s chokin’ on his laughter, but manages to say, “No, it sure as hell doesn’t.”

Hangman rounds the corner with a I’m-gonna-fuck-someone-up scowl, stops short and stares. “What the fuck did you do?”

Christ, the way he’s lookin’ at me, you’d think I killed the goddamned cat. “Got a shave and a haircut,” I say, crossing my arms defensively. “Ain’t nothin’ special. Reaper and Eight don’t got anymore hair than I do.” I nod towards Coyote who’s followed Hangman into the room. “And that bastard wears a rodent on his head.”

Hangman looks like he just bit into a lemon. “Why would you do something so stupid?”

This is one of those Trigger-should-have-kept-his-fucking-mouth-shut moments. “Gonna meet Evanee’s parents.” Even before the words are out, heat creeps up my neck.

Everyone erupts in laughter.

“Never thought I’d see the day Trigger was pussy-whipped,” Blood mutters, shaking his head like it’s a cardinal sin to clean up before ya meet the relatives.

They think it’s funny, but then they’ve never seen Evanee’s pussy. Of course, it’s gonna stay that way. “We’re gettin’ married. Big wedding.” To Rocky, I sneer. “You’re gonna be the bridesmaid.”

Deflection works, because now Rocky’s the centre of attention and I get a chance to do what I came here for.

I head over to Coyote. “Gotta talk to you,” I mumble, though no one can hear except Hangman. “In private.”

Coyote motions towards his operations centre while Hangman furrows his forehead. “She’s fuckin’ leadin’ you around by your dick. Next thing, you’re gonna be shinin’ your boots and dressing like this asshole.” He jerks his thumb at Coyote.

It's the lamest thing I've ever heard come out of Hangman's mouth and Coyote and I exchange amused glances. It's not often Hangman gets flustered and I'm proud to be the one to do it.

"I'll probably start wearing a suit and tie, Captain."

"Fuckin' fuck up," he mutters as he stalks off to his office.

Coyote and I head to the ops room.

The operations centre is where Coyote does the tech stuff for the Jury. It's full of screens, drones, bomb-making equipment and other shit. Can't figure out most of what he does, but then again, I don't have the brain-cells my brother does. None of us do.

"What's up?" Coyote asks as he drops into his chair and leans back, hands behind his head.

I park my ass on one of the tables and it groans under my weight. "You still got your place here in Sagebrush?"

He nods. "Yeah. Haven't gotten around to selling it." Until shit hit the fan a few weeks ago, we all thought Coyote lived in Sagebrush, but turns out he has a posh penthouse in Reno that he calls home.

"Wonder if I can borrow it for a couple of weeks while me and Evanee sort out our living arrangements."

He shrugs. "You can have it."

That's him in a nutshell. He's got more money than Elon Musk and Bill Gates combined. He doesn't throw it around or rubs our noses in it, but like other rich assholes he don't get how the little people live.

"I'm not a fucking charity case," I say gruffly. "I need a place to park for a month or two is all."

Coyote sits up. "You could buy it."

I know the fuckin' townhouse will be posh and expensive, and while I'm not exactly broke, I can be a free spender, so don't have the deep pockets some of my brothers do. Coyote's idea of what I can afford will differ widely from mine.

Still, I think about it. “Can’t make the decision alone. Evanee’s got to see it.”

He shrugs. “Coming from her background, she’s going to like it. You don’t have to worry about that. And you’ll be doing me a favour by taking it off my hands.” He hesitates, then says, “I know you’re not a charity case, but this isn’t about that. I don’t need the fucking thing, don’t want it, so why can’t I give it away?”

Jesus, for a guy who’s supposed to be a genius, he can be an idiot sometimes. “What I’m saying is I don’t want to be the asshole who mooches off his friends.”

“It’s not mooching, for god’s sake. It’s a gift.”

I roll my eyes. “Thanks, Santa. And what do you want for Christmas this year?”

He throws his hands up. “Okay, I get it. Rent it then. If you and Evanee like it enough to buy it, we’ll have the conversation then.”

That seems fair. “What do you want for rent?”

He ponders for a moment. “You’re going to have to lease it for a year.”

“Whatever, man. A year’s lease. How much?”

“I’m thinking a dollar a month, three months damage deposit.” He furrows his brow like he’s counting in his head. “\$15 in total.” He pauses. “You break the lease, you forfeit all the money.”

“I fuckin’ give up,” I exclaim as I pull out my wallet out and open it. “Here.” I plunk a \$10 and a \$5 on the table. “One year, paid up. Now give me the key, I have things to do.”

He grins like he’s just beat me at poker, then opens the top drawer of his desk and pulls out two sets of keys and some remote-control door openers. “Gate,” he says pointing. “Garage, front door. I’ll get the intercom at the gate set to Casper Horne.” He scribbles on a note and passes it to me. “The code for the alarm. It’s part of the rent. So’s the cable, power, water, and sewer. Gardener and building maintenance

are part of the HOA payment, which is also covered by your rental fee.”

I rub the bridge of my nose. “You’re a hard bargainer, asshole.”

He smirks. “You have no idea.”



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

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# Evanee



I'm locking up for the day when I get a text from Trigger.

Hi gorgeous.

My stomach does a belly flip.

Hi handsome.

Need you to meet me here.

He sends me an address.

Okay. What for?

Curious kitten. You'll see when you get here.

I smile at his endearment.

Mysterious. I like it. Shall I come now?

Your clit can wait. I'll look after it when you get here.

I suck in a breath at how primal he is.

I suppose I can wait.

No supposing about it. Move your pretty ass.

I look up from my phone to see Wendy watching me.

“The boyfriend?” she says with a knowing glint in her eye.

“Yeah.” It’s possible I sighed it.

She shuffles a few things around on her desk, looking at them, not me. “Going well then?”

I’m not sure what she’s asking. Usually, she isn’t coy. “Yes. It’s going really well.” I pause. “What’s up, Wendy?”

She purses her lips. “The guy’s hot, but he’s a smooth talker. I know. I’ve met a million in my day. He’s in a different food group than you are. You’re used to suits and five-star hotels. That’s not who he is. He charms, flirts.” She shrugs. “He’s the bad boy type that all the girls want to tame.”

I never would have thought it, but Wendy has a mom complex. “I don’t want to tame him, Wendy. I like it on the wild side.”

She glares at me. “You know exactly what I’m talking about. I don’t want to see you get hurt. I’m don’t have time for that shit. Mopping up the tears, being reassuring. It’s bullshit.”

Now there’s the Wendy I know and love. “I don’t know how I know it, but Trigger is it for me and I’m it for him. It’s weird, but I knew it the moment I set eyes on him. We’re getting married and living happily ever after.”

Wendy’s lips reluctantly tug upward as she picks up her pack of cigarettes, takes one out and puts it between her lips, then realizes what she’s doing and replaces it in the pack. “As long as you’re sure, I’m happy for you.” She shoves the pack in her purse. “But if he hurts you, I’ll kick his ass.”

“He won’t.” I start towards the back. “I have to change and get going. He gets impatient.”

Lullaby neighs and Wendy and I look at each other.

Wendy states the obvious. “We gotta solve the horse problem before some asshole reports us.”

“Yeah, I know.”

After I change into a sleek Stella McCartney mini-dress and matching heels, I grab the keys to my Beamer and head to

the address Trigger texted me.

Sagebrush is a town of about ten thousand people, enough that there are neighbourhoods for the lower income, the middle-class, and the wealthy. Where I'm headed is definitely in the city's premier neighbourhood.

I double check the address as I pull up to the front gates of an elegant townhouse community. Yes, I'm where I'm supposed to be. Per Trigger's instructions I press the name Casper Horne on the intercom. Almost immediately, Trigger answers. "Babe. That you?"

His voice invokes a heat in my belly that's becoming very familiar. "Yes," I reply realizing Trigger's never told me his real name. "Is this Casper Horne?" My voice is throaty with promises of hot, hot, sex.

"Yeah, it is, baby. Get your precious ass moving."

The gates open slowly, and I drive in.

The grounds are beautiful, with green grass and magnificent trees, hedges, and flowering shrubs that defy Nevada's desert climate. The block of brick veneer townhouses I'm approaching are three-stories high with grand entrances and Juliet balconies. Each one has a two-car garage and a well tended yard on both sides of the walk leading up to the front door.

A shiver finds its way up my spine at how perfect everything is.

I pull into the driveway and park my Beamer. Trigger is waiting on the front steps and as I turn off the car, he stalks towards me in that imposing way he has of walking. He opens my door, pulls me out of the car, then shoves me up against it and grinds his groin into my pelvis as he cups my face and kisses me hard. "Miss me?" he asks when he comes up for air.

I'm almost speechless as I stare at him. "What did you do?" I run my hand over the dark whiskers on his face, then through the hair on the top of his head. I even tug at the ring in his ear though I've already done that several times in the past few days. He was handsome before, but no beard, short hair,

the tats on his throat exposed, the heavy silver chain around his neck, he's rocketed his sexiness into the stratosphere.

He loses some of the cockiness he usually has. "Needed a change. Beautiful girl, new home. Thought I'd get a new me to go with it."

I place a tender kiss on his lips. "You are the sexiest man alive, lover. In both your 'before' and 'after' pictures, but I have to say that you turn me on so much I could fuck you right here on the driveway."

His grins the grin of a happy man. "Not yet. We're too new to the neighbourhood."

He grabs my hand and leads me up the steps and through the double doors of the townhouse into a magnificent front entrance.

I'm bewildered and in awe. "I don't understand," I say as I look around with wide eyes.

"I rented it from a Jury brother. We needed a place, thought this would work." He pulls me in for a hard hug, his hand sliding down my waist and cupping my ass. "If it's too early to move in together, you don't gotta. I want you to, but I get it if you're not ready."

He's excited in a way I haven't seen him before and my heart gets giddy. There are so many facets to him that I'm discovering and every single one of them portrays a man who loves hard.

"It's not too early," I reply breathlessly as I untangle myself from him. Heavy petting can wait until after I've seen my new home.

"This place." He sweeps his hand around the fully furnished and beautifully decorated townhome. "It's temporary. A year's lease, but we can walk away at anytime. Or buy it, Coyote says. Up to us." He pauses. "Up to you."

Up to me? I already know this place is perfect. "Show me around."

He laces his fingers through mine and takes me on a tour starting at the upper floor where there's a rooftop terrace with outdoor furniture, a barbecue cove, and a hot tub. It's magnificent. The three bedrooms are grand and well proportioned. The huge master includes an ensuite and dressing room and the walk-in closet takes my breath away. It has floor to ceiling cubbyholes for shoes! I'd weep if it wouldn't ruin my makeup.

The main floor has all the requisite rooms: a fully equipped kitchen with a breakfast bar and central island, a huge office with French doors, an entertainment room, and of course, a dining and living room. The ten-foot ceilings and oak flooring add a stunning elegance. I shiver as I look around me. This truly is the home of my dreams.

The tour ends in the living room. I pout. "I thought we could detour to the bedroom. After all, isn't our goal to see each other naked?"

He seems nervous. "Later, babe."

He almost pushes me onto the sofa, then pulls a bottle of red wine from the bar cabinet and unscrews the cap. "I hope you like it," he says as he adds a few ounces to two glasses. He picks up the bottle and reads the label. "Says it's a Meritage. Canadian." He hands me one of the glasses and sits next to me on the sofa. "I couldn't believe Canada made wine. Thought it was too cold there to grow grapes, but the guy at the wine store said it was one of their best. Ninety something points."

He hands me one of the glasses, takes a sip of his and makes a face. "Fuckin' knew that guy was lying. The only good thing from Canada is the poutine."

"And Mikhael Hale."

His eyes narrow. "Who the fuck is Mikhael Hale?"

"He's a premier fashion designer. He's dressed Beyonce, Winnie Harlow, and Bella and Gigi Hadid." I smile as I take a sip of the wine. "The guy at the store wasn't lying, Trigger, but I don't think you really drink wine, do you?"

He takes another mouthful, this time choking as he swallows. “Never in my fuckin’ life, but I’d do anything for you.”

I take his glass and set it on the coffee table. “This wine is wonderful despite its Canadian roots, and if you can’t appreciate it, then I don’t want to share it with you. Go get a beer.”

He grins, gives me a hard kiss and stands. “It’s why I love you. You get me.”

“And I’ve got you.” I take another sip of the wine. It slides down my throat like chocolate on ice cream. “You’re all mine, lover.”

The intercom rings as he pops the top on a can of beer. “Be right back,” he says as he disappears.

I hear murmurs at the front door, then a few minutes later he materializes with several bags in his arms. “Hope you like Chinese,” he says passing by me towards the kitchen.

I trail after him with his beer, my wine glass, and of course the bottle.

“Sit,” he says as he places boxes on the kitchen bar top. “We got chow mien, chop suey, fried rice, ginger beef, lemon chicken, beef and broccoli.” He opens a few more cartons. “Something with cashews and shrimp, steamed rice.” He upends the almost empty bag. “Egg rolls and fortune cookies.”

I stare at the offerings. I’m a girl with a healthy appetite, but even I can’t eat that much. “This is a lot. I should have skipped lunch.”

He grins as he sets a plate in front of me and hands me a set of chopsticks. “I wasn’t sure what you liked so I ordered a bunch of different food.”

He sits next to me, and we dig in. At least he does. I keep looking at the shiny kitchen, the oak hardwood floors, the French doors off the dining room that lead to a lush stone alcove that reminds me of Italy. I’m consumed by the heat from Trigger’s body, his heady scent of soap, engine oil and

musk. His big hands as they dwarf the fork he's holding. The smokiness of his eyes.

I'm in this beautiful townhouse that's ours for at least a year. More if we want it. I grew up on an estate in a huge mansion, lived with a couple of boyfriends who had decent places, shared a dorm room with other students, but I've never had a place of my own.

Now I do and I'm sharing it with a man that makes me bubble with happiness and sets my body on fire.

"You're not eating," he points to my plate with his fork.

I grin. "I'm in love."

"Better be with me," he growls.

I pick up a piece of lemon chicken and hold it in the air. "I am absolutely in love with you, gorgeous, but you only win by a small margin over the shoe shelf in the walk-in closet."

I pop the chicken into my mouth as I watch his grin grow.



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

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# Trigger



I 'm so fuckin' nervous I can barely eat two helpings of Chinese food. I don't think Evanee senses it though because she keeps looking around the kitchen, then craning her neck to look down the hall to the front door, around the corner at the living room, and outside to the little terrace with all the plants.

I've never been this happy in my life. I got the most amazing woman sitting next to me, got her a house she absolutely loves. And she gets who I am. I drink beer, ride a bike, eat Chinese food and she embraces it all.

I want to swipe the cartons off the bar top, lay her on it and eat her out. Who needs food when I've got the most delicious woman in the world sitting next to me? I get a boner and almost hop off my chair and let nature take its course.

But I don't. Not yet, buddy, I say to my dick.

Instead, I pick up the bottle of wine and pour a couple more ounces into her glass.

"Thank you, lover," she says, wiping her lips with a napkin.

"Let me get that for you," I tell her as I capture her chin and press my mouth on hers in a gentle, lingering kiss. My dick's so hard, I'm worried I'm gonna break the zipper on my jeans.

She slides her hand around the back of my neck, pressing me closer, opening her mouth and inviting me in.

Fuck me. I groan and pull back.

Her pretty lips pout. “What’s going on, Trigger?”

I pull at my collar as my stomach coils. Confident, cocky Trigger has left the building. “I’ve got something for you.”

At the garage when we were fucking and I promised her she was it for me, it got real. I’m not worried about our differences. We’re both too cool to expect each other to change. I’m not concerned that she’ll reject the violence in my life, my brothers, my club. She’s already seen that side and she’s still here.

She takes her wine glass as I help her off the barstool and lead her back to the couch in the living room. “Put the wine down. I got something to say.”

Her plump inviting lips pull down into a frown as she looks at the glass then me. “Before we officially move into together, you need to understand, that while I love you more than Coco Chanel, you should never come between me and my red wine.”

I grin and feel less nervous. “Put the fucking wine down, woman. You can have more when we’re done here.”

“Very well,” she replies primly, but with a teasing smile.

I thought about getting down on one knee, but that’s not who I am, and I’m pretty sure a girl eagerly participating in fucking on the hood of a car isn’t either. She may come from a posh background, but she’s got more grit than some of my brothers.

I tug the ring out of my pocket and hold it up. The jeweller told me that it was made of platinum with a 1.01 carat diamond, cut square, with high clarity and color. I took her word for it because I don’t know a fucking thing about engagement rings. “If you don’t like it, we’ll take it back and get something better.”

“I love it!” she breathes as her eyes glaze over. “Because it came from you.” She snatches it from me and slides it on her ring finger, then stretches her hand out in front of her and admires it. “Also, it’s a beautiful ring.”

“It came from Botswana, but the jeweller said it was responsibly sourced.” I pull her head up so she’s looking at me and not the ring. “I got a couple of things to say so I need you to focus on me.”

She glances at me, then the ring and back to me. She frowns. “I’ll try.”

I furrow my brow at her. “You’ll do more than try or I’ll take the ring away from you.”

“Like hell you will,” she replies hiding her hand under her ass. At least she can’t see it anymore.

I clear my throat. “I’m asking you to marry me again. Not when we’ve just had sex or before I get knocked out. I want you to understand I’m not fucking around.”

“I know you aren’t,” she interjects as she blows out a deep breath. Her eyes are bright, and her face is full of anticipation.

I return her beautiful smile. “I never thought about a future before I met you. I just lived day-to-day, slept wherever I ended up, fucked who I wanted to. I never wanted to change before, never wanted to be better.

“Now, with you in my world, I think about shit that matters. Like quittin’ smoking, global warming and where diamonds come from.” I wave my hand around the living room. “I never thought I’d ever want a three-bedroom townhouse in a good neighbourhood close to kindergartens. But now I do.”

I swallow because my throats getting tight. “But only with you. You and me, we’re like the best parts of each other.” I tuck a lock of her hair behind her ear. “I’ll never cheat on you, never hurt you, never leave you. I promise.”

Her eyes get wet, but she blinks it away before it turns into tears. She pulls her hand from under her ass and looks at the ring then meets my eyes. “I’ll never leave you either, Trigger. Never cheat on you. Never hurt you. I will always love you and only you.” She glances down and strokes the ring. “I want a big wedding.”

I take the hand with the diamond and kiss the back of it. “You’ll get one.”

“I’ll always be a vet. Even if we have babies, I won’t stop working.” She’s talking to the ring.

I grab her chin and force her face up. I figure it’s the only way I’ll get her to look at me. “I expect that from you.”

“We’ll have pets. Rescues. I can keep some at the clinic, but some will come home with me.”

I hadn’t thought of that. “Will they eat the furniture or bite my Jury brothers?”

She smiles as her eyes slide back to the ring. “I’ll train them well before I bring them home.”

“No problem then.” I squeeze her hand. “What else?”

She twists her luscious lips. “I like to get my way, but I’ll compromise for you.”

Oh yeah. That reminds me. “One last thing. You’re gonna get out of the habit of flirting with guys and deliberately using your tits and ass to make a point.”

I finally have her full attention. “That’s how I negotiate,” she exclaims. “Or get out of trouble.”

I narrow my eyes as I jerk her body tight against mine. “Not anymore. You need to negotiate, I’ll get you a gun. You need to get out of trouble, you call me. I catch you doin’ anything other than politely talkin’ to other men, I will fucking put you over my knee and spank the living hell out of you.”

Her eyes light up as she kisses me hard. “That’s not exactly a deterrent, you know.”

Fuck me.

In one fluid movement, I shove her down on her back on the couch, yank her dress up to her tits, and tear her panties off. “Spanking will come later. I want dessert now.”

Then I fucking feast on her.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

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## Evanee



For some reason I'm nervous. I've met parents before, but Trigger is so damn cool, I figure his dad must be just as awesome.

We've been living together one whole day and neither Trigger nor I want to wait to set a wedding date. Parental approval doesn't matter to us, but it would be nice to have them on board. I'd really like my dad to walk me down the aisle.

In the driveway, Trigger stops me. "Gotta let you know that mom topped herself when I was fifteen."

That stops me cold. "I think we'll need to talk about your timing. That information might have been helpful before we got here."

He swats me on the ass. "So far my timing's been perfect."

I sigh. I love the man so much I'm willing to break the habit of using my sexuality to get what I want, and though I promised him I wouldn't change him, I might have to have him work on his live-in-the-moment approach to life.

His father is standing on the porch, an older version of the sexy man beside me. He's greying and balding, has a paunch, and isn't as tall as Trigger, but the resemblance is in his broad smile and the way he tucks his fingers into the pockets of his new jeans.

"Dad, this is Evanee, the girl I'm gonna marry," Trigger announces like I'm a brand-new Low Rider Harley. "Evanee, this is my old man, Robert Horne."

Mr. Horne offers me his hand. "Call me Bob. Nice to meet you." He looks past me and gives Trigger a quick wink.

"Hello Bob," I say as I shake his hand. "You can call me Evanee."

"Looks like my boy took my advice. You clean up pretty good, Casper."

I look over the shoulder at my sexy man. "He sure does."

Bob steps back with a wave of his hand. "I got you a new chair to sit in when you're over."

A lovely red high back lawn chair sits next to a significantly older faded blue webbed model with rust on its steel frame.

"Hey," Trigger says as he walks me to my new chair. "I want a new one too."

"Get your own," Bob says as he sits in his recliner. He grins at me. "You're every bit as beautiful as Trigger said."

I took extra time getting dressed this morning. My hair's tied back with a Prada metal hair clip to show off my Swarovski cushion-cut drop earrings and I'm wearing Paul Andrew shiny black platform espadrilles that match my scarlet sleeveless halter neck jumpsuit.

I sit and cross my legs, start to arch my back then stop when Trigger glares. "Thank you for the lawn chair," I say to Bob. The jumpsuit clashes horribly with it, but it's too late to go home and change.

Trigger sits beside me. His chair groans under his weight, and I'm worried it's going to collapse.

"We moved in together, dad. Gettin' married next," he says.

Bob sticks his bottom lip out. "Well, you're grown-ups. You do what you're gonna do. I'm not gonna say different." He sounds just like Trigger right down to his enunciation of words.



“Figured you’d say that,” Trigger says. “We’re gonna have a big wedding.”

The doubt shows on Bob’s face. “Thought you’d wanna run off to Vegas to tie the knot.”

“Nope. I picked the house we’re living in. Evanee gets to decide on the wedding.”

I smile in what I hope is charming and not seductive. “It’s been a dream of mine since I was a little girl.” I want to tell Bob how much I love his son. How he fulfills me like no other man, but I sense that he’s not really the touchy-feely type. “My parents will expect it.”

He abruptly changes the subject. “I got beer. And a bottle of red wine.” He turns to Trigger. “Get it for us, will ya.”

Silence grows as we wait for Trigger. “I like the chair,” I tell him. “Now that I know it’s red, I’ll wear the right color next time I visit.”

His face blanks and he drums his fingers on the arms of his chair while I pretend I’m interested in the house across the street.

Finally, he says, “It’s a good one. Ordered from Amazon. I’ve got the Prime membership, so it arrived overnight.”

“Ah,” I nod. “I’ve ordered vet supplies from Amazon, but not clothes or shoes. It’s difficult to get the size right.”

He leans towards me. “Ain’t that the truth. Casper ordered me some shoes on Father’s Day and had to send them back. They were too tight.”

Finally, a topic we have in common. “Tight shoes are the worst. I once bought a pair of Jimmy Choo Kitten Heels that gave me horrible blisters.” I shudder. “Never again.”

For some reason, that comment shuts down the conversation again.

After a minute of awkward silence, Bob says, “Weather’s been good. Not so hot.”

I nod. “It’s a relief.”

He shifts in his chair. “You say you order vet supplies from Amazon. Get good deals?”

“Sometimes,” I murmur.

“You got the Prime membership?”

“I don’t,” I tell him.

“Well, next time you need supplies, go through me. It’s free shipping and it arrives fast.”

“That’s marvelous,” I exclaim. Given my financial straits, free shipping is a boon.

The screen door slams back against the wall as Trigger comes out carrying the beer, wine and a stemmed glass.

Bob and I sigh in relief.

“You got a nice bottle of red,” Trigger says, winking at his father. “Same taste as I do.”

He hands his dad the beer, sets the wine on a plastic table that’s next to Bob’s chair, and moves it over to me.

“Thank you,” I say, smiling widely as Trigger pours me a glass of the same wine that he bought me the other day.

I take a drink and try to hold the grimace inside. It’s been chilled, but the look of anticipation on Bob’s face keeps me from saying anything. “It’s perfect.” I look at the glass. “These are lovely vintage glasses.”

“Almost twenty years old. Belonged to Casper’s mom.”

Shit and motherfucker and all the other swear words Trigger uses. “Well, they’re lovely,” I repeat lamely.

“Don’t gotta worry about talking about mom,” Trigger says as he rubs my back. “We’re good with it.”

Bob nods. “Ancient history.”

“Good,” I say, still uncomfortable. “Good.”

Bob takes a long swallow of beer, then lowers the can. “I like animals. Was thinking about getting a dog, but don’t know. I can barely look after myself.”

“You do fine lookin’ after yourself,” Trigger interjects.

“You should get a dog. A rescue,” I say warming to the topic. “So many of them need good homes.” I shift slightly in my chair, trying not to arch my back. “And they’re great companions.”

He looks doubtful. “What’d I do with it if I go somewhere?”

“You don’t go anywhere,” Trigger says.

Bob narrows his eyes at Trigger. “I might.”

“It’s an easy solution,” I say. “You’d leave it with us. Or if a dog’s too much trouble, you could get a cat. They can be very affectionate.”

“Dad don’t like cats,” Trigger observes.

Bob nods his head. “Accidentally killed one once. I was helping my friend, Trevor, build a cabinet. We were in his garage. I sprayed a bunch of lacquer. Cat was inside and got all woozy. Then when I was done, I walked outside and closed the garage door. Brought it right down on the cat.”

I’m at a loss for words, not because the cat was killed – cat’s do stupid things all the time that get them killed. But getting killed by a garage door? Unfathomable.

Trigger rescues me. “Cats have been out to get dad ever since.”

I turn to him. “You don’t really believe that, do you?”

He and Bob shrug their shoulders together. “They have networks,” Bob says. “They know.”

A ding comes from inside and Bob jumps up. “Dinner’s ready!” he announces.

I’m not sure who looks more relieved. Me, Bob, or Trigger.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

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## Trigger



We pull up in front of Evanee's childhood home. It's this huge mansion with a circular driveway surrounded by immaculate lawns that explain why the rest of the homeowners in Reno are on water restrictions. A fountain of a mermaid and dolphin sits in the centre of the driveway, the mermaid pouring water out of an urn. There are pillars leading up the stairs of the house, which has a million windows and hanging baskets of flowers.

As a kid, I imagined myself living in a place like this, but as I grew older, I started despising the assholes behind those doors. I'm meeting Evanee's parents with a chip on my shoulder that tends to feed my inner demons. Today, I gotta find a way to reconcile myself with who I am and what I want. Evanee grew up with this kind of money and I love her more than the air I breathe. How bad could her parents really be?

Evanee is nervous.

"Whatcha worried about, babe?" I ask as I help her out of the SUV I borrowed from Coyote. The ride was a concession that Evanee didn't ask me to make. I figure I may as well get used to drivin' a sled, 'cause with Evanee and maybe kids, I'm gonna need one occasionally.

"My parents can be... difficult," she says under her breath. She knows I'm carrying. I'm always carrying. "Please don't shoot them."

"I promise I won't, even if I don't like 'em."

She throws me a strained smile as she tugs at the collar of the jacket I'm wearing over my T-shirt. My cut is hanging safely in the closet at home.

Evanee is lookin' smoking hot, if not a little more conservative than usual. She's dressed in a tight skirt down to her knees, the usual high heels, but she's wearing a looser blouse.

We're barely up the stairs when the whole family comes out the door. Based on the briefing Evanee gave me on the way over here, I'm up-to-date on who's who. There's mom and dad and Evanee's older brother, Mason, and his wife, Jennifer. Evanee's sister, Alison, the oldest, is in her thirties and still not married. Not to be uncharitable, but the girl unfortunately takes after her dad.

"Daddy!" she exclaims as she hugs him, then does the same with everyone else as various greetings ring the air.

I stand with my arms crossed, thighs spread, and watch. It's my tough guy pose. I'm not intimidated by these people. I already don't like dear old dad for the way he's been treating Evanee. Don't like the mom because she lets the old man get away with it. The brother wears a sneer as he looks down his nose at me. The wife is examining me with interest and the sister's watching the brother's wife with the eyes of a pissed-off cat.

Greetings are made. Mr. and Mrs. Whittaker. Lyle and Brooke. Mrs. Whittaker offers me a limp handshake and a smile that could freeze hell. Evanee looks like her except my girl's perfect and the bitch in front of me thinks her daughter's slumming.

Mr. Whittaker shakes my hand in an iron grip trying to convey to me that he's the head of the household and criminals like me don't intimidate him. I let him carry on with his posturing because I know who I am. I have nothing to prove.

Neither suggests I call them by their first names. Too bad for them.

Mason attempts to emulate dad with his handshake. “Nice to meet you, Casper. Good that Evanee’s finally met a *nice* guy.”

His wife tickles my palm as she takes my hand, her eyes holding mine in the same way the passarounds used to look at me. Not happening sweetheart. Not now. Not ever.

Alison is introduced but doesn’t offer her hand. “Nice ink,” she says with a sour face.

I throw her a half-smirk. “The artist’s a club brother. An asshole, but talented. You want the name, I’ll pass it along.”

The hostility between sis and me flies right over Mama Brooke’s head. “Alison, you will not disfigure your body with such a disgusting practice.”

“Mom!” Evanee scolds while Alison smirks like the pot-stirring shit she is.

“No problem, babe,” I say, watching as her parents cringe. “I’m not a fan of dye jobs, but not everyone agrees with me.”

Mom gasps in outrage as she touches hair the wrong shade of red for her pale complexion. I don’t give a fuck. Fair’s fair, bitch.

“Let’s go inside,” dad says as he puts his arm around Evanee’s shoulders and guides her inside. Everyone follows, me bringing up the rear. Naturally.

I look around the big marble-floored foyer. It’s typical rich folk – got the money so spend it on shit they don’t need. “Nice place you got here, Lyle,” I say thinking the first thing we’re gonna get straight is I’m never gonna call him or his wife by anything other than their first names.

“We make do,” Lyle says carelessly. “Sometimes I think it’s too big, but when family gets together like this, I think it’s not big enough.”

Alison rolls her eyes at her father as I say, “Don’t have that problem, Lyle. One dad. No kids.” I look at Evanee who’s watching me with bemusement. “Yet,” I say with a wink.

“Is that the engagement ring?” Jennifer says, grabbing Evanee’s hand and checking it out. “It’s so cute.”

Evanee pulls her hand back. “Yes. Like yours. Adorable.”

I got the basic background about the family from Evanee, but not the dynamics. Gonna be a fun night.

We enter the room off the foyer, which is this big room with sofas and chairs, lots of pictures, even a baby grand. “Nice,” I say to Evanee, nodding.

She tries to move towards me, but her mother sidelines her. “Notice the George Rodrigue?” she asks, pointing at a painting of a blue dog. “It’s an original.”

“It’s beautiful,” Evanee says, her eyes filled with appreciation.

I don’t get it, but I file the name of the artist away for future reference. I may lack in a lot of areas, but my memory ain’t one of them.

“You a scotch man, Casper?” Lyle asks as he heads towards a bar.

“I drink it. Prefer beer.”

Mason and Jennifer are sitting side by side on a sofa that looks as hard as Hangman’s chair. Brooke has seated herself on the love seat, dragging my girl with her. “Evanee will have red wine, of course.”

Gonna be a long night if I can’t get my girl alone so I can fuck her under her father’s roof. I know it’s juvenile, but emotional maturity has never been one of my strengths.

“Just a moment,” Lyle replies as he digs around in the bar fridge. “Casper, are you a Guinness man or do prefer Stella Artois?”

I prefer something I can spell, I think, but don’t say. “Either will work, Lyle.”

Lyle pours a beer into a glass and hands it to me, then fixes everyone else’s drinks. I take an intentional gulp, draining half the glass, still standing because I haven’t been invited to sit.



Evanee seems to realize the oversight as she shoves her mother over with her butt. “Come sit beside me, darling.”

There’s space enough for a small woman, but I squeeze my big ass in next to my girl then run my hand up her thigh. “Perfect fit,” I say with a leer.

Brooke nearly chokes on her wine.

As we drink, conversation flows like I expected. Work and golf games and parties. Evanee and I don’t get a word in edgewise. No one asks how her clinic is doing, where she’s living, how she’s getting along in Sagebrush.

Lyle gets everyone a refill, then leads us into the dining room when dinner is announced by a man I can only conclude is the butler based on his dress and stiff manner.

I’m trying to be on my best behaviour, but it’s not easy. I can’t figure out how Evanee comes from this gene pool. I mean, I get that she’s this posh girl with a skewed sense of life, but at the same time, she’s genuine to everyone she meets – no judgement. She’s a miracle no matter what side of the tracks she came from.

Dinner is a long arduous affair with soup, then a starter salad. Another appetizer, then the main meal, followed by dessert. The red wine flows and I choke down the shit for Evanee’s sake. My inner demon tells me that I don’t do that for anyone, but it’s fading, because I’d do almost anything for my girl.

I’m seated between Alison and Jennifer while Mason and Evanee sit across from me. Lyle sits at the head of the table with Brooke at the opposite end. It pisses me off that Evanee ain’t beside me – seems like they did it deliberately.

Over the course of the meal, the conversation is as boring as it was in the living room until Mason asks me what I do for a living.

He knows, they all know that I’m a member of Hell’s Jury. If Evanee didn’t already tell them, I’m pretty sure Lyle had me checked out. I’m not gonna pretend otherwise, but I decide to toy with them a little.

“I’m a businessman, like you, Lyle,” I say wiping the fuckin’ seared scallops off my lips and trying not to hurl into my plate. “I’m part of a business group that has its hand in a variety of ventures, including,” I nod across the table at Evanee. “My darlin’s vet clinic.”

It’s news to Lyle, who chokes on a forkful of stewed tomatoes. When he’s done coughing, he says to Evanee, “You’ve let his gang invest in your clinic?”

Evanee gets her back up. “I did not let them, daddy. I asked them and they said, yes.”

“How much?” Lyle demands.

Evanee starts to answer, but I get out in front of her. “Well now, Lyle. That’s business between me and Evanee since we’re engaged.” I look at her with steel in my eyes. “Private business.”

I can’t tell what she’s thinking, but I got a feeling she don’t like me speaking for her. Something we can talk about later. “Anyway,” I add to distract them from the topic. “I run Dick’s Pick’s near the border of the Pyramid Lake Reservation. They don’t say we can’t do business out there and we reward them for being open-minded.” I try to suppress my grin. “You ever heard of it, Lyle?” I wink at Evanee, then add, “My business, not the reservation.”

Lyle clear’s his throat like the tomato’s still stuck in it. “Is it a photography business?”

I laugh. “Sometimes, I guess, but it’s a brothel.”

“Oh my god!” Jennifer says. “A brothel! Did you know?” She’s lookin’ at Evanee but side-eyein’ her husband.

“Of course, I knew,” Evanee tells her. “Trigger and I don’t have secrets.”

“It’s legit, anyway,” I say with the same puffed-up importance Lyle has. “One of the few brothels that are.”

Allison pretends to be outraged, though I can tell she’s intrigued. “It’s an offensive business. Brothels exploit vulnerable women.”

I'm about to counter her point, but Evanee cuts me off. "You can't pass judgement like that until you've spent some time understanding it. Trigger's brothel is a well-run place, clean and organized."

"You've been there?" her mother gasps.

Evanee twists her lips, probably wishing she could take back her last words, but soldiers on. "Yes, mom, I have been there. I'm as interested in Trigger's work as he is in mine."

"Trigger." The brother homes in on my road name. "Is that your nickname?"

I take a careful bite of the hibiscus tart the server just set in front of me. "Road name. Most of my club brother's have one."

"What's yours mean?" Mason asks slyly. "Got something to do with premature ejaculation?"

"Mason!" Brooke exclaims. I can tell by the panic on her face that she knows she's losing control of the dinner party.

I smirk at Mason. As insults go, that's as weak as they come. "As Evanee can attest, my ejaculation timing is pretty much on target."

"Oh my god," Brooke moans.

"Then why?" Jennifer's thigh brushes mine.

I shrug as I shift towards Alison who shifts further from me. "Ain't always a reason. Sometimes a name just sticks." I don't tell them that mine came about because I shot four men in three seconds. Didn't kill them all but earned the reputation as being quick on the trigger. Hence, the road name.

For about a minute all I can hear is the clinking of forks on plates. The butler offers me coffee, but I hold up a hand. "Another beer'd be welcome," I tell him.

He nods and moves on.

Finally, Alison breaks the silence. "Have you been to jail?"

Brooke gasps. "Alison, we don't ask questions like that."

Don't know who 'we' is because I've been asked it a hundred times. Mostly by cops. "Yep, I have. Juvie record then a small stint in county for B & E."

"You have a record?" Brooke says. She locks eyes with Lyle. "Did you know?"

"Of course, I knew," Lyle tells her with a furrowed brow. "I know everything about Mr. Horne."

I'm waitin' for him to list my deficiencies, but Jennifer jumps into the conversation. "So you're a criminal?" She's takin' shallow breaths and her eyes are glassy.

Mason glares at her from across the table. "He just said he was in prison, so yes, *wife*, that makes him a criminal."

Time to settle the family down. "The jail stint was five years ago. I've kept my nose clean since." Meaning I've never been caught again, but they don't need to know that. "So, formerly, I was a criminal. Just like Lyle here, formerly knew Jeffrey Epstein." I do my homework too. Well, Coyote does my homework for me, but he don't mind. Callin' out assholes is one of his favourite things to do.

"Business dealings," Lyle says defensively as his eyes dart towards Brooke. "Met him maybe three times, all in the boardroom."

I shrug. "Exactly like that, Lyle. In the past."

Silence intrudes and I'm proud of myself for shutting down the conversation.

Turns out Alison isn't about to let my lifestyle go. "Do you carry a gun?"

"I'm a fu... an American. Of course, I carry."

"Not all Americans carry guns," she counters. "Psychopaths do."

"The successful psychopaths do." I pretend I'm thinking. "The rest are puffed-up wannabes."

"Sweetie," Evanee says to me, her head lower, her pretty eyes looking up at me through her thick eyelashes. "Let's talk

about the wedding.”

I give her a grin and a wink. “That’s a great idea.” To Brooke, I say. “Evanee wants a big wedding, full out bash. No expense spared.”

Brooke smiles for the first time tonight. “I can’t wait to start planning it,” she tells Evanee, seeming to forget who her daughter is marrying. “Jennifer and Alison will help. And your friends of course.”

Evanee beams at her mother while Lyle glares daggers. “We have to set a date soon. Trigger says whenever I want. Next spring I’m thinking. Then we can hold it here.” She turns to Lyle. “Of course, you’ll be walking me down the aisle.”

Dad nods dutifully, but his lips are pressed so hard together it’s making the rest of his face turn white.

“That’s not much time to plan. And you’re busy with the vet clinic,” mama Brooke says. “But I think we can do it if all the girls pitch in.”

Jennifer squeals and claps her hands and Alison rolls her eyes.

Lyle clears his throat. “Why don’t you lovely ladies take the planning into the living room. Mason, I have a few contracts in my office I want you to look over.”

Mason seems like he’s about to protest, but a glare from his dad shuts him down. To me, Lyle says, “You a cigar man, Casper?”

Ah, dad and I get alone time. “Cigarettes, Lyle.”

He nods. “Let’s step out on the deck, son, and have a man-to-man talk.”

“Dad,” Evanee starts but I shut her down with a shake of my head.

“You start setting a date with mom, babe. Dad and I’ll talk about how much the shindig will cost him.”

Lyle looks pained as he leads me out to a deck through a couple of French doors, then pulls a cigar from his pocket and

lights up. “Cuban,” he says after he blows out some smoke.

I light a cigarette. “Newport. USA.”

He stares at me as he takes another shallow puff. “How much will it cost me to make you go away?”

I pretend to be thinking as I take a deep drag of my smoke. “About the same amount as the wedding, so you may as well pay for that instead.”

He takes a step closer to me. “You fucking low-life criminal. You’re an idiot if you think I’m going to let you mess around with my family, play games with my daughter.”

I hold my ground. “I’ve no plans to mess with your family and I’m not playin’ games with your daughter. Evanee’s the girl for me and my girl wants a big wedding with her prick of a father walkin’ her down the aisle.” I take a drag of my cigarette and flick the ash on the toe of his shiny leather shoes. “And you’re wrong if you think it ain’t gonna happen.”

“Listen to yourself. You can’t even string a proper sentence together. Evanee has degrees from prestigious universities, and you’re what? A high school drop out?”

If it was coming from someone I respected, like Hangman, I’d be hurt, but I’d still tell him to fuck off. But the bastard in front of me don’t merit a second thought. “I don’t hold her degrees against her. She can’t help where she came from.”

He sucks in a breath and for a second, I think he’s gonna have a heart attack. “You mess with me and I’ll make you and your little gang of criminals regret you were ever born. I’ve got more resources than you have lice.”

I shrug as I drop my cigarette on the deck and crush it under my boot. “I don’t give a fuck what you do with me, but you mess with Evanee, and I’ll cut your balls off and make you eat them.”

He laughs like he’s delighted the gloves are off. “She’s my daughter, you prick and eventually she’ll figure out what a loser you are.”

I can't help but admire him for not shitting his pants. "You'll be dead before that happens, old man." I step into his space. "Here's what I'm gonna do, Lyle. I'm gonna pretend we never had this conversation. Evanee won't hear what a fuck she has for a father. And you, you're gonna walk my girl down the aisle and wish us nothin' but the best." I turn towards the house. "Oh, and I wouldn't mind if you bought us the townhouse we're livin' in as a wedding gift. We're renting right now, but Evanee loves it. It's close to schools and shit like that; safe area to raise your grandkids." I give him a menacing grin, then find my girl and leave. Fucking in Lyle's house will have to wait for another day.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

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## Evanee



“Hey babe,” Trigger calls from the bathroom over the hum of the electric razor. “You just about ready? Party’s gonna be over by the time we get there.”

“Almost. I’m standing in front of the shoe shelf trying to decide which shoes will look best with my V-cut corset leather mini-dress. Tonight is the blow-out party at Hell’s Jury clubhouse before construction starts on the renovations. I’m excited that I finally get to meet everyone and spend some girl time with my investors. I want to look my very best. The dress is a little tight to be riding on the back of a bike, but what’s a little discomfort when the leather matches Trigger’s cut to a tee.

He walks into the closet rubbing his chin then stops dead when he sees me. “Jesus fucking christ,” he says. “You’re the best-looking woman in the world.”

I twist my hips and arch my back. “You like?”

“Fuckin’ yeah,” he says as he lunges at me. I’m twisted around and shoved against the wall, Trigger’s erection pressed into my backside. “We’re gonna fuck now.”

It’s all the warning I get as he yanks my dress up over my hips and my panties to the side. I hear the rasp of his zipper, then feel the bruising grip of his fingers digging into my waist as he kicks my legs open and plunges into me.

Trigger is big anytime, but I’ve not been properly warmed up and pain shoots through me. “Trigger, I’m not ready,” I grunt as I shove my palms against the wall to brace myself.

“Then get ready, baby,” he commands as he fucks me relentlessly.

“You horny bastard,” I seethe as my body responds to him. “You don’t play fair.”

His hand snakes inside my top and squeezes my breast. “You fuckin’ don’t either dressing like a high-class whore.”

I grapple with him as if I’m trying to get him off me, but he has me pinned. His strength and aggression are such turn-ons. He knows intuitively what I like, and he gives it to me hard.

He’s ruthless as he slams into me, grunting as he takes me. “What’s wrong, baby?” he hisses into my ear. “Don’t like it when you don’t get to come?”

“I’m going to fucking come, you bastard,” I snarl as I snake a hand to my pussy.

“Stroke my balls while you’re down there, bitch and maybe I’ll let you get yourself off.”

I’m careful as I grope around under his cock which he’s still using as a weapon. I’m definitely going to feel his love-making tomorrow, but it’s going to be a good kind of sore. “Slow down, asshole,” I tell him. “Or you’re gonna end up neutered.”

He growls his laughter as he grabs my hand and grinds it into my pussy. “You better fucking hurry up because I’m about to rocket off and I don’t give a fuck whether you do or not.”

He’s lying, but his words push me past the point of reason. He’s mashing my hand into my pussy while I flick at my clit. “Fuck!” he snarls as he grips me tighter and batters me harder. “Fuck!”

That’s all it takes me for to lose control. My orgasm shoots through me and I feel it in every part of my body. As Trigger slows his thrusting, my body hums like a hive full of bees.

“Jesus,” I whisper as he steps back and pulls my dress down over my ass.

“You got what you asked for, baby,” he says, the aggressive growl still in his voice as he turns me to face him, then shoves me against the wall, his hand on my chest. “Tell you what though, I’m gonna let you wear that dress to the party ‘cause I want my brother’s to see what I have and they don’t. But you’re putting on a fucking jacket. You don’t gotta show them everything.”

I pretend I’m pissed at him, but really, I’m not. I dressed for him and he knows it. I like that he gets me and who I am. “I’ll find a jacket, but I have to clean up first.”

He kicks my legs open again, then raises a knee and grinds it into my pussy. “You’re not fuckin’ cleaning up. You’re gonna wear my jizz all night so you smell like me. So my brother’s know who you’re fucking.

I shiver at the primacy.

Trigger is still high on adrenalin as we race towards his clubhouse. He’s driving at least 20 miles per hour past the speed limit, but it’s a blast. I hang on hard and enjoy the ride – well both rides if anyone’s counting.

The party is in full swing when we walk into the room. Music is blaring through speakers and voices are raised to be heard. We’re greeted loudly and boisterously, and then almost immediately separated, Jess dragging me off towards several women. I know Haley and Bryce. The twins are conspicuously absent, but that’s not a surprise given that they’re not legal and also Coyote’s sisters. I sincerely doubt he’d let them anywhere near a party like this.

Where are Emma and Maddy?” I ask anyway.

“They were here earlier,” a woman in her forties says. “With the other kids. They’re out though, by 10 PM. We have rules, you know.”

I doubt the twins would appreciate being referred to as kids and by the narrow slant of Bryce’s eyes towards the self-important women, she thinks so too. She says to her in her dead tone, “They’re not children and they should be here. Coyote and I are in negotiations.”

Haley interrupts before an argument breaks out. “Let me introduce you to everyone,” she says. “Verity,” she indicates the woman with the attitude. “She’s Hangman’s ex.”

Verity narrows her eyes but says nothing.

Hayley continues. “Slag here belongs to Lord. You might not have met him yet.” She points to a man in a wheelchair. “Chrissy is Fender’s wife and Gillian’s married to Blood. Blood is Chrissy’s brother.” She hesitates as she turns to the last woman.

“I’m Leslie,” a tall, beautiful woman says. “Gears is my guy, but he’s in prison for manslaughter.”

I smile brightly as Jess hands me a suspicious-looking cocktail. I take a sip and then look down at it. It has enough bourbon in it to cure an outbreak of rabies. “I’ve heard good things.” It’s a lie. I haven’t heard anything about anything, but it’s a social nicety one says at parties. Turns out I’m wrong. One doesn’t say such things at this party.

Slag sniffs as she blows the smoke from her cigarette into my face. “Doubt Trigger’s mentioned us at all. Maybe the passarounds. He spends a lot of time with them.”

The gloves are off and so soon. “Oh, you mean back when Trigger was a whore.” I smile like I’m talking to my best friend. “He doesn’t need them anymore.”

Verity looks me up and down like I’m a disease. “I guess it will last as long as you keep dressing like that.”

I expected that unoriginal comment from someone, I just didn’t think it would happen this early.

The two witches are standing next to each other, similar ages and hard expressions. I’m guessing they’re friends by necessity, have been around the club longer than anyone else, have seen more too. They think they’re the queens and maybe they are. I’m good with that. I’ve always preferred being a princess.

I start to reply, but Leslie gets out in front of me. “Let’s play like kittens tonight girls, not cats. It’s bad enough we have to share space with the passarounds.”

“I like you,” I tell her.

She grins. “I like you too.”

Jess gives Leslie a mock-frown. “I saw her first. She’s mine!”

“Well, if we’re being precise,” Bryce says, “I saw her first.” She quirks her lips at me. “But you can have her. She’s too tall for me.”

It’s true. In my heels, I’m at least a foot taller than Bryce. “And you’re too short. We’d look like a circus side-show next to each other.”

Chrissy scowls at me, then past me and I turn to see what she’s looking at. Most of the men are eyeing me, though surreptitiously. Rocky and Coyote are disinterested, Coyote watching Bryce as if she’s going to bolt any minute. Eight has his back turned, Hangman’s frowning, and Dicer’s practically sliding off the chair he’s sitting on. I catch Red’s eye and we smile at each other, then Trigger draws his attention by lightly punching him in the gut. There are a couple of men I’ve seen before but not been introduced to, and several other men I haven’t met.

Chrissy finally speaks up but changes the subject. “Fender says you’re a vet.”

I nod. “Yes. I’ve set up shop in Sagebrush. Sweet Tidings Animal Hospital.”

“Gag,” says Slag.

“Hmmm. Didn’t bring mine. Didn’t think I needed it tonight,” I reply lightly, then return my attention to Chrissy. The woman has no light in her eyes and I have this sense that her story is more tragic than anyone else’s, but that is none of my business and so I don’t ask. “I’ve only been opened a month, so business is slow. I try to match rescues and people, so think about adopting.” I look at all of them, including Slag, though I wouldn’t let her raise a badger. “All of you. There are so many animals that need good homes.”

“I wouldn’t have thought you a bleeding heart,” Verity observes. “Not with the amount of leather you wear.”

I decide I'm going to try to understand this angry woman. Slag is a bitch for the sake of being one, but Verity seems more complicated than that. "I wear leather, I eat meat, but that doesn't make me a hypocrite. I'm a small animal vet and I see horrific abuses of some of the animals I treat far more than I should." I blink rapidly because if anything can move me to tears, it's having to euthanize an animal that's been through hell. "So back to what I was talking about. Yes, I'm a vet and you all should consider adopting a rescue."

Speaking of rescues, Trigger comes up behind me and slides his arms around my waist. The heat of his body on my back makes me shiver. "Quit hogging my fiancé. I gotta introduce her to the rest of the brothers."

"Fiancé!" Leslie and Chrissy say in unison. Leslie grabs my hand and holds it up. "Fuck! Look at the size of that stone."

"Almost as big as Trigger's stones," Slag sneers.

She doesn't know Trigger if she thinks she's being insulting. He pumps his groin into my backside as he kisses the side of my neck. "Babe, you gotta quit bragging about me or you're gonna make these girls jealous."

Bryce snorts but otherwise stays silent, while Haley and Jess giggle.

"You're an idiot," Verity says in disgust.

I'm starting to get my back up, but Trigger affects a grimace. "Ouch. Good one, Verity."

He takes my hand and drags me away.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

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## Trigger



I'm second-guessing lettin' Evanee wear her little black dress. She doesn't seem to notice or maybe doesn't care that she's the only one dressed up like she's going to a nightclub. I don't care either because that's my girl and I wouldn't want her lookin' any other way. The problem is all eyes are on her and it ain't easy not to punch the lights out of a few of the guys – the ones that keep grinning when they look her way.

The women are different. Their responses are varied from acceptance to discomfort to downright hostility. The look on Raven's face is murderous and the rest of the passarounds are backing her up. Verity and Slag are their usual bitchy selves, and Leslie seems to be siding with them even if she pretends otherwise. Chrissy is Chrissy – can't tell what she's thinkin'. Jess, Haley, and Bryce are behind Evanee 100 percent.

Evanee's smart enough to pick up on the general vibes but the only time I've seen her phased by anything is when she met my dad. I liked that she cared enough to want to make a good impression and she did. Dad liked her a lot and told me not to fuck it up. I told him I wouldn't.

And I won't. Evanee is who she is and I love her for it. She's the only person in the entire room that's truly at ease with herself. She's a miracle and the best part of it all is that she's mine.

“How you doin' babe?” I ask her after I drag her down the hall that leads to Hangman's office and the bathroom.



She presses me against the wall and gives me a lingering close-mouthed kiss. "I'm doing fine. It's great to see you and everyone else in their natural environment."

"As opposed to a zoo," I laugh. "The women treating you right?"

She nips my neck. "Nothing I can't manage."

"Of course, it ain't." I'm beginning to think my woman can handle any situation.

"Let's go back to the party. We can have a private one when we get home." She takes a sip of the drink she's holding. "I'm going to be hammered after I finish this and when I'm drunk, there's nothing I won't do."

My dick swells up as I think of all the possibilities, and I adjust myself to give it some relief. "You keep talkin' like that, and we won't make it home."

She laughs as she grabs my hand then heads towards Hangman. "Hello, Prez," she says like she's known him for a decade.

Hangman's eyes flit over her, but his face is neutral. He's a guy who likes women, can be charming when he wants to be. But with Evanee, it's clear he doesn't want to be. He's like that with all the ol' ladies. He treats them like they're part of the club, which means they're as much subject to his wrath as we are. Mind you, he don't punch them. It's like they're his cross to bear, but inside I know he's protective of them. He's the prez because he's a great leader, so I think what he's doin' is setting an example for the rest of the guys. No fucking with the ol' ladies.

"You keepin' my investment safe?" he says to her.

Evanee holds her pretty smile, but her eyes narrow slightly and her body stiffens. "Of course, I am," she replies in that slow, inviting cadence that I promised her a spanking for doing. "I have a .38 under the counter in the reception area in case one of my clients causes a ruckus."

This time it's Hangman who narrows his eyes. "You forgot to flash your tits," he sneers.

“Hangman,” I growl in warning.

Evanee touches my arm. “Trigger has asked me to stop using my assets when interacting with men and while I’ve found it challenging, what Trigger wants, Trigger gets.” She smiles too seductively for my liking, but she’s trying.

Hangman flattens his lips, but Evanee’s basically cut him off at the knees. There’s nothing he can say that won’t make him look like the offending party. However, I get an evil glare before he turns his back and stalks toward Dicer.

I make the rest of the introductions and the brothers are mostly respectful, even Hash. Maybe he’s learning how not be a total bastard from Peyton, our Blackbeard rescue. She’s noticeably absent, but that’s not a surprise.

As the evening progresses, the party gets wilder. I’m having trouble keeping track of Evanee as she’s not the type to stay glued to my side. Mostly, she’s hanging with the ol’ ladies, but I catch her talking to the passarounds at some point. The conversation seems friendly enough, but Jess comes along and drags her away. I have to remember to thank Jess later.

Hangman interrupts a conversation I’m having with Rider and Rocky. “Talk to the asshole in the Chamber yet?”

I blank. “Asshole?”

“Jesus. I’m raisin’ idiots! The Blackbeard that fucked with Kit.”

Aw shit! “He’s on my list of things to do. Been planning to talk to him tomorrow. Reaper and Joker are feedin’ and watering him.”

I fuckin’ hope.

“Get it the fuck done!” Hangman growls as he turns his back on me.

I track down Joker who seems to be having a serious convo with Mothman. Don’t look like the VP is about to punch the new prince, so I feel confident I can interrupt without getting thumped myself.

“Gotta borrow the VP for a minute,” I say to Mothman, dragging Joker away.

“What the fuck do you want?” Joker asks. He smells like he took a bath in a whiskey barrel.

“You been lookin’ after the Blackbeard in the Chamber?”

“Why the fuck would I do that? He’s your problem.” A sober Joker is serious and unforgiving. A drunk Joker can be a riot or cause a riot. And he can turn on a dime.

“Because you brought him here and a Blackbeard is a Jury problem. Not just mine.” I run a hand through my hair, then realize most of it isn’t there. “It’s been days since we put him down there.”

Joker squints at me. “Reaper’s probably been lookin’ after him. He’s the responsible one.”

I groan. Sure, Reaper’s got his head on straight, but his way of dealing with a problem stops at the door. He kills them or ignores them. I know he didn’t kill this one so....

Joker grips my arm and pulls me through the increasingly crowded room as hangarounds, associates, and friends of friends join the party. Reaper’s talkin’ to Eight, his head bent, listening intently. The two are partners in both the legit and criminal activities and are always plannin’ something.

Eight is stone-cold sober, but it’s clear Reaper’s had a few because he actually smiles when he sees me. “Trigger! Been talkin’ about your woman.”

That gets my back up. “Keep away from her or I’ll fuck you up.”

Maybe wrong words as Reaper grabs me by the collar and barrels me across the room. He tries to slam me up against the sliding glass doors, but the fucking things are open, and we land in a tangled heap on the ground.

“Jesus!” I grunt as my backbone bounces off the hard-packed dirt. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“You, shithead,” Reaper snarls as he rolls to his back. “You’re an asshole.”

I manage to crawl a few feet from him. “I already fuckin’ know that!”

He sits up. “I know you know. I thought you needed a reminder.”

We’re the centre of attention for only a few seconds, then everyone goes back to their business except Joker, who hauls Reaper off the ground as I crawl to my feet. “You been lookin’ after the Blackbeard?” he says to Reaper.

Reaper narrows his eyes like he’s thinkin’ then his face clears. “The one we put in the Chamber?”

“Yes!” Joker and I both say with a healthy dose of irritation.

“Forgot about him completely.” He turns to me. “He’s your fuckin’ problem.”

“He ain’t just my problem!” I say again. “He’s everyone’s problem.”

“No one said he was my problem,” Reaper replies, his voice getting louder. “What the fuck have you been doin’ that you can’t look after him?”

“I’ve been busy,” I yell. “Why the hell do I have to remember everything?”

I’m three seconds away from knocking Reaper’s head off, but Joker steps between us. “Settle down both of you. We got a problem. Unless someone else has been checking on our good friend, Dino, he’s been down in the Chamber for almost a week.”

I scrub at my face. “So neither of you guys fed and watered him? Not even when you dumped him?”

“Why the fuck would we do that?” Joker snarls. “We thought he was your problem.”

We’re goin’ in circles. “We already established he isn’t just my problem.”

Joker gives me a shove. “You established that. I don’t hear anyone agreein’ with you.”

Reaper asks the important question. “How long can someone live without food or water?”

Shit! “I don’t know. Maybe a week.”

“We better fuckin’ find out,” Joker says grimly.

The three of us stumble to the Chamber. Well, those two stumble. I haven’t had much to drink because I’m intending to take advantage of Evanee’s offer to let me do anything to her later and I want to remember every glorious moment.

We get inside the garage that’s over top of the actual Chamber. It’s as dark as the inside of a fuckin’ raccoon. “I’ll get the lights,” I say, but Joker grabs my arm.

“Don’t turn on the lights, asshole. We’ll have the whole fucking party showing up to see what we’re doing.”

Reaper digs his phone out of the inside of his cut and flicks on the flashlight.

It’s not much light, but it’s better than stumbling around in the dark. The Chamber is a bunker directly under the garage we’re standing in. The entrance is a hatch in the floor hidden under a beat-up 1960 GMC Fleetside that Red drools over every time he sees it. He wants to restore it, but Hangman threatens to cut off his hands if he tries.

It don’t start anyway, so Joker and I push it out while Reaper steers.

Light or not, we’re attracting attention and some of the guys are headin’ towards us. Joker puts a stop to it by saying, “Nothin’ to see here, you fuckers. Go back to the party.”

Hangman may be the guy in charge, but as VP, Joker has almost as much authority. The guys drift away, though Rocky and Red don’t go far.

“Get lost,” I tell them. “I’ll explain later.”

“You fucking better,” Red says and I roll my eyes.

“Go fuck a passaround,” I snarl.

“Go fuck yourself,” he snarls back.

Reaper shakes his head. “You two share a brain.” He’s holdin’ the light so Joker can pull up the hatch.

I think maybe he’s right because I got no comeback.

Joker heads down first, followed by me and then Reaper, who closes the hatch behind us. Light floods the room as I flick on the switch. This place is our enemy’s worst nightmare. There are a couple of cells down here, a chair or two, chains, pliers, saws, a flame thrower, and anything else we might need to have a convo. Even a drain for blood and an incinerator. It smells like a funeral down here.

Reaper reads my mind. “Fuck, it stinks.”

“No shit Sherlock,” I snap. I’m fuckin’ pissed now, but mostly at myself for gettin’ so distracted by Evanee. Still, it’s Evanee, so how could I resist?

We make our way to the cell that Reaper and Joker put Dino in and find him slumped against the wall. Can’t be sure he’s dead, but him being down here almost a week without a toilet or shower, it fuckin’ reeks.

Joker presses up against the bars. “How long you think he’s been like this?”

“Maybe he’s sleeping,” Reaper adds unhelpfully.

Joker bangs on the bars. “Hey fuckface! Wake up!”

“He isn’t movin’,” Reaper again. He hardly ever gets drunk and now I know why. He gets embarrassingly stupid.

“Of course, he fuckin’ ain’t moving.” I scowl. “He’s dead.”

Joker presses his lips together. “Hangman’s not gonna like this.”

Reaper’s fumbling with the key, trying to fit it into the lock. “Well, Trig’s gonna be telling him. It’s his fuckin’ problem.”

I yank the key out of Reaper’s hand and slide it into the lock. “A Blackbeard problem is everyone’s problem!”

Joker bangs the door open and staggers inside. “Hey, asshole, wake up!” He gives Dino a kick.

Dino slumps over onto his side, then slides to his back face up.

“He’s dead,” Reaper announces like we needed to be told.

“He don’t smell dead,” Joker observes despite wrinkling his nose.

“Maybe he just died,” I suggest.

“That’s probably true,” the VP agrees. “You can live longer without food than water and bodies decompose slower in the cold.” He shivers. “Freezin’ down here.”

Reaper turns to Joker. “How the fuck do you know that shit?”

“It’s criminal 101, asshole,” Joker replies. “Didn’t you go to school?”

Reaper glares at him and I think I’m gonna have to break up a fight. “None of this shit matters except we got a fuckin’ dead Blackbeard on our hands and Hangman’s not gonna be happy.”

“Let’s not tell him tonight,” Joker suggests.

“Yeah,” Reaper nods. “Dino here ain’t gonna get any deader than he already is.”

I’m on board with waitin’ because when Hangman finds out, he’s gonna go postal.

We lock the cell up again overlookin’ the fact that it’s no longer necessary, then close up the Chamber and rejoin the party.

Almost before I’m in the clubhouse, Evanee’s beside me. “Let’s go home, lover,” she says, her breath hot on my ear. “I want a little ‘you’ time.”

I immediately forget about Dino. “I’m gonna make you eat those words, baby.”

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

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## Evanee



I'm nursing a two-day hangover and vowing never to drink something Haley's made ever again. I like a few glasses of a nice Meritage or Syrah, but I rarely allow myself to get drunk. It's Trigger, I decide. I feel safe with him, enough so that I can let my guard down for maybe the first time since puberty.

It's Monday, which means Sweet Tidings is open. I'm sitting behind the reception desk fiddling with a pen because Wendy is on a longer-than-usual lunch break. We had a couple of appointments this morning. Both were dogs, one for a check-up, and the other needed deworming. There's nothing blocked off for the afternoon, but I'm hoping we get one or two walk-ins.

I glance down at the accounts book and circle the final figure. Still red, no matter how many times I look at. I need to drum up some business and quick. This clinic can't survive on good intentions.

I'm thinking about letting my darlings out of their pens and bringing Singalong back to the lobby, since there are no clients for her to insult, when the bell over the door tinkles. I slam the account book closed and look up, smiling warmly. It falters when I see my new clients.

Two men stand just inside the door, dressed in the typical biker get-up: boots, jeans, T-shirts and cuts. One is clean-cut, no whiskers, short hair and pretty in the conventional way some men are. The other has long hair and a beard. The problem is that they aren't Hell's Jury. By process of elimination, I'm guessing they're Blackbeards.

Standing between them is a Rotti-Great Dane cross wearing a tactical harness. The dog probably weighs over 70 pounds and has teeth the size of a shark's. It's on alert, ready to attack and looking at me like it doesn't realize I'm its best friend. It needs a bath, delousing, and a little TLC, all of which it will get if I don't have to shoot it first.

"Hello." I slide my hand towards the drawer that houses my .38. I decide to shelve Trigger's no-seduction rule because my charms come in handy in certain situations. "Do you have an appointment?" I ask in a low inviting cadence.

"Get out from behind the counter, bitch," the pretty Blackbeard says. He's got the tag 'Vice President' sewn to his vest.

"I could, but why would I?" My insides are a quagmire of nerves, but my voice is steady.

"Because he fuckin' told you to," the bearded Blackbeard replies with a sneer. He's wearing an enforcer tag.

I flash him a brilliant smile. "You'll have to do better than that. As a rule, I don't do what I'm told." I bat my eyelashes at him.

It doesn't seem to move him, and I wonder if I'm losing my touch.

"Today you do, or we'll send Rip to come get you," he threatens, his voice dead and cold.

Rip. How original.

The Enforcer loosens his hand on the Rotti-mix as it growls and raises its hackles.

I gingerly release the .38 I'm holding and slide the drawer shut. I might be moved to shoot these men, but I can't shoot a dog just because someone trained it to be an asshole. "What can I do for you?" I ask, keeping my distance as I slide out from behind the counter.

The VP closes the gap, grabbing my arms and shoving me up against the counter. "Aren't you a pretty cunt? Dressed up like you wanna be fucked."

Pain races down my backbone, but his bruising grip distracts me from it. It's like my arms are in a vise. His eyes are hard nuggets, and his face is twisted into an ugly mask that ruins his pretty-boy status.

"Take your hands off me, please," I reply as pleasantly as I can. "You don't have to manhandle me to get me to do what you want." I look past him to the Rotti-mix. "In fact, I'm not busy this afternoon, so I could give Rip a check-up and the vaccinations he probably needs."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" the VP snarls as he bangs me against the counter again.

I suck in a small breath, but that's the only acknowledgement that he's hurt me. "Rip will live a longer, healthier, more joyous life if he gets regular check-ups." It's not easy to resist kicking and scratching the bastard, but I dig my nails into my palms to keep from reacting.

"Bitch—," he starts.

I don't let him finish. "Perhaps we should talk about his diet." I peer around the VP at the Rotti-mix. "His coat isn't as shiny as it could be, and he's more fat than muscle. If you want him to appear more menacing, you need to change his dog food." I slide my eyes over the dog. "It would also be a good idea to neuter him." And you too, you bastard.

He shakes me hard enough to rattle my teeth. "You think I'm playing a game?"

I grapple for composure. "Of course not. I'm giving you advice about your dog. It's what I do. I'm a veterinarian."

"You're a fuckin' headcase," the enforcer says from behind us. "I say we let Rip take a run at her."

The VP releases my arms, but presses his body against mine, grinding his pelvis into me. "Maybe I should take a run at her first." He slides his hands up my sides and gropes my breasts.

I take a breath to quell the shake in my stomach. "If you aren't here to have me tend to Rip, then why are you?"

“Your fuckin’ boyfriend and his asshole brothers have something of ours and we want it back.”

Okay. That I can work with. Trigger will know what’s he talking about. “I’m happy to send a message along to my boyfriend – well, actually fiancé – we’re getting married next spring,” I hold on to my anger as he pinches a nipple. There’s fear deep down, but if these guys think I’m intimidated by them, they’re idiots. I can shoot the nuts off a squirrel from fifty yards.

“I don’t give a fuck about your shit. I want my property back.” He grabs my hair and yanks my head back so I’m forced to look up at him.

I will kill this sonofabitch one day, but that’s a thought I keep to myself. I refuse to let him see his affect on me. Instead, to diffuse the situation, I say softly. “I will pass your message along.”

He lets me go so suddenly I struggle to remain upright. “You make sure you do, cunt.”

I watch Rip as he storms out the door beside his asshole humans. A dog that aggressive is trained through cruelty, punishment, and neglect. To calm myself down, I spend a moment thinking of how I will rescue him.

I don’t quite get to the phone to call Trigger when the bell over the door tinkles again. My composure plummets thinking the Blackbeards have returned, but instead, it’s two of Sagebrush’s finest in full uniform, both with grim expressions on their faces.

“Hello officers,” I say with a seductive smile. “Your arrival is timely.” I point to the door the men have just entered by. “There were a couple of gentlemen here earlier with a Rotti-Great Dane mix. It needs some care, and they left with him even though I implored them to let me examine him.”

Officer Brant, per the name on his tag, glares at me. “We didn’t come about a dog.”

“Oh,” I widen my eyes to appear confused. Inside I’m quaking because I’m still rattled by the Blackbeards and these

two men seem almost as hostile. “You came about the threat?”

“What threat?” barks Sergeant Levine or so says his name tag.

Buy time, Evanee. Buy time. Wendy will be back soon and then there will be two against two.

“You didn’t come about the threat?”

“We did not come about a threat,” the sergeant confirms.

“Well in that case, did you come about your police dog?” I crane my head to look at the other officer.

Sergeant Levine calls my attention back to him as he steps closer to me. “Do we look like we have a dog?”

Don’t retreat, Evanee. Don’t give him the power. “No. Which is why I thought you came about the other dog, but since you didn’t, it must be about the threat.”

The two men exchange aggravated glances. Officer Brant steps up next to the sergeant, but his voice has lost some of its edge. “What threat, ma’am?”

God, I hate being called ma’am. “Please call me Dr. Whittaker or even Evanee. I prefer that to ma’am.”

Officer Brant sighs. “What threat, Dr. Whittaker?”

“Thank you, Officer Brant,” I say in a sweet disarming voice. “There were two men in here earlier, with the Rotti-Great Dane mix. They were very aggressive in their request for me to pass along a message to my boyfriend.”

“And who is the boyfriend?” Sergeant Levine asks with mild disinterest.

“I think the important question is who were the men who made the threat.” I look from Levine to Brant. “They were Blackbeards. You know, the biker gang. I didn’t catch their names, but one was the Vice-president and the other was the Enforcer.”

Sergeant Levine assumes the tough guy pose, thighs spread, hands resting on his gun belt. “You’re associating with known criminals?”

I think about this. He's clearly referring to the Blackbeards, but whatever the case, the answer is still, yes. "I suppose I am. However, that's truly irrelevant because I've been threatened."

The Sergeant appears to have had enough. "You want to complain about a threat, then call the police station. We're not here because a couple of Blackbeards dropped by and wouldn't leave their dog with you."

Clearly, I've exhausted their patience. "Then why are you here?"

"We received a complaint that you are harbouring a horse on this property."

Shit. "A horse? That's ridiculous. Who would suggest such a thing?"

"The source of the complaint is irrelevant. Harboring a horse within city limits is illegal. If you're contravening the law by doing so, we'll have to impound the animal, ma'am."

The jig appears to be up, so I go into protective mode. "First, Officer Levine, one does not harbor a horse and second, a horse cannot be impounded like a car."

"It's Sergeant, ma'am." He takes a step closer to me.

"It's Dr. Whittaker, officer." I take a step closer to him. We're almost standing nose-to-nose.

Officer Brant inserts himself into the standoff. "A horse may not be impounded, Dr. Whittaker, but it can be euthanized."

I didn't see that coming. My hands shake as I grope for the counter to hold myself up. "And who would do that? I am a vet, and I would never do such a thing to a healthy animal."

"You're not the only veterinarian in town," Sergeant Levine sneers.

I suck in a breath. "Dr. Broughton reported the horse?" I can't believe it. Erik and I may not be on the best of terms, and he can be mercenary, but he would never put down a healthy animal.

“It doesn’t matter who called it in. Are you or are you not harbouring a horse on this property?”

Lullaby inopportunately brays.

Sergeant Levine looks at me blandly as he brushes by me and heads to the back, followed by Officer Brant.

I trail behind them. “Don’t you need a search warrant?” I say, trying to stall.

Apparently, my question doesn’t warrant a reply.

The Sergeant throws open the backdoor and the men step into the makeshift corral.

Lullaby looks up like she’s happy to see them.

“They’re not friendlies,” I tell her.

“Ma’am. This is illegal,” Officer Brant says in dismay.

I stretch my face to sky as I let the ‘ma’am’ reference go. There are bigger hills to die on. “It’s only until I can rehome her. She’s been abused and is still under medical supervision.”

Sergeant Levine turns to Officer Brandt. “Cite her.” He pins me with a hard stare. “You have 24-hours to remove the horse from the premises. If you do not, it will be confiscated and euthanized.” He stalks out.

Office Brandt writes out the citation. “You’ll have to inform us of where you’ve removed the horse to. It can’t be someone’s back yard still within the city limits.” He hands me the paperwork. “Twenty-four hours, Dr. Whittaker.” He looks at Lullaby with regret. “It’d be a shame. She’s a nice horse.”

Tears wet my eyes, but I hold on to them as I show him out. “Good day, Officer,” I say as I shut the door and lean against it.

Once my emotions are under control, I call Erik. “You bastard!” I seethe. “Why would you rat me out about Lullaby? Sure, you’re an asshole, but I didn’t realize you were scum too. How could you agree to put down a healthy animal?”

Erik seems to be confused. “Lullaby? What are you talking about?”

“Don’t play dumb with me. My horse, Lullaby!”

“Horse?” Erik echoes. “I don’t know anything about a horse.”

I was with Erik long enough to know that he isn’t a liar. Not even the white lies. It’s another reason our relationship didn’t work. “Someone told the police about the horse I was keeping behind my clinic.”

He pauses. “You’re keeping a horse behind your clinic? Jesus, Evanee, what’s wrong with you?”

I blink rapidly, missing Trigger, wishing he were here, then remembering that I need to talk to him about the Blackbeards. “She needed a home and I’m trying to find her one... why am I even justifying this to you?” My mind is racing. “If you didn’t report me, then who, Erik? Who?”

He sighs. “Who’ve you pissed off lately, Evanee? Think about that and you’ll have your answer.”

He ends the call.

I throw myself into the reception chair wondering what the hell happened to Wendy. I need her here to talk to, to help me figure this out. Who have I made angry lately? I think back to the party and go through the various faces. The ol’ ladies? Well, some were less welcoming than others. Slag, for example, but I doubt she’d go to that kind of effort. Same with Verity. Plus, how would they know about Lullaby? The passarounds were friendly enough, though I know they were faking it, but I put them in the same box as the ol’ ladies. None of them would think to come to my clinic and climb over a six-foot-tall fence to look for a horse.

The Blackbeards? No, they’d come in through the front door. Which they did.

Maybe Trigger’s dad didn’t like... ah. The lightbulb goes off. Not Trigger’s dad. Reporting the horse is something petty; something my father would do. Not to get me in trouble, but to make me second guess my choices. I shiver as I think of the VP and Enforcer who paid me the earlier visit. Did dad have a hand in that too?



I slump into the office chair, knowing how bad it is for my posture, but to hell with it. Today is not the day to worry about who the fuck I want to be.

The ceiling needs painting I observe as I lean my neck on the back of the chair and tilt my head up. I blink my tears away as I think about my father. He knows people, some are criminals, but the high-end kind. He wouldn't lower himself to associate with the Blackbeards. Would he?

I pick up the phone to call him when Wendy stalks in like a viper about to strike. She's stopped smoking again and I'm not sure I can handle her moodiness right now.

"Sorry, I'm late. I ran into some buddies of yours," she rasps.

My heart sinks. Her tone of voice suggests anything but. "Friends?" Maybe the Blackbeards cornered her too.

"Yeah." She rounds the desk, elbowing me out of the chair, and thumping her body into it. "A couple of guys in suits. They said they were DEA. They wanted to share their concerns about who you were consorting with. They were very persuasive. Bought me lunch and everything."

Her explanation is so unexpected, I grope for words. "What? Lunch?"

She smirks at my discomposure. "Yeah. They suggested that you needed to be kept safe from Hell's Jury and thought I'd be a good inside person to report back on activities."

My heart sinks. "Are you sure it was DEA?" I know Hell's Jury is involved in criminal activities, but I didn't think their world would impact mine in any significant way.

"Oh yeah. They had badges and everything."

"This is ridiculous," I fume. "First the Blackbeards. Then the cops. They must all be in this together."

"Doubtful," Wendy says, reaching for cigarettes that aren't there. "These guys were acting alone." She stops as she realizes what I've said. "What do you mean, Blackbeards and cops?"

“We’ll talk about that later. Right now, I want to know what’s going on with you and the DEA agents.”

Wendy doesn’t like to be told what to do anymore than I do, but she seems to sense my stress. “They were concerned about your well-being; didn’t think they should approach you directly because of you living with Trigger.” She chews at her thumbnail, then looks at it. “I was intrigued. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy working at the clinic, but it’s minimum wage and I could use the extra cash.”

I get defensive. “It’s slow for now, Wendy! When things pick up, I’ll pay you more.”

“I know. I’m bored too. This seems like fun.”

“It’s not fun. It’s suicide! If Hell’s Jury find out what you’re doing, they’ll kill you.” I’m shaking now. “And Trigger will leave me. They might kill me.”

She sits straighter in the chair. “You don’t have to worry. I won’t fuck this up. I drove a hard bargain; told them that I’d think it over. Asked what kind of money they were talking about.” She reaches into her purse and pulls out an envelope that she hands to me. “Two grand. As a sign-up fee.”

“You agreed?” I’m in shock as I rifle through the bills.

“Took me a while to be convinced, but yeah, I decided to do it.”

This time I can’t control the tears that slip out of my eyes. “Wendy, are you nuts?” I’m on the edge of hysteria. “I love Trigger. I can’t betray him, and I can’t let you do it, either. I don’t want you to die.”

“Cut out the theatrics,” she replies crossly. “What makes you think I’m going to betray him or his motorcycle boys? The DEA are looking for a way inside. They think I’m it. Your boyfriend and his club can feed information through me.” She grins like a barn cat. “Like I said, I was getting bored, and I can use the cash.”

“It’s dangerous.” My tears have stopped and I’m sort of off the edge of the cliff, but I’m still shaking inside. “I don’t want to lose you.”

“I thought I knew you better than that. You’re not spineless and I have no intentions of dying. I need an adventure and this one dropped into my lap.” Her eyes light up. “So let’s get subterfugeing.”

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# CHAPTER THIRTY

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## Trigger



Joker, Reaper and I are sitting outside at the picnic table with beers in our hands, planning our strategy on how to let the prez know that Dino is dead through our neglect. He won't like what happened because I think he wanted to give him back to Crip, but he'll let it go. The problem is we didn't get any goddamn information out of the dead fucker and that's gonna turn Hangman into a raging lunatic.

"I say we blame it on Trigger," Reaper says with an uncharacteristic grin. He's not a teaser, at least not sober, but he's finding something funny about the situation.

"Fuck off, asshole," I tell him, my sense of humour pretty much exhausted. "Last time I saw Dino, he was in your custody."

Joker takes a swallow of his beer, staring past us to the high chain link fence that surrounds our property. He looks like he's thinking about going over the wall. "We gotta rip the band aid off, guys. Tell him we fucked up. Decide what we're gonna do with the corpse and move on."

I state the obvious. "Blackbeards are gonna blame this on us."

Reaper's grin drops. "Of course they are, asshole. Someone put Dino up to the bullshit that happened at the brothel. Don't get it though." He drains his beer and chucks the can towards the firepit and misses. "The odds were slim that he'd be able to grab Kit and take off."

Joker nods. “Yeah. Beat her up first and then let her scream her head off? If it was me, I’d tie her up and gag her. Or knock her out. Lot easier to get out without raising the alarm.”

I think about this. “Maybe Dino was never supposed to get out. Dumb bastard went in there following orders. Maybe Crip wanted us to grab him.”

We’re quiet for a moment as we contemplate that possibility, then Reaper says, “That makes more sense than anything else. Dino was a sacrifice, maybe placed to feed us information that’ll backfire on us.”

“That’s a fucking big risk Crip’s taking,” Joker concludes. “Thinkin’ we were gonna let Dino come out the other end alive.”

I finish my beer and crush the can. “Would we have killed him? Things between us and the Blackbeards are hot right now. Maybe he was thinking we’d give Dino a good talkin’ to, then let him go.”

Joker raises his eyebrows as he focuses on me. “You’re not such an idiot after all. Well, at least not as big as Dino.”

I shrug off the insult. I’ve been called worse. “Ain’t never heard of Dino, so he’s either a hangaround or new prospect. I suppose Crip told him he’d be a hero. That he’d get some promotion if he took one for team.” I pop the top on another beer. “Dumb fuck.”

The ringing of my phone interrupts the conversation. It’s Evanee. “Hey gorgeous,” I say by way of greeting.

“Trigger,” she says. Her voice is too high.

I jump up from the table. “What’s wrong?” Because something sure as hell is. I’ve never heard my girl this distraught.

“Everything! The police gave me a citation for having Lullaby in town. They say they’re going to euthanize her if I don’t move her in the next 24-hours.”

“They cited you for Lullaby?”

Joker and Reaper are looking at me in confusion, so I cover the phone and say quietly. “It’s one of Evanee’s pets. A horse. Cops found out she was keepin’ it in the back of the clinic. Want her to move it.”

To Evanee, I say, “Don’t worry, babe. We’ll talk to the cops. Don’t know why the fuck they’re messing with you. They should fucking know better.”

“A horse?” Joker repeats. “What the fuck are you talkin’ about?”

I wave my hand at him to get him to shut up so I can hear Evanee.

“It doesn’t matter,” she says. “They’re right anyway. Lullaby needs room to run. She’s too confined here and I can tell she’s getting depressed.”

“I got this, Evanee. You ain’t alone anymore. Me and the Jury will find a solution.”

Reaper snorts. “You bring somethin’ like that to church, Hangman will fuck you up good.”

I scratch at the whiskers on my face. Fucking itches all the time. “We go at it differently. Cops are hassling my ol’ lady. That ain’t right.”

“She isn’t your ol’ lady, though. Is she? You haven’t brought it to church. She isn’t vested.”

Evanee hears everything. “I might not be vested?” There’s a quiver to her voice.

“You’re gonna be vested, babe. You don’t got to worry about that.”

Reaper and Joker exchange glances, but keep their mouths shut.

I glare at the assholes. To Evanee, I say, “Hangman ain’t gonna like that the cops are giving you the gears and he’ll make sure it don’t happen again.”

“But what about Lullaby?”

I'm gonna fuck up the cops who made my girl lose her cool. "We'll solve it. Find a place with lots of room for her to run." I look around the compound yard, and a lightbulb goes off. It's big, barely used, the kids could ride the horse. Yeah, that'd work. I don't say it out loud because Reaper and Joker are still listening. I hold my hand over the receiver again. "Why don't you bugger off."

Reaper grins. "And miss all the fun?"

Evanee's talkin' again. "What babe? Sorry, I got distracted by an asshole."

"I bet he did," Joker mumbles to Reaper.

"There were Blackbeards here too. The vice president and the enforcer."

My heart goes into overdrive. "Fuck! Those assholes hurt you?"

"No. Not really." She's sounding more composed now.

"What the do you mean, not really?" I'm already thinking about the heads that are gonna roll.

"What that fuck's going on?" Joker says, looking serious now.

"Fucking Blackbeards," I tell him.

"They wanted me to pass along the message. Made a few threats. I could've shot them, but I couldn't get to my gun."

I feel the chill down to my boots. "Evanee, you can't shoot any Blackbeards. That would cause a war that we ain't ready to have."

Reaper's chuckling despite the conversation. "She's gonna get vested, no problem."

"Shut up!"

"What?" Evanee says, her voice strained.

"Not you, babe. Joker and Reaper. What was the message they wanted you to give me."



“They said you have something of theirs and they want it back.”

Dino, I mouth to Joker and Reaper. “I want you to come in.”

“Should I bring Wendy?”

I think about it. “Was she there when the assholes showed up?”

“No. She was at lunch.”

“Then cancel your appointments, lock up and send her home.”

“I have no appointments.” Again, I hear the stress.

“It’s gonna be okay. Business will pick up.” I try to sound soothing, but I can hear the terseness in my tone. “Get here, baby. Now.”

“Jesus christ,” Reaper says under his breath. “This is longest fuckin’ conversation I’ve ever been involved in.”

I cover the phone again. “No one invited you to stay, asshole.”

“Okay,” Evanee says, starting to sound like herself again. “What about the DEA agents though?”

I almost drop my phone. “What fuckin’ DEA agents?” I shout.

Joker leaps off the picnic table. “Give me the phone.” He makes a grab for it and we grapple over it. I come out on top by knocking him to his ass.

“Joker and Reaper are here. I’m gonna put you on speaker, so you can explain about the DEA agents.”

“No, I don’t want anyone to know,” she says, but it’s too late. Joker and Reaper can hear everything.

“Just tell us, babe. I’m not lettin’ anything happen to you.”

Reaper and Joker don’t seem as committed as me as they share a serious look.

I give them the finger.

“I’m not worried about me,” Evanee says. “And this isn’t Wendy’s fault.”

“Who the fuck is Wendy?” Reaper growls.

“My assistant,” Evanee tells him. “She got approached by them when she was at lunch. They offered her a lot of money to get information about you guys.”

“Jesus fucking christ,” I say, pulling at my beard and grabbing air instead. “Those guys are dangerous. She ain’t hurt, is she?””

“No. She agreed to do what they wanted. They gave her two-thousand dollars, Trigger. I’m holding it right now.”

“Why the fuck did she take the money?” Joker all but shouts.

I narrow my eyes at him. “Back the fuck off, cocksucker, or I’ll bury you.”

Threats like that shouldn’t be made lightly, but he’s talkin’ to my girl and the shit she’s talkin’ about is fucking scaring me.

“It’s okay,” Evanee says. “Wendy said she could feed them false information. Maybe get them out in the open so you can figure out what they really want.”

Reaper, Joker, and I exchange glances. This is the closest we’ve come to the DEA fucks who killed Jess’s brother. Maybe we can find out who they got snitching on us from the inside. We can’t pass it up.

“Wendy there?” Reaper asks.

“No. She’s outside with Lullaby. She’s pretty upset about the citation.”

“You trust the woman?” Joker asks Evanee.

“Of course I do.” Evanee sounds affronted. “Why would she show me the money and tell me what happened if she was actually working with them?”

Reaper shrugs. “Who knows? Maybe she’s playing both sides.”

“That’d be too obvious,” Joker says. He glances at his watch. “Gotta get going. Church.”

“Listen, babe,” I say. “You and Wendy get over here where you’re safe. We’ll figure it out.”

“What about Lullaby?”

“We got 24-hours to solve that problem, but just in case, I’ll send Zero over to keep an eye on her.”

I hear the relief in Evanee’s voice. “Thank you, lover. We’ll head over now.”

I’m reluctant to hang up the phone, but Joker grabs it and ends the call. “Church, asshole,” he says. “We got a lot to talk about.”

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

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# Trigger



Joker, Reaper, and I get to church just in front of Hangman, who comes storming in like he usually does. “Updates first,” he demands as his chair groans under the weight of his big ass body.

“Got more important stuff to talk about,” Joker tells him. “Let’s hold the updates until you hear what we have to say.”

Anyone else and Hangman would chew them up, but coming from Joker, the prez is almost aimable. “Better be good, motherfucker.”

We start with Dino, followed by the Blackbeards hassling Evanee, then the horse problem. It goes exactly as we expected.

Hangman goes ballistic over Dino bein’ dead before we talked to him, and it don’t help that the brothers are laughing like hyenas. He’s less impressed with the Blackbeards fucking around with Evanee.

“You sure it was Mad Max?” he asks.

I nod. “Evanee said he was wearing the VP patch.”

That pisses him off. “Crip just crossed another fucking line, messing with the vet. He’s already on notice for kidnapping Coyote’s sisters. Don’t know why he thinks he should keep pokin’ us.”

“About that,” Joker says, then tells everyone his theory about Dino’s involvement.

Hangman punches the tabletop. “That’s just like Crip, to risk the life of someone else for his own fuckin’ purposes.”

There’s a silence in the room as we process Hangman’s lack of self-awareness.

He notices and gets defensive. “I might ask you fuckers to go in shooting, but I don’t send you in the back door so you can intentionally get picked up by the Blackbeards. That’s too fucking risky. Look what happened to Dino.”

No one reminds him that we didn’t really kill Dino through violence. Neglect certainly, but other than me roughing him up back at the brothel, we never touched him.

Joker, bein’ the diplomat, soothes the prez. “Yeah. We have a code of ethics that we live by.”

“And fucking morals,” Hangman adds as several of us exchange amused glances. “But that don’t solve the Blackbeard problem. I would’ve figured they’d be keeping their heads down, waiting for us to retaliate.”

Rocky leans back in his chair and stretches his back. “Hassling our women or sending in some fuck to get caught by us ain’t exactly gunning for us.”

“We’re not as stupid as Crip or the idiots he’s got in his club. Maybe this is what he thinks is retaliation,” Reaper says.

Most of us nod even though Crip ain’t all that stupid. Mercenary, yeah, but we shouldn’t underestimate him.

“Rocky’s right. The Dino thing seems too mild for payback. Same with the vet. No violence, just mind games,” Joker says.

“Fuckin’ mind games,” Hangman blusters. “We can play too. He wants to get back what’s his, we’ll give it to him in a fucking body bag.”

The horse problem don’t settle Hangman down. “What the fuck are you talkin’ about?” he snarls.

“Cops cited Evanee for keeping a horse out back,” I tell him. “Says they’ll euthanize her if she doesn’t move it in 24 hours.”

“Euthanize the vet?” Hangman squeezes his eyes shut as he tugs on his beard. “They can’t fuckin’ do that for keepin’ a horse.”

Sure I explained it badly, but Hangman’s not that dense, so I know the bullshit is getting to him. Some of the guys suppress their laughter and I get ready to duck. “Put the horse down, not Evanee.”

“So the fuck what?” Hangman bellows. I didn’t expect he’d sympathize, but he ain’t the kind of guy who kicks dogs.

Joker intervenes. “The cops targeted Trigger’s woman deliberately, so someone ratted her out and that isn’t a thing we can put up with, especially since we invested in the vet shop. Unlikely Jackson is acting on his own. He doesn’t have the balls. Someone put him up to it.”

Jackson, the captain of the local police, don’t mind lining his pockets with our dough.

“And,” I add, “Evanee will literally shoot my nuts off if I let her horse get killed.”

Of course, this causes a round of laughter from everyone but Prez.

Jawbone takes a gulp of air and manages to say, “So what’s the solution, Trig? Where you gonna take the horse?”

I may as well get it over with. “Here I thought. We got a big back yard. Kids will love it.”

“Fuck that,” Mothman says like he has a say. “The horse will shit all over the yard.”

“We’ll build it a corral.” I tell him, thinking on my feet. “The kids can feed it and pick up the shit. It’d do ‘em good to have some chores. Teach them responsibility.”

Rocky rolls his eyes. “He moves into a townhouse so now he’s an expert on parenting.”

I give him the finger.

“Who’s gonna pay for it?” Fender asks because he’s the tightwad in charge of the money.

Coyote frowns at me, then sighs. “I’ll pay for the fucking corral. We’re all investors in Evanee’s clinic. It’ll look bad if we let the cops kill the horse.”

“I got a better idea,” Hash says with a smirk on his face. “How about we cut the horse’s head off and put it in Crip’s bed. Like the Godfather did.”

“You fuckin’ animal!” I yell, half-rising from my chair.

Red thumps me back down. “For Christ sake, Trigger,” he says. “The fucker’s playing with you.” There ain’t any love lost between Red and Hash so it’s a surprise that Red’s defending him.

Of course, Hash doesn’t know where the fuckin’ line is. “Am I, asshole? What the fuck do we need a horse for? Next we’ll be getting some kangaroos and a goat.”

“I like the sounds of that,” Rocky says with a grin. “We can get a donkey, so that when the passarounds are busy, Hash’s got someone to fuck around with.”

“Fuck off, bitch,” Hash says.

I hate agreein’ with Hash, but Rocky’s not as funny today as he thinks he is.

Eight asks the practical question. “How’re we gonna get the horse here?”

“How the fuck would I know?” Hangman shouts. “We don’t got a spare horse trailer sittin’ out behind the Chamber.” He runs his hands through his hair. “Jesus fuckin’ christ. We’re in church. Why the fuck are we talkin’ about a petting zoo?”

“I can ride,” Rider, one of the Vegas guys, announces, too new to understand that Hangman’s diatribe is his way of tellin’ us to move on. “If Evanee has a saddle, I can ride it out of town.”

Blood enters the fray. “You can’t fuckin’ ride the horse through town. That’s as illegal as the vet keepin’ him at the clinic.”

“The horse is a girl,” I mutter.



“What?” Hangman says, his lip curling into a sneer.

I straighten up in my chair. “The horse is a girl.” The laughter is pissing me off so I get aggressive. “And since when do we give a fuck about ridin’ a horse through Sagebrush?”

“Man’s got a point,” King says, speaking for the first time.

“We don’t,” Joker replies to question. “But it might get the good citizens going if they see Rider and the fucking horse trotting down the road. Someone’s bitched about it already.”

“We’ll bring it over when everyone’s sleepin’. After midnight,” Rider suggests.

“You can ride in the dark?” Jawbone asks doubtfully.

Rider smirks. “I can ride blindfolded.”

“Where’d you learn to ride?” Rocky asks.

Rider glares at Rocky. “I was a fuckin’ Canadian Mountie, asshole. I can ride. Isn’t that enough?”

“Hey,” Hash says. “About the horse head.”

“Shut the fuck up!” I snarl at the bastard. “Wasn’t funny the first time, sure as hell ain’t funny now.”

He scowls like I’m the asshole. “I’m not finished. We do the godfather thing with Dino’s head instead. Put it in Crip’s bed. He wants back what’s his. We give it to him.”

Hangman looks at him like he’s a genius. “Who the fuck’s gonna do that?” he asks, which means he’s on board.

“Trigger, obviously,” Joker says, then immediately regrets opening his mouth as Hangman turns on him.

“You and Reaper too, fucker. The three of you started this. You end it.”

It’s not that I don’t like Reaper and Joker, but I don’t work with them and I don’t see how this will go smoothly. “Rather bring Rocky and Red along. We more sympatico.”

“I don’t even know what the fuck that means,” Blood sniggers to Fender.

Mothman rolls his eyes. “You guys are even more fucked up than my club.”

Hangman stabs his finger at him. “Shut it or I’ll send you in with the idiot.”

Mothman smirks but shuts up.

Hangman turns to me. “Fine, you want your playmates, they’re all yours.” He says to Rocky and Red. “You go with him then. Get it done tonight.”

“Tomorrow’s better, Prez,” Rider says. “Gotta move the horse tonight and I’ll need Trigger along to help.”

We all wince. Never a good idea to get all logical with the Prez, but seems we’ve fucked with his mojo today. “Fine. Move the fuckin’ horse first, then get Dino done. This is gonna get Crip all hot and bothered and I need some entertainment.”

“Okay.” To Rider, Red and Rocky, I say, “We’ll get together later to sort the stuff out once we get things settled with Evanee and Wendy.”

Hangman rubs his temples. “You’re givin’ me a fucking headache. Who the fuck is Wendy?”

Joker intervenes. “The assistant at the clinic. She and Evanee are comin’ here where’s it safe.” Then he does something inexplicable. “Church’s over. Only ones who stay are Hangman, Reaper, Trigger, and me.”

Everyone freezes, waiting for Joker to die, but Hangman doesn’t react other than to say, “Don’t tell me when church is over, asshole.” He looks at the rest of us. “You heard him. Get out.”

When we’re alone, I tell the prez about the DEA agents.

It goes as well as I expected.

“Those cocksuckers got some balls! How the fuck are they walking around Sagebrush without anyone knowing!” He jabs his finger at me, but he’s yelling at all of us as if it’s our fault.

“Ask the cops,” Joker snaps. “Jackson’s supposed to be keepin’ an eye on who’s coming and going in this town.”

“The goddammed asshole is too busy harassing the vet about the horse to be useful,” Reaper growls. “Time to tune him in.”

Hangman turns to me, “Can we trust this Wendy?”

I nod, hoping I’m not wrong. “Evanee says we can. Besides Wendy isn’t stupid enough to play one side against the other. We don’t offer her anything but her safety right now. We can reward her later if she draws the motherfuckers out.”

Hangman looks pointedly at us. “This don’t get out. Between us. Understand? This is our opportunity to get those fucks and whoever they got inside our club.”

“No to talking to Eight,” he says to Reaper. “No Rocky or Red,” he says to me. “They ain’t the ones ratting us out, but right now, the fewer that know, the less chance it’s gonna get around.” He pauses. “You gotta tell the vet and the assistant to keep their mouths shut.”

“Don’t gotta tell them,” I grumble. “Evanee knows better.”

“I wanna talk to them.” He looks at his watch as he stands. “Not at the clubhouse. I’ll let you know when and where.” Then he stalks out.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

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## Evanee



Wendy and I arrive at the clubhouse to find it quieter than usual. Ash is lounging on a chair, one leg over the arm, texting on his phone. Brielle is sitting on the floor playing on a tablet and the three boys are parked on the couch. Max glares at me, and Sean and Oscar ignore me, but they all gaze curiously at Wendy.

Wendy is looking around the room with interest. Her eyes skip over the children to the beautiful mural of the Hell's Jury logo that dominates one of the walls, then the pool table, then the bar and the women next to it.

I don't see Haley, but her sidekick is talking with Verity. It's not a friendly conversation, but that doesn't surprise me.

"Jess," I tell Wendy as I nod towards the blond beauty who's waving her hands in the air. "And the other is Verity."

Verity pulls a pack of cigarettes from her purse and Wendy's eyes light up. She beelines towards Hangman's ex. "You got one to spare?"

Verity peers at Wendy, her eyes narrowing. "Who are you?"

I chase Wendy. "Don't, Wendy. You've been doing so well."

"So well doing what?" Jess asks.

"She quit smoking," I tell her. "Four days."

Verity laughs derisively. "Four days isn't an accomplishment."

“We need to support her,” Jess says to Verity like she’s talking to a child.

Verity ignore Jess. To me, she says, “Who the fuck is Wendy?”

“I’m right here,” Wendy rasps as she grabs Verity’s cigarette pack out of her hands and drags a smoke out. “I’m Evanee’s office manager.”

I guess if she’s an investor, she’s allowed to promote herself.

“Thanks for the smoke,” she says to Verity.

I watch in despair as she plucks the lighter out of Verity’s hand and heads to sliding doors leading out to the back yard.

“What are you doing?” Verity growls at her.

“Smoking outside,” my new office manager replies over her shoulder. “Bad for the kids to see smoking and also bad for their lungs.”

“That’s what I was just telling Verity,” Jess says in frustration as Wendy disappears through the doors, Verity chasing after her.

I smile at Jess. “Guess you should have grabbed her lighter and ran off with it.”

“What are you and Wendy doing here anyway?”

Good question and I hadn’t really thought up a reason. I don’t need one, but I don’t usually have Wendy riding shotgun. “It’s about my horse,” I say quickly, thinking that’s the least harmless subject. “I got cited for keeping it town.”

Jess twists her lips to one side as she heads behind the bar. “It’s illegal?”

I nod. “Yes. Within city limits, you’re not allowed to keep large animals such as cows and horses.”

“Goats?” she asks. She places a tall glass on the counter. “Coke or orange juice?”

“Goats too I think.” I nod towards the glass. “Is drinking in front of the children bad for them too?”

She drops her eyes. “No.” Then she leans over the counter. “Don’t tell anyone, but I think I’m pregnant. Haven’t had time to get a test yet, but I’m late and my breasts are tender.”

I can’t quite figure out how that relates to me not having a drink, but I say, “Congratulations, if you want a baby.” In past, I’d stop at the happy wishes and throw a charming smile at the mother-to-be, but my association with this club seems to be weakening my social filters.

Jess takes no offence. “I do. Rocky’s baby,” she sighs. “Imagine how great that’ll be?” If this were a cartoon, there’d be little pink hearts floating around her head.

I try to visualize me with a baby, but nothing comes up. “I’m happy for you,” I murmur.

She barrels on. “Then when you see mine, you’ll want one of your own. They can have playdates and we can compare their progress and do birthday parties together. Haley has two and won’t be having anymore, so it’s up to you and me.”

“What about Bryce?” I ask wishing she were here to rescue me. “Or Chrissy?” She’s still young but married a few years or so I’m told. I’m surprised she doesn’t already have one.

Jess purses her lips. “I don’t think Chrissy will have any more. Her son was killed by a hit and run driver two years ago. She’s still struggling with it.”

I feel a chill at the woman’s loss. “That’s sad.”

Jess nods. “She comes to parties and stuff but mostly keeps to herself.”

I think back to the party on Saturday night. Chrissy was there, but I had the sense that she was also somewhere else. At least her mind was.

Jess is frowning and rubbing her belly, so I move the topic from Chrissy back to the baby-to-be.

“Well, there’s Bryce then. She might have a baby.”

Jess jumps back in where she left off. “Even if she did have one, which I think she won’t, she wouldn’t be very much fun. She’s....” Jess pauses. “Well, she’s....”

“Impersonal,” I supply helpfully.

“Exactly,” she enthuses. “But you would be fun.”

“Thank you,” I murmur. I should be flattered that I’m considered fun, but the conversation is moving into a future that Trigger and I haven’t yet discussed. I try to think about how great it would be to have a baby with him. Maybe. Not sure. They’re messy and demanding.

Then I imagine dressing my daughter in designer outfits and little wool berets. She couldn’t wear heels until she was bigger, but Manolo Blahnek Mary Janes or Christian Louboutin derbys would be adorable on her tiny feet. If it were a boy, he’d wear little Levi jeans and Boss T-shirts. Maybe a tiny leather cut like his daddy has. And boots. I stop and think. I’m almost certain Michael Kors makes combat boots for children.

Fortunately, Jess interrupts my thoughts. “What do you think then. Baby or no baby?”

Instead of replying to the whole ‘should I have a baby’ conversation, I slide onto the barstool. “I’m not remotely pregnant so instead of orange juice, I would like a scotch please.”

She grins. “Coming right up.” She reaches for the Canadian Mist, and I shudder. I’d have to be almost dead to drink that rotgut.

“No.” I point at the bottle next to it. “The Glenfiddich single malt.” Someone around here has decent taste in scotch.

She hesitates then pulls it out. “What’s the difference?”

“Not a scotch drinker, are you?”

She wrinkles her nose. “No. It’s gross.”

“Maybe,” I murmur as she pulls a glass from a shelf, “But a shot of the good stuff makes a bad day seem not so bad.”



“A cold beer does that for me.” She sets the glass down and opens the ice cooler.

“No ice. Just some filtered water.”

She furrows her brow. “We don’t have filtered water.”

“What do the kids drink?”

That makes her pause. “Well, coke I guess.” She reddens as I raise an eyebrow. “At least I’ve got Verity packing apples in their lunches.”

“One small step at a time,” I smile.

“And she’s smoking outside now, thanks to your Wendy.” She glances towards the doors. “What’s she doing here anyway? Shouldn’t she be at the clinic?”

“Well, besides the citation, other things happened today, and Trigger wanted me to come in with Wendy.”

Her eyes brighten. “Do tell.”

“Don’t tell,” Eight rumbles as he strides towards the bar. “Not until you’ve been told what you can say.”

I flip my barstool around and look the biker up and down. He’s not ugly, not pretty, but would be a draw to women who liked the tall, dark, silent type. Except that he’s closed up. I can see it in the set to his mouth, his dark stare, his coiled body. He’s violence, not danger. He’d scare most women off, including me. “Sure,” I reply because I’ve lost my words and that annoys me more than a bad manicure.

Rocky saunters over, proprietarily tugging Jess to him, kissing her like they’re alone in a hotel room. “Missed you,” he says.

“Missed you too,” she replies rifling her hands through his hair.

Eight grunts and stalks towards Oscar, who puts down his controller and jumps to his feet. He grabs his pack and the two walk out together, Oscar saying a few words and Eight nodding.

“Where’s Trigger?” I ask Rocky when he comes up for air.

“Stayed behind. Stuff to talk about that Hangman wants to hold on to for a while.”

I suspect that particular stuff has something to do with me and Wendy. I nod, thinking of Eight’s words. Despite being an asshole, he’s right. It’ll take some time to get used to the biker code.

Rider joins us. “Trigger and me are going to move the horse tonight.” The man is compact, yet wiry, shorter than most of the men here, but that doesn’t deter him. Confidence rolls off him.

“Where are you taking my Lullaby?”

“We’re bringing her here. Gonna build her a corral.” He nods at Jess. “Wouldn’t mind a beer, sweetheart.” Then he says to me. “Got a saddle for her?”

He’s completely oblivious to Jess and Rocky’s glares as his attention flips back and forth between us.

“Get your own fuckin’ beer,” Rocky grumbles.

He barely registers the chill as he steps behind the bar, inserting himself between Rocky and Jess and digging around the beer cooler. He accidentally bumps up against Jess as he grabs a bottle.

“Get the fuck away from her,” Rocky snarls, but his fist finds air as Rider skirts the bar, twisting the cap off.

To me, he says, “Saddle?”

“Don’t you have a horse trailer?” I realize the ridiculousness of the question as soon as it leaves my mouth. “Of course, you don’t,” I say as Rider chuckles. “But Lullaby can’t be ridden.”

“Why not?” Jess asks.

“She’s been abused. It’s why I have her in the first place.” Sadness swamps me at how cruel humans can be. “Maybe someday, but she’s not ready yet.”

Rider shrugs me off. “I’m good with horses. She’ll let me.”

He's cocky, I'll give him that, but Lullaby is not as docile as she seems.

I think about his words, which leads me to thoughts of the citation, which leads me to wonder who ratted me out. "Excuse me," I say politely. "I have a phone call to make."

Despite the size of the clubhouse, there are few places that a body can find privacy. I venture up the stairs, an area I've never been. There are several doors, most of which are closed, but the door at the end of the hall is open, so I peek inside to find it empty.

Sunlight futilely tries to bridge the dirty glass in the lone window. There's a bed tucked up against a wall and a desk and chair opposite, both long past newness. A few men's clothes are neatly folded and set on top of the desk. A bathroom is to the right of the door and I check inside. Clean and tidy. It's odd, because this clubhouse is clearly the domain of men, and none of the bikers appear that fastidious.

I let it go because it isn't important. Right now, I have to call my father.

I seat myself on the bed because the chair is wood, and I worry I'll ruin my Valentino crepe skirt should I pick up a splinter or two. The skirt was an impulse buy and I've regretted the lime green confection ever since. I'm only wearing it because the move into the townhouse was fast and chaotic, and I've not yet had time to sort everything out. Still, I don't have it in me to abuse my designer clothes.

Daddy answers on the first ring which means he's not busy and even if he was, he'd take my call because I'm his little girl. It makes me sad to think that our relationship is splintering because of his inability to let me grow up. "Evanee, I'm so happy you called."

I bet he is. "Hi Daddy. The most awful thing happened to me." I'm being coy, leading him by the nose to an admission. "Two Blackbeards came into the clinic today and threatened me."

“What?” I hear the fear in his voice, then outrage. “Are you okay? You’re not hurt, are you?” He pauses, groping for words, then snarls, “I’m going to kill those sonsabitches.”

“No need,” I tell him. “Trigger has it well in hand.”

“That’s the problem right there,” he roars. “This wouldn’t have happened if you weren’t associated with that low-life.”

“Need I remind you that low-life is my fiancé,” I say with a healthy amount of chill in my voice.

“I don’t care if he’s the Prince of Persia. He’s put you in danger and I will not have that.”

Time to play my ace card. “Well, someone certainly has, but it wasn’t Trigger. It was about my horse. They wanted to take it away and euthanize it.”

“The horse?” His voice sounds hollow.

*The horse.* “It was strange that they came about my Lullaby, but they said the police asked them to pick her up. Did you know that the captain in Sagebrush is in the pockets of the Blackbeards?” It’s fiction because I know nothing of the sort, but it’s plausible.

“Jim Jackson,” he chokes. “He sent the Blackbeards?”

Interesting that my father is on a first name basis with Sagebrush’s captain. “Yes. Trigger arrived and intervened, thank goodness. Otherwise, I don’t know what they would’ve done to me. I certainly wasn’t going to let them have my horse, not willingly.” I’m a little dismayed that the lies are falling so easily off my tongue. I’m going to have to revisit my sense of self.

His panic betrays him. “I thought... I asked Jackson....”

“You knew about Lullaby?” I say, still being coy.

He sighs. “Yes, baby. I keep an eye on you. I’m aware of everything you do. I asked Captain Jackson to cite you for the horse. I didn’t mean for it to come to this.”

I raise my eyes to the ceiling. “Why, daddy? You know me better than to think a citation would run me out of Sagebrush.”

“I do know you, Evanee. Animals are your weakness. I figured if you were hassled enough, you’d come home.” The arrogance is back in his voice. “You don’t belong in Sagebrush, and you certainly don’t belong with a bastard who brings trouble to your doorstep.”

“Really, daddy. Aren’t you being just a tad hypocritical?”

“No!” he snaps. “I’m afraid for you! Why doesn’t that matter to you?”

“It matters, but I’m not your little girl anymore. I make my own choices and you have to stop interfering!”

“That’s bullshit! I will never stop looking out for your welfare.”

I’m tired of the conversation. “We need to sort this out, but it’ll have to keep. I have a horse to move.” I hang up on him mid-sentence.

I return downstairs to find Rider on the couch talking to the boys and Jess sitting on a bar stool, Rocky standing between her thighs, kissing her passionately.

Trigger enters the room, and heads straight to me, wrapping me in his arms. “Fuck, baby. I’m gonna burn every motherfucker who messed with you today.”

“I know you are, lover,” I reply, then slide my hands up his back. “Thank you.”

He glances around. “Wendy here?”

“Yes.” I haven’t seen her since she went out for a smoke. “She’s outside bonding with Verity.”

Jess rolls her eyes as she comes up for air. “I bet they’re brawling.”

Trigger holds my waist lightly as pulls me to a quiet corner. “We gotta sort this thing out with Wendy and the DEA agents,” he says softly, kissing my temple. “Hangman don’t know whether to be pissed or excited. The assholes waltzed into town wearing suits and flashing badges. They should’ve stood out like sort thumbs, yet no one said anything.”

I run a hand across his chest, taking a trip over the peaks and valleys of his muscles. “I’m worried for Wendy, but I don’t think I can talk her out of playing double-agent. She’s very excited.”

Trigger clasps the hand that’s now tracing his perfect abs. “Hangman doesn’t want to talk about it here, said he’ll let us know.” He glances over at Rider. “We got other things to do.”

I smile at him with love in my heart.

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## **CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE**

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## Evanee



I'm in Lullaby's back yard reassuring her that the move is for her own good and that she's going to love her new home.

She seems to be on board, but I'm concerned about how she's going to react when Trigger and Rider arrive. She's not good with strangers, especially men.

"You're late," I say softly to Trigger when they appear. "I was getting worried about you."

"Sorry, babe," Trigger replies as Rider prowls around the small paddock. "Had to borrow a saddle from an unsuspecting farmer. Hope we can get it back to him by morning."

That's what I love about Trigger. He's not the kind of guy who takes advantage of others. If they deserve it, he kicks ass. Otherwise, he's as friendly as a Canadian beaver.

"This is a nice setup," Rider says, his voice hushed as he skirts Lullaby. He stands in front of her with relaxed body language, holding her gaze, but he hasn't touched her yet. My confidence in him grows. I don't think he'll make a move towards her until he sees her eyes soften.

"How long before you saddle her?" I ask. Could be minutes, could take an hour. I'm uncharacteristically nervous and have been since this afternoon. The Blackbeards are blips on my radar; it's the threat to Lullaby that I'm anxious over.

Rider doesn't move, "She's gonna need a little time to get to know me."

"She doesn't like men. Her last one was an asshole."



Trigger squeezes my waist. “How can she tell Rider’s a man?”

Rider’s teeth gleam in the dark as he smiles. “I’m not wearing a skirt, asshole.”

“She can tell,” I say before Trigger gets riled up. “Animals are sensitive to smell. You two smell like men.”

Trigger kisses the side of my head. “I’m gonna take that as a compliment.”

“I’d like to get this done,” I whisper in his ear. “So we can go home and I can thank you properly.”

He draws me closer. “Me too. The things I got planned.”

I laugh softly. “The things I’ve got planned, lover. It’s your turn to sit back and enjoy the ride.”

“You know,” Rider says in the gloom. “Me and Lullaby can hear every fuckin’ word you’re saying. She don’t like it.”

Trigger rolls his eyes. “You make love to the horse and leave me and my girl alone.”

Rider raises his hand and runs it down Lullaby’s muzzle. She snorts but doesn’t otherwise react.

“Careful,” I say.

“Go inside,” he orders in a soft voice. “Both of you.”

I leave reluctantly. When we close the door behind us, Trigger pulls me in for a hard kiss. I open to him, let him take me, enjoying his masterful handling, then as I get turned on, I try to take over. It’s a battle with tongues and lips and hands as we grope each other.

“Let’s take a walk.” He grabs my hand and tries to lead me away, but I resist.

“No. I don’t want to leave. What if Lullaby needs me?”

“It ain’t gonna work if you’re hovering over her,” he growls with authority and tightens his grip on my hand.

“It’s just—”

Then I lose my train of thought as he swats me hard on the ass and herds me into my former bedroom. “I’m gonna take your mind off the fuckin’ horse.” He shoves me up against the wall as he slams the door behind us. “How many times should I make you come? Two, three?” His eyes glint wickedly. “Yeah, three times. You’re good for it.”

“Trigger,” I start, but his lips aggressively find mine.

“You know what I like about you,” he murmurs against my mouth as he hikes my skirt to my waist. “The clothes you wear. Especially the skirts. Makes it easier for me to get at you.”

His fingers are already in my panties as he kicks my legs open. “You don’t mind if I dive right in?” Then he does. Two fingers inside me and his thumb griding against my clit.

We’re both breathing hard, and his fingers are doing the trick. I can’t focus on anything but my man. “Is that best you can do?” I taunt as I pull him closer to me and grope his cock through his jeans.

He grabs my wrist and slams it over my head. “Nope. Not now. This is about you, gorgeous. Not me. You can show your appreciation later.”

He pulls me away from the wall and sits me down on the bench that sits between the animal crates. The kennels are empty at the moment, which is disappointing, not because I like to be watched during sex, but because it reflects how slow my business is.

“Where’s the pets?” he asks as he kneels on the floor and peels my satin panties off. I lift my ass to help him.

“Wendy and I moved them to our house before we came over to the clubhouse.” I dig my nails into his arms as my need for him grows. “I wanted them safe.”

He swats my thigh as forces me to my back. “You fuckin’ listen to me when I tell you to do something. You wanted the pets out of here, the prospects could’ve done it.”

I grab his neck and force his face to mine. “Singalong doesn’t like Zero and Crank for some reason.”

“That ain’t your problem. We got Stark now and he won’t put up with bullshit from your fuckin’ Scottish asshole of a bird.”

“Singalong is rough around the edges, that’s all.”

“Quit talking about the fucking bird.” He crushes his lips against mine and gives me a long bruising kiss. His body presses onto me and his hands grip my wrists.

“Trigger,” I moan as I shift my face to the side. “I worry.”

He kisses his way down my body, taking my wrists with him as he shifts his body to the end of the bench. “Legs over my shoulders, babe. Not gonna tell you twice.”

He doesn’t have to, because most of my darlings are safe and his lips are making promises that I have every intention of making him keep.

I slide my legs over his shoulders then jerk as he releases my wrists and hefts my hips up with his hands. He presses his lips against my clit.

“Fuck,” I moan. I’m already so turned it takes only a few swipes of his magical tongue to make me fall off the edge. It’s the same every time. A delicious electrical current that invades every part of me, making me touch heaven before I go numb.

“Good girl,” he says as he laps at my juices.

I’m still coming down from the first orgasm when he starts feasting on my pussy like a starving man. He slides two fingers into me and fucks me slowly. “Wish it was my dick,” he mumbles as he swipes his tongue through the creases in my thighs.

I groan and grab at hair that is no longer there. “Make it your dick, then.”

“Later.” He pushes fingers harder into me, then curls them against that magical inside zone, stroking lazily.

“Fuck!” I buck my hips. “Speed the fuck up, you bastard.”

“Settle down, gorgeous. We go at my pace.” He kisses my clit.

I lift my head and shoulders up so I can see his head. “You promised three, so get to it before Rider shows up.”

He nips the inside of my thigh hard enough to bruise. “The only fuckin’ name on your lips while I’m goin’ down on you is mine.” He’s still tickling inside as he grips my hair and yanks my head so he can stare hard into my eyes. “You understand, babe? I ain’t playing games here.”

I throw my head back as his commanding words topple me. “I understand,” I gasp, wanting so badly to scream, but I don’t want Lullaby to worry.

“That’s two,” he says as he flattens his tongue hard against my sensitive clit.

“Give me a minute,” I pant. “I need a minute.”

“You don’t get a fuckin’ minute.” He uses his teeth to draw my clit between his lips, his tongue working it.

It aches in protest at first, then the build starts, pushing me upward even as I wriggle my hips to evade him. “You’re going... I can’t,” I moan as he assaults me relentlessly. I spiral higher, almost there. Almost.

Then the bastard pulls back from my tortured clit.

“You ready?” he asks, his voice strained.

“Yes. Yes. Yes,” I chant.

He blows on my clit. A steady hot breath that shatters me. My body jerks wildly and I start to fall off the bench, but Trigger grabs my waist and holds me steady, the tip of his tongue flicking at my clit as I come down.

“Jesus,” I whisper.

He presses my thighs against my breasts as he leans over me and kisses me hard. “I don’t break promises, baby.”

Almost on cue, Rider’s voice floats into the room. “Lullaby is saddled up and ready to go.” He pauses. “If you two are done in there, we gotta get moving.”

Trigger helps me up and finds my panties. I grin as I slip them on, my eyes on his beautiful face.

I give him a hard kiss. “I hope you like payback, lover,” I whisper, then we head to Lullaby’s paddock.

My darling is saddled up and seems to be impatient to get started. It’s after one in the morning and given the distance to the clubhouse, it’s going to take a while.

Rider echoes my thought as he tickles Lullaby’s forelock. “She’s out of shape so I can’t push her. We’ve got five miles to cover, but we’ll get out of town fairly quickly, won’t we sweetheart?” He blows on her snout, and she whinnies softly.

My heart thumps in panic. “You can’t run her.”

He narrows his eyes. “Don’t be a nag.” Lullaby snorts as if to say, *good one, Rider*. “We’ll have to canter at least until we’re past the city limits. Then I’ll get down and walk her for a mile. Then we’ll canter again.”

I open my mouth to protest, but Trigger gives me a little shake. “He knows what he’s doing, baby.”

How do you know, I almost ask, but then let it go as I watch Lullaby gaze at Rider with trust. “Okay,” I nod. “Okay.”

“Trigger, you’ll follow me, and Evanee, you head to the clubhouse and wait for us there.”

There are so many problems with this scenario. “I should follow you. She knows me, not Trigger. And Trigger’s bike will spook her.”

Trigger starts to agree with me, but then stops as Rider shakes his head, the lines around his mouth tight. “Trig says you can drive a bike, so do it. Trig, you take her cage. If there’s trouble, I need you there to handle it for me.”

“I can handle trouble.” I don’t know why I’m being so difficult. After all, these men are helping me. Still, it’s Lullaby.

“No, babe. Not the trouble we might encounter.” Trigger swats me. “Get your ass on my bike and get to the clubhouse. Wait there.”

“Fine,” I say petulantly as I grab the keys out of his hand.

He follows me into the clinic, then takes the keys for my Beamer. He tugs me in for a long, sensuous kiss. "It's gonna be fine. You worry too much."

"You would worry too, if she were your horse."

He raises his eyebrows. "She is my horse, ain't she? I may not be her dad, but I love her mom and that's good enough for me."

I almost melt at his words. "You're an asshole," I say softly as I slap his chest.

He returns my affection with a hard kiss, then opens the front door. "Out. I'll lock up."

I have no choice, but to agree, so I step out onto the pavement and watch as he closes and locks the door behind me. He jabs a finger towards his bike. "Go," he mouths.

I turn to the bike. It's been so long since I've driven one that I almost forget about Lullaby in my excitement. I don his helmet and throw my leg over the seat. This is Trigger's bike. I grind my pelvis into the leather as I think of him straddling the bike while I ride him. It almost tips me over the edge and also off the bike.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

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## Evanee



**S**tark raises his eyebrows when I pull up to the gates on Trigger's bike. He's tall, handsome enough, though nothing compared to my man. His face is hard, his eyes stripping me down. He doesn't smile, nothing charming, and I feel naked under his scrutiny. Usually, that doesn't bother me, but this man seems like a lion ready to pounce.

"Girl who rides a sled," he comments without inflection as he opens the gates, then watches me wheel the bike through, not offering to help.

I like most people, but him, I've just dropped into my 'maybe' category. "Lots of girls ride bikes. Welcome to the 21st century." I'm surprised at my sarcasm because I don't often use anger to deal with hostile men. I decide it's because I'm worried about Lullaby.

My reply doesn't phase him. "Not the pretty ones."

I drop Trigger's helmet as I turn to stare at him. Where's a gun when I need one? I take a deep breath and blow it out. This situation is impossible. Use my charm, don't use my charm? I think of Trigger. Don't use my charm. Let it go, Evanee. No point debating my finer points with a cranky asshole.

"Excuse me," I say with dignity as I turn my back on him.

I bang the door on his chuckle.

The clubhouse is deserted when I get inside. Of course it is. It's a Monday, or rather, Tuesday morning, almost 2 AM. The main room is dimly lit – just the pot lights over the bar are



on. I'm relieved to be honest. It's been a long day and my encounter with the new prospect has left me rattled. I want Lullaby here, then I want Trigger to take me home and help me forget everything about the last 24-hours.

I wander past the pool table over to the sliding doors and flick the light switch. Light floods the back yard. Or compound. Or whatever it is. It's big, has firepits and a brick enclosure for barbecuing. A couple of picnic tables are placed haphazardly, and off to one side is an outdoor two-story playground set for kids – slides, netting, a swing. There's a garage in a corner with a single sliding overhead door and a few other smaller buildings. One looks like a tool shed, another, bigger one, is probably used for storage.

The fresh cool air greets me as I step outside and walk carefully towards the construction in the far corner. My heels are meant for floors, carpet, and pavement, not the ruts and little rocks that are hazardous to my ankles should I stumble.

Lullaby's corral has already been partially built and I'm impressed by how quickly things get done around here. The lumber for the paddock is resting by the fence and a small barn has already been framed. There's a water trough and several hay bales to one side as well as what appears to be a secure barrel of oats. Lullaby will have everything she could possibly desire. Now all I need is my sweet girl here and I can rest easy.

I smile as I turn back to the clubhouse, then falter when I see a light leaking through the window high on the wall in Hangman's office. It wasn't there when I came outside and it's weird to me that Hangman would be here at this time of the night. Still, I don't know the man well enough to be familiar with his comings and goings. If it is Hangman, I need to thank him for what he's done for Lullaby. I also know he wants to talk to Wendy and me about the DEA agents. Maybe this is an opportunity to start the conversation.

He's an impatient, autocratic man who fills up a room with both his body and his presence, but he doesn't make me nervous. In fact, despite his blustering, I quite like him. I imagine the two of us bonding over a beer as we wait for

Lullaby, talking about my day, planning a course of action to lure the DEA agents out.

Of course, I know that's not going to happen. He's the most misogynistic man I've ever met. He credits the women in the club with brains, but at the same time, isn't interested in their opinions. Still, he seems to have no problem sending them into the line of fire when it's needed. I want to think that his behaviour is mercenary, but it's no less than what he expects from the male members in the club.

I think of Trigger. Commanding and protective. I like how possessive he is of me. I like that he respects my intelligence and fortitude. That he respects what's important to me, and that he thinks I'm beautiful. He's the perfect man for me.

Refocusing, I decide that, at the very least, I should say hello to the president so he doesn't think I'm shunning him. I pick my way gingerly back to the clubhouse, flick the outside light off, then head to the office. "Hello, Hangman," I say as I approach.

There's no response. The office is empty. "Hello," I call, pausing in the doorway, reluctant to enter Hangman's domain without him inside. "Who's in here?"

My words hang in the air for about ten seconds, then Chrissy's head pops up from behind the desk.

"Chrissy!" I exclaim. I have this stupid image of Hangman down on the floor with her, but I quickly dismiss it. I don't think Hangman's the type to move in on another man's territory.

Chrissy is pale and her arms tremble as she uses Hangman's desk as a prop while she climbs to her feet. "Evanee. What are you doing here this time of night?" Her words are hesitant, her tone hollow.

I think she owes me the bigger explanation, but I reply anyway. "Trigger and Rider are bringing my horse over."

"Why aren't you with them?" she asks suspiciously.

She doesn't realize she can't push me around. "Why should I be?" I tilt my head at her. "What's going on?"

Chrissy doesn't immediately answer as she drops her eyes to her fingers, which are sliding back and forth across the surface of the desk.

My penchant for long silences is to wait them out.

Finally, she says, "It's really stupid." She draws the words out, pausing in between them, then tugs at her ear lobe. "I was in here earlier with Fender."

I blank. "Fender?" I've met so many new people in the past few days that I've lost track of who's who.

"My husband. You were introduced."

"Right," I say with a nod. "Nice guy."

"Yeah," she agrees. "I lost an earring somewhere." She tugs at her ear lobe again. "In the clubhouse." Her face reddens and she blinks. "They were my mom's."

There's sadness in her eyes, but it still doesn't answer my question. "They must be special to get you up in the middle of the night."

She smiles sheepishly. "They're all I have left of her. I was laying in bed, obsessing about it. Restless." She gives a small helpless shrug. "Fender told me to go and look for it. He was grumpy that I was disturbing his sleep."

What a stellar guy, I think acidly. Kicking his wife out of bed in the middle of the night instead of getting up and going with her, or better yet, distracting her by dining on her pussy. Then I wonder if she's telling the truth. Besides the two of us, there's no one else here but Stark. Maybe home is not so happy and she's seeking comfort in tall, dark, and hostile manning the front gates.

Or maybe it's more than that. After all, he'd have had to let her in, so he'd know she was here. Maybe they're working together against Hangman.

I quickly reject that possibility because if they were plotting something, Stark would have warned Chrissy of my presence.

Or maybe, Evanee, you're overthinking it all. Maybe it really is about a lost earring. "I can help look for it."

She shakes her head. "I've looked everywhere I was today. The last resort was Hangman's office."

"Okay." I hear the engine of my car and my heart leaps. "I have to go. Lullaby's here."

As I turn, Chrissy says softly, "Evanee, please don't tell Hangman I was in his office. He really doesn't like his space invaded."

I look back at her. "I get it." Chrissy's right about Hangman. His office is his domain, and he wouldn't be impressed if anyone crossed the threshold into it without his permission. "I won't mention a thing to anyone."

"Thank you," she says gratefully.

The entire encounter is quickly forgotten as I hear Lullaby clomping into the compound.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

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## Evanee



Hangman, Joker, Reaper, and Trigger stalk into my clinic like they're about to destroy it. Despite not having nearly enough sleep, I was having a good day until they showed up with their testosterone, aggression, and male scents. It doesn't help that they've wheeled their bikes backwards side-by-side in the small parking lot of my clinic.

"Could we talk about this later?" I ask. "Business is already slow, and any potential clients will run for the hills when they see you."

Hangman gazes at me. "We're gonna talk about this now. We can make this quick if you quit your bitching."

Wendy gives a throaty chuckle from behind the counter as she stands. "This is going to be fun."

She doesn't appear alarmed by Hangman's grim face as he glares at her. "You the bi... one the DEA agents cornered?"

"Wendy, you already know Trigger." I introduce the rest starting with Hangman and ending with Joker. "Hangman's the president."

Wendy grimaces at me. "I can see it on his vest."

"Right," I reply. I'm well aware that I'm fidgeting with my hands as I glance back and forth between the men and Wendy.

"Hey babe," Trigger says as he slides a much-needed arm around my waist and tucks me into the warmth of his body. "You don't have to be nervous. We're here to talk."

I bury my nose in his shoulder and breathe. His scent calms me. Ironically, despite being an unpredictable criminal, he personifies safety and stability.

He inhales too. “You remind me of the rose bushes in my dad’s yard, back when mom was alive.”

Reaper squeezes his eyes shut. “Jesus. You’ve turned into a fruitcake.”

“I love fruitcake,” I reply as I wrap my arms around Trigger’s waist and clasp my hands. As comebacks go, it’s not my best.

Wendy chuckles at my attempt. “Relax, Evanee. I’ve got this.” She turns to Hangman. “Why don’t you all sit down?” She waves to the row of reception chairs.

Hangman looks behind him and scowls. “Why don’t we get the fuck on with it. You tell me exactly what happened yesterday, and I’ll tell you what’s gonna happen next.”

Wendy tilts her head to the side as she considers Hangman. “Okay. We’ll start with what happened yesterday. Then you and I will discuss what happens next.”

Hangman stabs a finger at her. “Don’t fuckin’ push me. I’m not in the mood.”

I stiffen at his aggression towards my office manager.

Trigger kisses the side of my head. “Don’t worry, babe.”

Wendy gazes at him, then the others, then outside at the bikes. “You’re not exactly being subtle, are you? If the so-called DEA agents are staking out the clinic, they’ll know something’s up.”

“They aren’t staking out the clinic,” Trigger says. “We have eyes up and down this street and nothing’s out of the ordinary. Besides, the assholes wouldn’t be stupid enough to still be hanging around.”

Joker agrees. “They got a reason to dress like feebs and talk to you publicly, but they ain’t gonna stick around and wait for one of us to notice them.”

“Why would they want to talk to Wendy in public?” I ask because it doesn’t make any sense to me.

Trigger looks down at me. “They probably think that if they get her alone, it might spook her. This is their way of feeling her out. Trying to decide if she can be trusted.”

“Can we get on with it?” Joker rumbles as Reaper paces the lobby, looking down the hall, and checking out the bulletin board that’s covered in notices and brochures.

“Sure,” Wendy replies. “Went for lunch yesterday to that new sushi place. You been there?” she says to Hangman.

“I don’t even know what the fuck sushi is,” he blusters.

“I call bullshit. You’ve been around long enough to know it’s Japanese food. Rice and seaweed rolls with raw fish or vegetables. Sometimes both.” She looks expectantly at him. “Come on. You must have heard of it.”

Hangman looks green. “Not the fuckin’ raw fish kind.”

“This isn’t a tea party,” Reaper growls. “I got things to do today.”

Hangman and Wendy glare at him. “Anyway,” Wendy says, “I just sat down in a booth when these two men came over. Suits. Not that unusual. Sagebrush isn’t that out in the sticks. One sat across from me and the other beside me, blocking me in.” She shrugs. “I was irritated more than anything. Attila here,” she nods towards me, “only lets me have a half hour.”

I get defensive. “It’s all I take too. Besides, you’re always gone longer than a half-hour.”

Wendy lifts her shoulders in a half-shrug. “It’s the principle of it.”

“Jesus,” Reaper says to Wendy as he settles himself against a wall. “You and Hangman are gonna die of old age before this conversation gets done.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Hangman growls as Joker and Trigger share amused glances.



“I guess you can’t help that you’ve got assholes in your club,” Wendy says to Hangman. “Evanee can give him a tranquilizer shot if you want.”

Hangman rewards her cheekiness with a smirk. “I’ll think about it. What happened?”

“They told me they were DEA agents, flashed badges, and everything. Tom and Jerry, they said and I told them they could fuck right off if they thought I was a fool.” She grins as she thinks about it. “They said they were sorry, but their names were classified. I told them I had only thirty minutes for lunch, so they needed to say what they came to say.” She leans towards Hangman and lowers her voice. “They said that Hell’s Jury was an outlaw gang, and they were worried about Evanee and me getting mixed up with them.”

She pauses dramatically and gets what she wants when Joker says, “And?”

“And I agreed. I told them I was worried about Evanee too because she’d just moved in with one of you accurately-called criminals.” She nods to Trigger. “I said *one of you* instead of Trigger because I thought it made me seem like I didn’t approve.”

Reaper starts prowling again. “Could we please get to the nuts and bolts.”

“Such nice manners,” Wendy rasps then returns her attention to Hangman. “They seemed pretty happy that I disapproved of Evanee and Trigger’s relationship.” To me, she explains. “I don’t. I think you two are made for each other.”

Trigger smiles as if Wendy’s approval made his day. “Thanks, darlin’.”

Joker snorts but she pays him no mind. “Tom and Jerry said I could help my boss out by pretending I was supportive of the relationship. Then I could get inside information that might help them press charges against you guys.”

“What’d they look like?” Joker asks as he pulls a notebook from the inside pocket of his cut.

“We already know what they look like,” Hangman says irritably.

“We know what the guys in our photo look like,” Joker counters. “We gotta find out if these were the same guys.” He gazes at Wendy expectantly.

She takes a moment to think about it. “Suits, ties, slim. One was taller than the other by maybe three inches. Short guy was no more than 5’8” I guess. Nothing that stood out. They had the classic fed look – short hair, clean-shaven.” She twists her lips as she looks past Joker. “Brown hair. Brown eyes.” She shrugs.

“Not helpful,” Reaper says flatly. “You seem pretty relaxed for someone just approached by the feds to do a little spying.”

“I made my living in the stripper circuit. This is nothing compared to some of the bullshit I’ve encountered.”

Joker, Hangman, and Reaper look more closely at her. None of them comment.

“I made them spend most of the lunch break convincing me. I told them that there had to be something in it for me. I wasn’t going to risk my life and lose my job. They agreed. Told me they’d pay me well. I told them I wanted a down payment upfront. Tom pulled out an envelop full of cash and gave it to me. Two thousand dollars. A lot of money for sure.” She pauses. “Of course, it came with all sorts of dire warnings about them arresting me if I betrayed them.”

“This is bullshit,” Reaper interjects. “You think we’re the lesser of two evils?” He asks this in a way that implies they’re not.

I think she’s going to admit she’s afraid of Hell’s Jury, but she surprises me. “First, Evanee and I are friends so I’m not going to betray her. Second, Tom and Jerry are full of shit. If they were legit, they wouldn’t have come at me straight on and in such a public place. They wouldn’t come at me at all. They’d flip someone in your club who had an inside track.”

I can’t help but pick-up on the uneasy glances exchanged among the bikers.

Wendy seems not to notice. “Investigations like the one they’re talking about – it’s a long haul, not some piecemeal game.” She pauses as she picks up her cigarette pack and flips it around in her hands.

Hangman and Joker are looking at her with respect and Reaper’s looking over her head, like he’s thinking. I glance at Trigger who winks and smiles. Then his eyes drop to my cleavage.

“I’m getting old but I’m not dead yet.” She glares at Reaper, who smirks. “And don’t want to be. If I’m gonna pick sides, I’d rather be on your side. You don’t play games.”

Hangman agrees with Wendy. “We sure as fuck don’t.”

Tigger chortles. “Most of the time.”

“Anything else?” Joker asks.

“I ordered sashimi and a tuna tataki and they ordered—”.

“We don’t fuckin’ care what you were eating,” Reaper exclaims.

Wendy narrows her eyes then dismisses him. To Hangman, she says, “We talked about logistics as we ate and drank green tea. I made them pay the bill.” She smirks proudly. “They gave me the money and this phone.” She pushes the cell towards Hangman.

Hangman takes a long considering look at Wendy, then nods. “Okay. I’m gonna trust you.” He picks up the cell phone, examines it, then returns it to Wendy. “Bring this to the clubhouse to let Coyote look at it. Might have a tracker.”

“I can bring it,” I say, worried for Wendy. “I don’t think Wendy should go there.”

“I disagree,” Wendy replies. “What if it rings? I’m supposed to have it on me all the time.”

“But if it has a tracker,” I argue. “Then they’ll know you’re at the clubhouse. How will you explain that?”

Wendy grins. “Easy. I made friends with Hangman’s ex when we were there yesterday.”

Reaper snorts. “Verity don’t make friends with anyone.”

“Neither do I,” Wendy replies. “We have a lot in common.”

Hangman seems to think it’ll work. “Okay, but you don’t tell Verity anything about this.”

Wendy rolls her eyes. “I’m not stupid, boss. I don’t talk to anyone.”

“How’s she going to explain yesterday?” Trigger asks. “Her being at the clubhouse and all.”

Hangman looks expectedly at Wendy since she seems to have an answer to everything.

She does this time too. “Evanee was threatened by a couple of Blackbeards. You told her to come in. Told her to bring me along for my safety.” She gives Trigger a toothy grin. “It was a handy coincidence.”

“Maybe too handy,” Reaper grumbles.

Hangman ignores him. “You sure Verity and you are friendly? Maybe you misread the signals.”

“We’re like twin sisters,” Wendy says with a smirk. “She’s lonely, you know. Needs a confidante.”

“I don’t trust you,” Reaper says as he stalks over. “You got a fucking answer for everything. Already playing the game before we started this conversation.”

She stares blandly at Reaper. “It doesn’t take a lot of brain power to plan ahead.”

“Good thing,” he mutters.

Hangman intervenes. “These assholes have already killed two guys that we know of. We gotta make sure you’re protected.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that.” The tone in her voice borders on sarcasm.

Hangman misses the subtlety. “We wanna draw them out, so we’ll feed you info. They call, you give it to them.”

“They won’t have another face-to-face,” Joker muses. “They’ll arrange a drop.”

“Yeah. If they want a meeting, it’ll be to kill you,” Trigger adds bluntly. I stiffen and he pulls me closer. “Don’t worry, babe. We’ll have her back all the way.”

Hangman glances between me and Wendy, then to the rest of us, he says, “Let’s go. I have some thinkin’ to do.”

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

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## Trigger



Crip lives in a double-wide mobile home on a one-acre parcel of land on the southern edge of the Cold Springs area outside Reno. The yard is bush, bare dirt and incongruously, some rectangular wood boxes for gardening and a couple of small greenhouses.

“Didn’t realize Crip had a green thumb,” Red says as we survey the property with infrared night vision goggles. Rocky, Red, and I are lying on our bellies concealed by some brush, waiting for Coyote to get here. He wasn’t initially part of the plan, but then we thought it would be a blast to film Crip’s reaction. Shits and giggles and all that. We could’ve set up the cameras on our own, but Coyote will make sure it’s done right.

Rocky sniggers. “Gangrene, I’d call it. You ever see his fingernails? They look like they haven’t been cleaned in a decade.”

“Yeah,” I smirk. “His stink is like an early warning system. Helps to know when he’s coming.”

Red sniffs the air. “Can’t smell anything but fuckin’ dust and weeds. Guess he ain’t around.”

Stink aside, the lack of visible light and movement suggest the house is empty. It’s only eleven o’clock, dark enough for us to hide ourselves, but early enough that we know Crip won’t be home yet.

Red shifts his big ass body. “Christ, the guy is stupid, living out here in the boonies unprotected. Not even a fence.”

“Fence wouldn’t keep anyone out,” I reply. “Not even us.”

Red sniggers. “Maybe you, asshole.”

“We goin’ in or what?” Rocky says, impatient to get done and home. “Jess don’t like being kept waiting.”

Red whistles air. “Whipped!”

Rocky don’t take offence. “You wait. It’ll happen to you too.”

“Already happened,” Red replies, his good humour fading. “Never gonna happen again.”

“Shut up, both of you,” I grumble. “You’re fucking with my good mood.”

Rocky chuckles. “Yeah. Let’s focus on puttin’ Dino’s head in the asshole’s bed. Crip wants his property back, we’ll give it to him in spades.”

“Where the fuck is Coyote?” I growl. “Not like him to be late.”

“He ain’t comin’,” Red decides. “Let’s go in.”

“The fuck’s reliable. He’ll show,” Rocky interjects.

A scuff sounds behind us and Red whips out his gun. “Fuckin’ better be you, Coyote.”

Coyote emerges from the gloom with a case in his hand. “It’s me. Put the cannon away.”

Red holsters his Glock. “Where the fuck have you been?”

Coyote drops down beside him. “Getting the equipment together. I was short on mikes. Had to go shopping.”

“It’s eleven o’clock. What kind of electronics store stays open that late?” Rocky asks.

Coyote’s pearlies cut the dark as he grins. “My kind.” He peers at Crip’s trailer. “The asshole’s not home?”

I shake my head. “Nope. He’s at Petee’s with Mad Max and a few others.” Petee’s is competition for the Jury’s strip club. Isn’t owned by the ‘beards, but they’re frequent fliers. “Hash’s keepin’ an eye on him. He’ll text when they leave.” I glance at my phone. “Says it’s all clear on his end.”



“I don’t trust that prick,” Red grumbles. He’s got good reason not to. As a prospect, he got the shit kicked out of him by the fucker.

I defend Hash anyway. “He might be an asshole, but he’s still a brother. He ain’t going to fuck us around.”

“Let’s go,” Rocky says as he climbs to his feet.

“Stay down,” Coyote hisses. “We have to make sure the place isn’t wired. Didn’t you learn anything from the Harper shitshow?”

The shitshow he’s referring to is when Rocky, Red and I went to get our stolen bikes and cartel money back from the interbred family that stole them. We were in such a hurry that we triggered a silent alarm. Ended up with Jess in the middle of a fire fight and Red with a hole in his belly.

“So how we gonna know?” Rocky snarls with impatience.

“Shut up and give me a minute,” Coyote snaps as he rises to his feet. “I can’t concentrate with all your sniping.”

We settle into silence as Coyote sneaks up on the property, too slow for our liking. “Let’s go,” Red mutters. “If we stay behind him, then we ain’t gonna trigger anything.”

“Good idea,” Rocky replies, already on his feet, Red following.

“Goddamit,” I hiss, hurrying to catch up. “We gotta be careful.”

“You’re gettin’ pussy-whipped too,” Red mutters when I reach him. “Losin’ your backbone. That’s what women do to men.”

I look side-ways at the giant. His hands are empty. “Where the fuck is Dino?”

“Shit,” Red says under his breath as he turns back towards our hiding place. “Forgot the asshole.”

I roll my eyes and wait for him.

When he returns, he’s holding the sack an arms-length away from him. “It’s wet at the bottom and fucking cold.” He

shudders. “Accidentally picked it up that way.”

“Grow some balls,” I tell him, but truth be told, I’d be shuddering too. I prefer to work with live bodies. After they’re dead, they’re no fucking fun.

When we catch up to Rocky and Coyote, they’re bickering. “He’s got the place wired, asshole,” Coyote hisses. “You want to kill us all?”

“Just you, fucker,” Rocky snarls. “Christ, we’re gonna be here all fucking night waitin’ while you knit a goddamn sweater.”

Coyote doesn’t respond and we wait in silence as he dismantles a small box, then carefully cuts wires. “You’re breathing too loud,” he says to Rocky.

Rocky’s fist curls.

I grab Rocky’s shoulder. “Cut it out. We need him.”

Coyote sits back on his haunches. “There. We should be good to go through the yard, but the house will be alarmed too, so don’t go in until I say.”

We follow him into the yard, past the greenhouses. I almost trip over a spade and some fertilizer that’s hidden in the bushes.

“I’d bet ten bills that there’s bodies buried under the daisies,” Red says.

No one takes the wager.

Coyote dismantles the house alarm system in two minutes. “This is amateur work. All of it. Crip needs to get a better IT guy.”

“You volunteering?” Rocky says as he barrels past Coyote and inside.

“What bug crawled up his ass?” Coyote grumbles.

“He’s horny,” I tell him.

Red sniggers as he follows Rocky into the house.

The trailer isn't as bad as I thought it would be. It stinks like Crip, but with fumigation, it might be liveable. It has three bedrooms, but two are filled with shit like old tires, hedge clippers, some boxes. There's even an artificial Christmas tree leaning up against a wall.

"Look what I found," Red says from one of the bedrooms. He's holding up a hula hoop.

"Jesus," I snicker. "The things you learn about a man when you break into his house and leave a head in his bed."

He disappears inside the room, then emerges with an ancient scrub board. "What the fuck is this?"

I roll my eyes. "This isn't a fuckin' garage sale, asshole. Put it back where you found it."

I head into Crip's bedroom. Coyote's settin' up the cameras and recording equipment, Rocky watching him, shuffling from foot to foot while he waits.

"Would you fucking chill, man?" I tell him. "We're gonna get done when we're done."

Rocky gazes at me like I'm the asshole, then turns towards the hall. "I'm gonna go piss in Crip's milk."

Red comes in with a boxful of books. "Look at these," he exclaims as he digs around. "Didn't think the fucker could read." He holds a book in the air. "This looks like a first edition Moby Dick." He stuffs it into the waist of his jeans.

"Put the box back, you jackass. We ain't a fucking book club."

He glares at me as he carries the box out, then returns empty-handed.

I stare at him in exasperation. "Where the fuck is Dino?"

"Shit," he mutters and leaves again. When he returns, he looks like he's seen a ghost. "I swear I left him in the bedroom I was in, but found him in the other one."

"So the fuck what?" I scrub my eyes. "Too much alcohol and not enough pussy. It's fucking with your mind."

He shakes his head as he practically throws Dino at me. “I wasn’t in that fucking room.”

“Jesus,” I say as I scramble to catch the sack. “You gonna piss your pants, don’t do it in here.”

“Crip needs a maid,” Coyote grumbles to no one as he whacks at a cobweb in the corner of the ceiling.

“Or a flame thrower,” I reply absently as I survey the room. The bed’s set up so there’s night tables on each side and it’s easy to tell that Crip sleeps on the side nearest the door. The night table has a bunch of shit on it including an overflowing ashtray. It’s good luck because I can put poor Dino on the other side where it might take Crip longer to notice him.

“Done,” Coyote says as he steps back. He turns to me. “You ready to go?”

I nod as I set Dino’s head on the pillow next to Crip’s, then draw the blanket over his face. Just some hair’s peeking out.

Coyote steps up beside me and we survey the scene. He chuckles. “This is going to be good entertainment.”

Coyote resets the alarm on our way out the door. “I’ll keep an eye on the feed tonight. Text me when Hash texts you. That way I’ll know when the real party starts.”

He heads back the way he came, Rocky following him, and Red scuttling behind.

They’re gone by the time I get to my bike. I don’t waste time wondering where they went. Like them, I’ve got places to be.

Evanee’s still up when I get home, lounging in our bed reading a journal full of animal research, or so she said when I saw it on the coffee table in the living room. She’s wearing this black lace see-through nightgown that falls mid-thigh. Her long shapely legs are stretched out in front of her, one knee bent. Those sexy glasses of hers are perched on her nose as she looks over them at the page she’s reading.

At my entrance she raises her head and a slow deliberate smile spreads over her lips. “Welcome home, lover,” she says sensually as she removes her glasses and sets them on the night table. “I was getting lonely.”

Apparently so was my dick as it turns to steel. “You are a fucking sight to behold.”

She tilts her head as she looks me over from head to toe, then back again, stopping at my groin and studying the tightness of my jeans. “Why are you still over there when I’m over here?” She closes her journal and sets it next to her glasses, then turns to her side, one hand supporting her head, the other gliding over the hip she’s propped up.

I hesitate, thinking about all the times I never stopped to think. It’s different now because it’s Evanee and I’m not going to disrespect her. “Gotta shower first, baby. I’ve been handling unsavoury bits and pieces.”

Her lips form an upside-down heart-shaped pout. “I don’t mind getting a little dirty.”

I think of Dino, of the cold wet sack. “Not this kind of dirty,” I growl as I turn my back and speed-strip. As soon as the water’s hot, I jump in the shower, grab the soap and start scrubbing.

As I’m rinsing, a pair of hands slides over my belly and up my chest. Evanee’s curvy body presses into me. “I’m okay with clean too,” she whispers in my ear. “In fact, let me help you.”

She takes the bar of soap from my hand and runs it slowly over my back. “Your tat is magnificent,” she says, and I feel her tracing over it with the soap. “The logo is pussy-drenching. The wings, the skull, the raven. It’s such a turn-on.”

“So are you, baby,” I growl, my dick at bursting point. I start to turn towards her, but she shoves me up hard against the shower wall, her foot kicking my legs open the way I’ve repeatedly done to her. “I’m not done back here,” she says in a demanding tone.

I could take over, but for the moment, let her have her way. After all, that bar of soap she's holding is slowly creeping downward.

Evanee runs it through the crack of my ass, stopping at the asshole, scrubbing it, playing with it. "Fuck," I grunt as she slides a soapy finger inside. "Are you fucking trying to kill me?"

She slides out and in again. "I was thinking of giving you a prostrate exam." She drops the soap and brings her other hand around the front, wrapping her long fingers around my hard as steel pecker. Then she pulls upward as she aggressively penetrates me. "A doctor friend told me that the way to find a man's prostrate is to grab the penis, pull upwards and dig deep." She pulls her finger out, gives my cock another tug, then pushes back inside me.

"You're not fucking going that deep, sweetheart." I yank her wrist, wrench her around, shoving her belly-first against the wall and twisting one of her arms up her back. "You wanna play with assholes, we're gonna play with yours."

She slaps the wall of the shower to gain balance as she gasps at my aggression. "I wasn't done," she protests.

I stoop to pick up the soap, then after straightening, kick her legs apart like she just did to me. "I'm not done either, you fuckin' little tease."

I slide the soap down the crack of her ass a couple of times, then drop it on the floor. I'm not quite as gentle as her as I force a finger into her asshole as far as I can.

It brings her up on her toes as she grunts. "Easy lover, I don't have a prostate."

"Yeah, but you have a beautifully fuckable ass." I move my finger in and out, keeping it real slow. It ain't gonna be enough for her, and I smirk at how well I know my girl when she presses her ass against my hand.

"Quit playing around, you bastard. Either you're in or you're out."

Fuck me. "You ain't ready for the in part baby."

“Just a little,” she implores.

“You want a little, do you,” I growl, knowing it’s gonna take restraint I don’t usually have to give her just a little. I drop her arm and shove my body against hers, fumbling with my dick as I run it up and down the crack of her ass. I replace my finger with it, but just at the entrance, pressing enough to make her open to me.

She gasps but pushes her ass against my cock. “A little more, please.”

“Evanee,” I say, my lust barely leashed. “Don’t fuckin’ tempt me. I’ll lose control and hurt you.”

Even as I say this, I inch inside her.

She takes a deep breath, her body rigid. “Out again, then in. That far.”

“You’re killin’ me here,” I rasp as I pump in and out. The head of my dick is smilin’ but the rest is getting pissed. “I need to fuck you, baby.”

“Just a little more,” she says, her voice strained. “Then I’ll give you a good wash, a blowjob, and a mind-blowing fuck.”

I make the mistake of grabbing her waist and looking down at her ass, my dick sliding in and out. It’s fucking amazing. I mean, I’ve had ass before, but Evanee’s is a round globe of perfection. I lose control and shove further in.

She slaps the wall and tries to evade me. “Okay, that’s all, Trigger.”

It’s too late though. I looked where I shouldn’t have. I pull out, push in, pull out, push in. I’ve got enough control not to slam myself into her, but not enough to stop. “You’re gonna have to take me, gorgeous.” I wrap my hands around her body and twist her nipples. “Fuck yourself.”

She moans as her hand finds her pussy. “Jesus, I’m turned on,” she says, then jerks as I slide inside her again. “We need some lube.”

I can barely hear her over my heavy breathing and pounding heart. Her hole is squeezing me like a vise; each

time I pull out, it puckers like its pouting, each time I push in, it invites me deeper.

She's matching me breath for breath. "Trigger, fuck," she moans. "Oh fuck." Her asshole tightens around my shaft and when she comes, it spasms hard enough for me to lose control.

My hands tighten on her waist as I stare down at my cock fucking her. I don't speed up; I don't push deeper even as the pressure in my balls builds. When I come, my jizz shoots out of me so fucking fast and hard that I lose all the feeling in my legs. I sag against her, trying to get my heart under control. I gotta stay standing because I'm not ready to release her.

She's leaning up against the wall, her elbow bent, her head propped up on her arm as she gasps for breath.

Finally, I slide out of her, then bring her down as my knees buckle. I grab the soap and scrub myself, letting the water from the shower rinse me, then turn her, making her straddle me with her knees then shove inside her pussy hard and fast and as deep as I can fucking get.

She wraps her arms around me, her head buried in my neck as she rides me. It takes a little longer this time, but I don't mind. Her silky pussy rubbing up and down my dick is the best feeling in the world. I got the woman I love in my arms and nothing else matters but here and now.



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## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

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# Trigger



There's something magical about a plan comin' together in exactly the perfect way.

It's late mornin' and I'm standing in Hangman's office briefing him and Joker on the excursion to Crip's house. I barely get started when Hangman's phone rings.

Hangman smirks as he looks at the caller ID. "It's Crip." He raises a finger to his lips to keep Joker and me quiet, then puts the phone on speaker and sets it down on his desk.

"What?" he snarls. It's pretty much how he starts all phone calls.

Crip's enraged tone is loud and clear. "You motherfucking cunt!"

"Good morning to you to, ballsac. Have a good night's sleep?"

"I will fucking kill you!"

Me and Joker's shoulders are shaking as we try to suppress our laughter. The VP's not quite successful as a snort escapes.

Hangman winks at him then returns his attention to Crip's tirade. "Got a problem, asshole?"

"This is the fucking end for you and your motherfucking bastards! I'll wipe you off the face of the map!"

"I'm confused. Shouldn't that be my line?" Hangman spins the phone. I ain't ever seen him so happy. "After all, you fucker, you're the one who messed with my brother's family."

He's talkin' about Coyote's parents, shot to death in cold blood by one of the Blackbeards' associates, then helping the bastard kidnap Coyote's twin sisters. "You fuckin' crossed the line killin' and kidnappin' innocents."

"Deserved, fuckface. The bastard killed Vortex."

Poor old Vortex was a Blackbeard that accidentally got in the way of a bullet from Coyote's gun when Coyote was rescuing his woman.

"Aw, shucks," Hangman replies blandly. "Did someone shit in your coffee this morning?"

My stomach hurts from silent laughter and I gasp for air as I think about Rocky goin' off to piss in Crip's milk.

"You're dead, you cunt!" Crip bellows. "Fuckin' dead!"

The smile falls off Hangman's face. He thumps his hand down on his desk so hard the phone jumps. "You don't make fuckin' threats to me, you cocksucker! You fuckin' messed with our family, killin', kidnapping, threatening our skirts! You stepped over the line. Dino's head in your bed? That's the least of your fucking problems."

Joker and I ain't smiling anymore. The Prez this furious is a sight to behold.

"One of these days, I'm gonna turn you into dog food." Crip's voice is low and deadly. "You better hope I don't find you alone."

Hangman laughs derisively. "You think I'm afraid of you? You're shit on my shoe, you cunt. A fucking wasp that needs killin'."

"Like you did with did with Dino? He's no Blackbeard. You killed him in cold blood for doin' nothin' worth dying over. You're the fucking murderer."

"I tell you what, bitch." Hangman leans closer to the phone. "Everything you done up to now, I'll wipe the slate clean. We're even. You understand? No more fuckin' around with our families or I'll mess you up good."

There's a pause on the other end. "It'll be a cold day in hell before I let you give the orders."

Hangman narrows his eyes. "I'm done here." He punches the end button.

"Whew," Joker says. "That was intense."

Hangman looks over at him. "Guess we accomplished what we wanted. Got Crip riled up."

I scuff my boot on the carpet as I run the conversation over in my head. "No talk of retaliation. Just a temper tantrum."

Joker agrees. "Blowing off steam. Has to save face."

Hangman leans back in his chair. "Hope that shuts things down for a while. We got too much else goin' on right now to deal with Blackbeard bullshit." He changes the subject as he asks Joker, "Any news on Meg?"

Meg was a passaround who got pregnant with Hangman's kid while he was married to Verity. She went missing when Brielle was four years old. Gone for six years without a trace until one of the Harper's told us his family killed her. That was all the info we got before Hangman turned his head to mush.

Joker shakes his head. "No time, boss. Not with the usual club stuff and those feebz playing games." He motions towards the phone still on Hangman's desk. "And the fuckin' Blackbeards."

Hangman sighs. "Guess she can keep. After all, she's been waitin' six years."

"Gonna have to," Joker replies.

Rocky sticks his head inside the doorway. "Coyote's almost set up. Should join us now." He glances at me with a grin and a quick raise of his eyebrows.

"You got beer in there?" Hangman asks as he stands.

"Yup," Rocky nods. "In a cooler. Better get there before the brothers drink it all."

Red shoves a beer into my hand as I walk into Church. "Thanks," I say absently as I look around at the brothers

talking, some laughing, some serious. Everyone's there, including the former prez, Lord, who's now in a wheelchair thanks to a stray bullet in a fire fight.

I sit in my usual place next to Rocky and facin' Reaper across the table. Coyote's attaching a cable to the TV, a small grin on his lips. He's the only one of us who's seen the feed, which I guess is why he's smiling. "Ready," he says as he slides into the chair next to Reaper.

The brothers stop talking, all eyes glued to the screen.

The cameras are set up so they record in the dark and the mikes are super-sensitive to sound. Crip's bed comes into view.

I point at the lump on the pillow. "Dino's head."

"Shut up, asshole," Jawbone says. "We don't need subtitles."

I grin as I take a sip of my beer. I'm feeling as mellow as a man can get after a good night of fucking. And this morning, my girl woke me up with a blowjob before she headed to work. It was in the kitchen, me standing at counter with a cup of coffee, watching my cock being fucked by her beautiful mouth.

I don't know why it turns me on so much to see my dick sliding in and out any of her holes, but it's making me hard thinking about it.

The distant bang of a door in the video brings my attention back to the TV screen. The mikes are so sensitive we can hear Crip stumbling around, cursing, then the flow of piss and the toilet flushing. Another thump as he leaves the bathroom.

"The filthy bastard didn't fuckin' wash his hands," Hash says, pretending to be outraged.

"At least he used the toilet," Rocky sniggers.

"Shut up," Hangman growls even though he's laughing as hard as the rest of us.

Coyote turns up the volume as Crip wanders into view. He's so fucking drunk he's stumbling all over the place, hittin'

the wall, the furniture, slurring his curses. We watch as he struggles to undress. Like any biker who respects the code, he shrugs out of his cut and hangs it on the back of a chair. The rest of his clothes ain't so lucky as he manages to kick off his boots after several tries, then fumbles with his jeans and T-shirt until he's naked.

"Fuck," Rider says what the rest of us are thinking. "I'm gonna have to bleach my eyeballs after seeing that."

The laughter roars out of us.

Crip crawls into bed, then the feed goes black.

"What the fuck?" Hangman growls, looking at Coyote, who's leanin' back in his chair, his arms folded. He's wearing a smug smile as he tilts his chin towards the screen. "Keep watching."

A few seconds later, the feed comes on again. This time, it's early morning judging by the brightness of the sun as it shines through the curtainless window. Crip's snoring, laying on his side towards the window. Dino's head's about a foot from his face.

Jawbone snickers in anticipation as Crip mutters something in his sleep and smacks his lips.

We watch as Crip opens his eyes, slowly at first, blinking a few times. Closes them again, then opens them so fucking wide it looks like his eyeballs are gonna pop out of his head.

"AHHHHHH," he screams as he scrambles backwards, gets caught up in the sheet and falls on his ass out of bed. He stumbles a few times as he tries to get to his feet, his dick flapping in the air.

"Good cameras, brother," Hash snorts. "Pickin' up on that shriveled old dill pickle."

The guys laugh harder.

Meanwhile, Crip is stumbling backwards, staring at poor Dino. "The fuck?" he says, sounding like he a swallowed a frog. He finally stops swaying but is keepin' back from the bed, looking at the head, holding his stomach. He swallows

convulsively a couple of times, then drops to his knees and heaves out his guts.

“Fuck,” Fender groans, covering his mouth. “I can almost smell the stink.”

I can't disagree. A hungover naked Crip pukin' is enough to turn anyone's stomach.

Coyote almost chokes on a swallow of his beer as he tries not to laugh. “Wait. It gets better.”

When Crip's done, he climbs to his feet, wiping his mouth. Last night's meal is still dripping off his beard and snot's glistening on his moustache. He takes a few steps towards the bed, then gags and pinches his nose.

“Guess Dino's wearing too much aftershave,” Red chuckles.

“Ode de lah puke,” Lord says to another round of laughter.

Crip slowly leans a knee on the mattress, then thinking better of it, steps back. He makes his way carefully around the bed and reaches out with a shaky hand towards the sheet covering Dino's face. He plucks at it then jumps back, not really gettin' it done. He repeats this a couple of times, until Dino's face emerges, glassy eyes staring up at Crip.

“Oh fuck,” Crip groans as he slides his hands over his face. Then his eyes roll back in their sockets, and he faints dead away. The feed goes blank.

I'm laughing so hard my guts are hurting.

“I'm gonna fuckin' piss my pants,” Rocky says as tears stream down his face.

The room is in chaos. We're talking loud, cheering, toasting to a job well done when Zero runs into church, his face pale, his body shaking.

“Something bad's happened,” he says in a hollow voice as he looks at me.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

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## Evanee



I take my time getting to the clinic today. Wendy's taken another day off and since she's not there to nag me about coming in late, I decide to detour to the mall to do a little shopping. There's something about being a girl in love. I haven't felt the need to indulge in retail therapy for a while, but the fact that I've got absolutely no appointments this morning makes me fall off the wagon.

An hour and two pairs of shoes later, I'm back at the clinic. I generally park at the curb across the street rather than the clinic's parking lot because there are only a few spaces. Some day, they'll be full of cars that belong to real animals and their people.

I'm walking across the street, the bags with my shoes clutched securely in my hands, when Sweet Tidings explodes.

**BOOM!**

The force knocks me backwards several feet and I land in a heap on the pavement. My ears are ringing, and I throw my hands over them, too late to block out the sound of the blast.

I'm swimming underwater, can't catch my breath, can't hear, can't see through the dust and smoke. My eyes hurt, tears burning, nose running, my body numb.

People are shouting though I can only understand the hollow intonations of panicked words. Then someone's next to me, yelling for an ambulance, but in slow motion.

"I'm okay," I croak as reality intrudes. I slap away a hand that's trying to raise my head. There's the familiar sting of

mascara as it adds to the pain in my eyes.

“You’re not okay!” a loud voice exclaims. My ears are still ringing but the hearing’s coming back. My crumpled body protests as I unbend it slowly, checking for broken bones or other injuries.

“You’re bleeding, Dr. Whittaker,” a gentle male voice says. My sluggish brain gropes for a name. Manteen... yes. Manteen, the owner from the deli.

I ignore him as I take stock, sobbing. My Wolford logo tights are ripped to pieces and soaked in blood. And my feet are bare. I touch my face. Wet from weeping, maybe blood, but I don’t feel pain.

“Not too deep?” I mumble, blinking my eyes, trying to clear them with tears. “Am I bleeding to death?”

Manteen wipes blood from my arm. “No. I don’t think so.”

His touch makes me jerk as the numbness turns to agony. I look down, the world blurs and I feel faint. No! I can’t black out. I have to stay conscious.

My skirt is ruined, singed in places, ripped in others. And my feet, a toe poking through the tights. “Where are my shoes?” I ask Manteen in a monotone voice.

A few seconds, maybe minutes, pass and then he pushes one of the bags with my new shoes into my hands. “All I can find.”

Every bone, every muscle in my body screams as I try to stand, then fall as my knees buckle.

A woman cries, “No! Don’t move! The paramedics are on their way.” She has the high strained voice of someone about to faint.

Hands try to force me down and I slap at them.

“Leave me the fuck alone!” I scream. “Everyone, get the fuck away from me!”

My hysteria works. People give me space, a male voice telling someone to get me a blanket. That I’m going into

shock.

It doesn't matter.

I climb to my feet. Sway and grab the air. Almost topple. Then a hand is there, supporting me. "Let me help," Manteen says as he steadies me.

I blink a few times, then his face swims to view in front of my eyes. My vision's still blurry, but better.

A young girl is on my other side, her hand gentle on my waist. "Are you okay?"

I gaze at her. The details become sharper. Blue hair and several lip rings. Black lipstick. Terra Moon. I think that's her name.

"Yes," I rasp, then clear my throat. "Yes." My voice is stronger. I take a step away from Manteen and Terra.

"Where's my purse?" I mumble, trying to turn my head, to look around me. It's slow. I'm slow. Why can't I move faster?

"It's here," Paul Belmonte, the owner of the bakery two blocks down, says as he hands it to me.

My hands are shaking as I take it. Why are my hands shaking? Why do my eyes hurt? My ears?

Then I remember. The explosion. My clinic. My life.

I stare across the street to the burning pile of debris that used to be Sweet Tidings.

My head swims again and I feel faint as I think of the loss of life if it hadn't been empty. What if Wendy had been working today? What if my sweethearts were still living there, trapped in their cages? Burned or crushed? Still alive, in pain, dying slowly? What if Lullaby had never been moved?

What if Trigger...? I let loose a sob at the sickening thought, then another, covering my mouth with a bloodied hand. I hardly spare a thought for myself as the nausea in my stomach coils into something darker.

Rage.

Someone destroyed everything I've worked for since I was eighteen. All my dreams are in ruins.

I curl my fists and pound them against my temples. "Fuck!" I scream. "Fuck!"

Even my car is ruined, a side window blown out, scratches, dents. I stare around at the rest of the buildings. Glass shattered, the building next to my clinic crumpled. Lawyer's office. Wolverstien, Wolverstien, and.... I shake my head.

"Where are the lawyers?" I ask as cold seeps into my bones.

"Okay. They're in shock, but not hurt." Terra again.

I nod at her, then stumble to my Beamer.

"Sweetie, where are you going?" I don't know the woman talking. Pink blouse, black pants, but the suit-jacket clashes.

"Don't wear lavender with pink," I mumble as I wrench open the driver's door.

"No. No." Manteen protests as he grabs my arm.

"Ahhh," I yell as pain streaks up it. "Don't touch." It's cut, not broken I don't think, which is good. I'm going to need both arms to do what I plan next.

Manteen jumps back. "Sorry, Doctor Whittaker," he says. So polite, always calling me doctor. I like the man, I think as I slide into the seat, then tug the door shut behind me.

"I'll be back," I croak. The car miraculously starts, and I pat the dash. "Good girl," I tell it as I pull away from the curb and past the smoking ruins of my life.

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

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# Trigger



**M**y heart's in my throat as Zero starts talking faster than he's ever talked before. He's looking at Hangman not me.

"There was an explosion on Main Street. Total devastation." Finally, he turns to me. "Sorry, man. Evanee's clinic."

The room spins in front of me, and for a moment, I think I'm going to faint.

Rocky props me up. "Easy big guy," he says softly.

I shrug him off. "What the fuck are you talking about!" I roar at Zero. I'm already in denial. Evanee's clinic. Evanee. My Evanee. She'd be there right now. She'd be inside.

"How bad?" I hear Reaper ask.

Zero doesn't sugarcoat it. "Bad. Nothin' left man. No one could've survived."

His words are the catalyst to get me moving. "Fuck that, asshole!" I shout at him as I punch him full on in the face. "Evanee's not dead!" My whole world is crumbling around me. She... Evanee... nothing else fucking matters.

Red's got his arms around my chest, holding me back from pulverizing the prospect. "You don't know man. We gotta get there and see."

I shove my elbow in his gut. "So the what the fuck are we waiting for?"

Hangman's already out the door with most of the guy's following him. I push my way through the bodies and stumble down the hall, trying to get to my bike.

Why is this place so big? Where's the fucking door? "Get the fuck out of my way!" I scream at my brothers.

The air blasts me in the face as I step outside, helping me clear my head, but it doesn't stop the panic, the rapid beating of my heart. The hard painful ball in my gut. My girl. My love. It can't be true.

Eight's beside me, a hand resting on my shoulder as I fumble with my helmet. I hurl it away from me. "You okay to drive, man?" he asks.

I knock his hand off me. "Try to fuckin' stop me."

Stark barely gets the gate open as I burst through on my Harley and skid the corner onto the road. The bike weaves back and forth until I get it under control.

Thoughts hammer through my head as I speed towards Sagebrush. I've got to get to Evanee. She's all that matters to me in this world. If she's gone, there's no point to life.

It's taking too long to get to her, and I shove the bike into full throttle. Sagebrush is humming as I rip through street after street. People in their yards. Sirens. Chaos. My eyes are leaking, and my body's numb.

I squeal around the corner to Main and brake hard. The bike slides out from under me. My body hits the pavement, my chin bounces off, and there's burn on my hands as I try to catch myself. I roll over several times. Winded, not hurt.

Still catching my breath, I leap to my feet and race towards the pile of rubble that used to be Evanee's clinic. "Where is she?" I bellow as I start grabbing at boards and bricks. Jagged concrete blocks tear at my hands. "Where the fuck is she?"

"She's not here!" a man yells. Accented words. From India maybe. Him and another man, pulling at me. Dragging me away.

I swing my fist, but it meets air as the men duck.

Then Hangman's there. "Get away," he orders them. He grabs my shoulders and shakes me. "Settle the fuck down!"

Fire trucks arrive, then ambulances. What took them so long? My baby's inside! What the fuck is wrong with everyone?

"Dr. Whittaker's not here," the Indian man explains to Hangman. "Not in the building."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Hangman barks.

It helps, his voice, the irritation in it. The ball of panic in my belly starts to unfurl. "She's not here?" I say, daring to hope.

"No," a girl with blue hair says. "She left."

"She wasn't in the blast?" I know I'm asking the same thing different ways, but I can't stop myself. I need reassurance.

"She was," Blue hair replies. "Well, heading towards the building I think."

"None of us saw," a woman with a pink top says. "But she wasn't in the building when it blew."

"She left," the Indian man says. "She shouldn't have though. She was hurt."

None of this makes any sense. Hangman doesn't think so either. "Where the fuck did she go?" he barks.

I see the shake of their heads. "Don't know," Blue hair says. "But she was pissed when she left."



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# CHAPTER FORTY

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## Evanee



As I speed towards Reno, my scattered thoughts are on repeat. The explosion, the aftermath. Trigger. What if. What if. What if.

WHO?

That's the better question, Evanee. I take deep breaths as I concentrate on my driving. *You don't need to ask yourself that. You know.*

I weave through residential streets too fast and not fast enough, heading to my parents' house. My home. The place I grew up in. It couldn't have been dad. He's overbearing and controlling, but he would never do anything to hurt me. At least not physically.

Would he?

I rip around the corner of the estate and roar up the driveway. My tires squeal as I come to an uneven stop at the front of the house. The car door handle won't cooperate, or maybe it's my hands. They're trembling.

"Open the fuck up!" I scream as I heave my shoulder against the window. A pain shoots down my arm and I gasp, but it helps settle me. I force myself to slow down, pull the handle with deliberate care, and shove the door open. I'm still barefooted but I have my new shoes. They're black, thank god. I pull them out of the box they were in and shove them on my feet.

The front door to the house opens and dad steps out onto the landing, staring in horror. "Evanee," he cries as he takes

the stairs two at a time. “What the hell happened to you?”

I shove at his chest when he tries to touch me. “You didn’t do this, did you?” I scream at him, blinking to hold my tears inside as I think of the betrayal should he say yes.

He’s shaking, his lips bloodless. “Do what? What the hell happened?”

“Someone blew up my clinic!” I shove at him over and over, forcing him to retreat. “Was it you?”

He flushes as the concern on his face wages war with his anger. “How the hell could you even think I’d do something like that?”

Relief numbs me temporarily. “I couldn’t. I shouldn’t.” I sound weak. “You were so against—”

“I would never do anything to hurt you. I’m not a monster.” The sag of his shoulders, the sadness in his voice reassures me.

“I know. I know.” I’m whining. Daddy’s girl. He’ll keep me safe.

That won’t do. I can’t falter now. Anger flares as I skirt around him and barge into the house.

“What are you doing?” he asks, panic in his voice as he follows me into his office. “You’re covered in blood. Let me take you to the hospital.”

I slam open the top drawer of his desk, rifle around, shifting papers, pens. A stapler jars my pinkie finger, sending a streak of pain through it. I solve the problem by hurling the fucking thing away from me and enjoy the satisfying explosion of the glass from dad’s trophy case. But my search yields nothing. It’s not there. The next drawer then, and the other one – neither hold my prize.

“Evanee!” dad shouts, startling me from my single-minded quest.

I jerk my head up. “Where’s the key?”

He stares at me in shock. “I’m calling the police.”

He reaches for the phone on his desk, but I get there first, grabbing it and flinging it across the room. The cord whips from the wall and spirals after it.

“Where’s the fucking key?” I scream.

“What key?” Dad’s voice matches my volume, but his face is slack, not angry. He’s scared.

“The key!”

He knows what I’m talking about. He’s stalling.

Settle down, Evanee. Take a breath.

I swallow air, expel it, then I remember.

Dad stumbles as I shove him out of my way and head downstairs.

He clambers after me. “Evanee. I don’t know what you’re planning, but if it’s Casper—”

“Casper?” I stop dead and stare at him. “Trigger!” I bark. “That man’s worth ten of you.” Tears start as realization hits at how close I came to dying. My brain’s on a reel now, an image of my broken body lying in the rubble, damaged beyond repair. Seeing Trigger holding me, rocking me. Dying inside. Our world destroyed. “He’s the reason for everything! He loves me. He supports me. He believes in me. Don’t you fucking dare talk to me about my man.”

Dad presses his lips together as he stands motionless, watching as I jerk open a tall cabinet, then a drawer within, pulling out the key I’m looking for. “I didn’t mean—”

“You didn’t mean what, daddy? To treat me like a child? To demean me? To refuse to acknowledge the path I wanted to take?” I’m ranting now, but this discussion is long overdue. “Who the fuck do you think you are, that you interfere with my dreams? Playing god with the bankers. Calling the police. Pretending you care about me then undermining me?”

Dad scrubs at his face. “Baby, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize you were so serious.”

What bullshit! “I didn’t go to veterinarian college on a lark.” I stab my finger into my chest. “I worked my ass off! Did everything in my power to graduate.” My body shakes as my fury peaks. “This is who I am! Accept it or go to hell!”

He’s standing between me and the gun cabinet.

“Get my out of my way,” I snarl as I bulldoze past him.

“Evanee,” he implores. “You’re hurt. You’re covered in blood, cuts, bruises. You’re limping. This is madness.” He swallows. “Let me call Casper to come get you.”

“Do whatever you want,” I snap as I consider my choice of rifles. I yank out a Remington 870 pump-action shotgun with a four-round magazine, then grab as many boxes of shells as I can carry. Arms full, I sprint back upstairs. “I don’t have time for your father-of-the-year bullshit.”

He shouts my name as I jog to my Beamer, throwing the boxes of shells on the seat beside me and setting the shotgun on the floor.

*Dad didn’t do this, I tell myself, and the asshole feds are too subtle. They don’t blow buildings up.* No. It was the Blackbeards. The pretty-boy VP and the Enforcer’s faces swim in my mind. Yeah, they did this.

Now it’s my turn.

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# CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

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# Trigger



Joker's shouting on the phone. "Get them to the clubhouse! All of them. No fucking around. Bring Trigger's dad in." He pauses like he's listening. "I don't give a fuck if the old man won't go. Tie him up and carry him in."

He's getting the job done and I'm grateful, lookin' out for my dad and everyone else. I'm finally settling down, the ball of fear in my belly uncoiling as chaos flows around me.

Reaper gets in my space. "Where'd she go, man?"

I shake my head. "I don't fucking know." My mind is clearing. "Maybe home or the clubhouse, looking for me."

My phone rings and my heart jumps. "Evanee," I say, but I already know it's not. It's an unknown number. "Not a good time," I growl into the phone.

Lyle Whittaker's panicked voice invades my ear. "Casper!"

"Evanee's there?" I say as my pulse slows, but it takes seconds for the relief that she's safe to shift to fear that she's running away from me. I promised I'd look after her and I fucking failed. This was my doing, the threats, the explosion. It was because of me. Of the Jury. So stupid to play games with Crip.

And she'll realize it was the Blackbeards. She's smart, resourceful. She won't know that our adventure last night was the catalyst, but that don't matter. Her life's dream is in ruins, she almost died and it's my fault.

Lyle's voice brings me back to the present. "She was here. She accused me of blowing up her clinic, then—"

"Did you?" I snarl. I know better, but the question needs asking.

"No." His voice creaks before he clears it. "Of course, I didn't. But she's hurt and not thinking."

"Put her on the phone," I demand. I need to explain, beg her to give me another chance. I need to hear her voice. Know that she's okay.

"She's not here!" Lyle's voice is too high. Afraid for her. Like me. "She came here madder than hell, grabbed one of my shotguns and some shells and left. I don't know who she's gunning for, but she needs medical attention. You've got to find her and get her to a hospital."

"I'll fucking find her, and then when she's safe, you and me. We're gonna talk." I don't know why I'm threatening her old man, but it distracts me from beating myself up.

"What's going on?" Reaper says when I end the call. He's calm like he always is in a crisis. Inside, his monster is pacing.

I call Evanee as I tell him. "Her dad says she was there. Took a shotgun and shells and left again."

Her phone rings, then goes to voicemail. "Evanee," I shout. "Don't know what the fuck you're doing but get your ass to the clubhouse." I resist the urge to beg her forgiveness. Now's not the time. I hang up. "Lyle says she's hurt."

Reaper runs a hand over the top of his head. "Who would fucking do this?" He already knows. There's guilt in his eyes as he looks around him.

"Not hard to figure out," Red says. "Mad Max and Sadie come to the clinic threatening her. We put Dino's head in Crip's bed." There's murder in his eyes. "They fucking went too far."

Ice crystalizes inside me as I think of how vulnerable my baby is. "She's hurt. She has no fuckin' idea what those cunts will do."



Red gazes at the rubble that used to be her clinic. “Think she does.”

Hangman joins us. “Fuckin’ Blackbeards. Gonna end Crip for this.”

“Not if Evanee gets there first,” Reaper says grimly to Hangman. “She’s gone after him.”

I race towards my bike, my whole body shaking. “They get hold of her, they’ll destroy her.”

“Let’s go!” Hangman shouts to the brothers. “We got some Blackbeard ass to kick.”

I’m already gone.

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## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

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## Evanee



I know everything about the Blackbeards. Not because I have an interest in them, but after I met Trigger in the mall, I started stalking him.

That led me to both Hell's Jury and the Blackbeards.

I know who the Jury's enemies are, I know what they do, I know where their clubhouse is.

I'm headed there now.

I still haven't decided whether I'll kill the fucking VP or simply destroy his pretty face. The damage will depend on how close I can get to him and my cool-off period between now and finding him. Either way, he's going to pay.

I don't have a death wish, but at the same time, I'm not a passive woman who let's others dictate how I live my life. I never have. Why would I start now?

People are predictable and I know I don't have a lot of time. Dad will have called Trigger the minute I left the house, and Trigger will be coming for me. If I wait for him, he'll try to stop me, and I can't let that happen. I need the satisfaction of destroying the bastard who threatened me. Who blew up my fucking clinic with no thought to who might be inside.

Unlike the Jury's, the Blackbeards' clubhouse is in an industrial area of Reno. It's a small, dilapidated warehouse, surrounded by similar buildings. Nothing's fenced, so it's easy to come and go.

And hide.

I take an indirect route, then pull up to a warehouse that's slightly removed from the clubhouse. I can't know if the pretty-boy's inside, but I have to start somewhere. I'm not opposed to cleaning a Blackbeard's teeth with a little buckshot to get the information I want on the VP.

Before I slide out of the car, I check the mirror. My face is covered in blood, a deep cut on my forehead is still oozing. Another jagged slash runs parallel to the line of my jawbone. If I don't get them sutured soon, they'll pucker as they heal. The rest of the cuts are of no account.

My hair is matted with blood, and I fluff it to give it some life. This sparks pain in the upper bone of my right arm, which makes me groan. My ankle and ribs hurt, but it's nothing I can't handle. I've spent my life in stilettos. Turned ankles have never slowed me down.

The pinkie on my left hand is broken, and I need to set it before I start shooting. I pull the key to my clinic off my key ring. I swallow convulsively. I won't be needing it anytime soon. My blouse is beyond salvaging, so I tear off a strip of material from the hemline and use it to bind the key to my finger.

I grit my teeth at the agony, but it's a welcome reminder of my mission. After I can breathe normally again, I wiggle the rest of my fingers. My manicure is ruined, but that's fixable. I clench my hands a few times. They're stiff, but I'll easily be able to hold the shotgun and pull the trigger.

I dump the shotgun shells into the empty shoebox, then slide out of the car, placing it on the roof while I reach in to grab the gun. I heft it in my hands, curl my fingers around the stock, and test the trigger by gently pulling it.

When I bring it to my right shoulder, my humerus protests. I know it's fractured, which means I can't use the arm to shoot. The kick from the gun would render me senseless after one shot. The alternative is to steady the barrel with my right hand and prop it up on my left shoulder. I test this out, pulling the trigger, imagining the recoil.

The weight of the gun makes my arms shake too much for the sight to be useful. The solution is simple. I'll shoot from the hip with my left hand. It'll be less accurate and scatter the shot wider, but I can live with that. I don't think I want to kill anyone, not intentionally anyway, but I wouldn't mind adding a few extra holes in the Blackbeard bastards.

I practice a few times; pull the trigger, drag the forend back, then push it forward to reload. It hurts, both my broken pinkie and right arm, but it'll work in the short term. Satisfied, I load the gun with four shells and stuff several others into the pockets of my skirt. Then I flick off the safety.

I'm ready to go.

I grit my teeth at the pain in my ankle as I stride towards the Blackbeards' clubhouse. No limping for me. That's not how I roll. There are a few bikes scattered in the yard, but no one outside. No one to raise the alarm.

The drone of motorcycles in the distance doesn't deter me from my destination. I've got a mission to complete. These Blackbeard pricks destroyed my clinic. They tried to kill me. They shattered my dreams.

They're going to fucking pay.

Fuelled by fury, I yank the clubhouse door open and step inside, the shotgun hanging loosely in my left hand.

I scan the room. Two men sit side by side at a bar, drinks in front of them. They're playing cards, looks like blackjack. Another's slouching in an armchair, his feet propped up on a footstool, eyes half-closed, a joint between his lips. The fourth is talking on the phone, sitting at a table.

And the fifth man. The fucking fifth man is sitting on a couch whispering in the ear of a barely-dressed woman who's perched on his knee. He's the sonofabitch who walked into my clinic and threatened me.

I slam the door behind me and take a single step forward. I don't need to get closer. The room isn't all that big. Heads jerk up, eyes widen and one of the men at the bar goes for his gun.

I swing my shotgun his way and pull the trigger. The recoil throws me backwards, but the door stops me from falling. Buckshot scatters and hits both men. The one with the gun shoots the ceiling as he collapses to the floor. The second slides off his stool, his eyes wide, his mouth gaping like a goldfish. Blood is spreading on their clothes, but they're moaning. Not dead. At least not yet.

I grit my teeth at the pain in my right arm as I slide the forend back and forth, expelling the spent shell and reloading. Then I swing the gun back and forth between the other three men. They're standing now, the fucking VP dumping the woman on her ass on the floor. Their hands are raised in the air.

I glance at her quickly. "Get out," I say flatly.

She whimpers as she tries to stand, stumbles, then crawls towards a door behind her.

Shouts from a back room dimly reach my ears. Adrenaline is coursing through me making me reckless, stupid. I don't care.

"Whoa, princess," the VP says through his pretty lips. "You wanna be careful waving that thing around. You're gonna hurt someone."

His asshole words settle the rapid beat of my heart and my vision becomes a pinprick, focusing on the man who tried to kill me. "That's the plan, you prick," I say, then pull the trigger.

I miss. The shot vibrates through my right arm and broken pinkie. Agony clouds my vision, and I sway.

No! Don't go down, Evanee! Don't!

The man with the blunt is on his feet, inching closer to me. "You got two shells left, cunt," he sneers. "Three of us and your aim is off. You ain't gonna have time to reload, so you best put the shotgun down and maybe we'll let you live."

Mad Max snickers. "Depends how well she fucks."

The door behind the VP slams open and three more men rush inside the room, guns drawn, grim faces. “What the fuck!” the one in the lead says. He’s focused on the guys I’ve already shot, still moaning, one holding his side, the other his arm.

“Got it in hand, Prez,” the VP says, his eyes still glued to me.

The president. He’d have given the order to destroy my clinic. I swing the gun towards him. “I can’t decide which of you bastards I’ll shoot first.”

The VP throws back his head and laughs. “You can’t hit the side of a barn, bitch. Drop the fucking gun.”

That settles it for me. I aim at the VP’s gut and pull the trigger. The gun kicks high, and I almost miss him, but some of the buckshot embeds itself into his face.

“Fuck,” he screams as he bends over and covers the wound, blood pouring through his fingers. His body hits the floor as the other men look on in shock.

It gives me time to load my last shell.

Crip raises his gun, points it directly at me. “You’re about to take your last breath, bitch.”

I point my shotgun at him. I’m injured, he’s not. My arms are shaky, my ankle is barely holding me upright and my adrenaline is depleted. I’m going to lose this shootout.

Goodbye, Trigger, I whisper as the shotgun slips from my hands.

A gunshot cracks, then I’m falling, falling. Hitting the ground hard. Looking up at the sky, not comprehending.

There’s no pain and for a moment, I have the foolish thought that dying isn’t that hard to do. Loud angry voices swarm around me, then hands roughly pull me over the pavement and around the side of the building.

“Am I dead?” I ask the sky.

“You’re not dead, baby.” Trigger’s voice sounds watery. “But goddamn, when I’m fucking through with you, you’re gonna wish you were.”

I smile as Trigger’s face swims into focus. “I can’t wait.”

He folds me in his arms and crushes me against his body.



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# CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

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# Trigger



I'm in the hospital, sittin' in a chair next to Evanee's bed. She's got intravenous in her arm and her face is deathly white, but she's awake and smiling. "It was justified," she says to me and Hangman. "They blew up my clinic."

"You're a fucking head case," Hangman snarls at her. "First rule of Hell's Jury. You don't fuckin' go into battle alone."

She glances from him to me without a trace of remorse. "No one explained the rule."

I close my eyes as my gut roils at the thought of what could have been. Crip's bullet caught me on the side of the neck because I opened the door at the same time he pulled the trigger. Evanee fell backwards, puttin' me in the line of fire. Thank fuck.

I wasted no time getting her to the hospital, leaving my brothers to mop up the damage at the Blackbeards' clubhouse. The emergency doctor tried to separate us when we got here, but there was no fucking way that was gonna happen. Hell, he barely convinced me to put her down long enough for him to assess our injuries.

Mine was a flesh wound, stitched up and covered with gauze. A nurse washed the blood off, tried to give me pain meds, but I told her to fuck off. I'll deal with drugs later, when and if I need them.

Evanee was more broken. The doc said he couldn't believe she was still upright.

She has a sprained ankle, a hairline fracture to her upper right arm and a broken pinkie finger. Her ribs are slightly bruised and small cuts litter her body, especially the exposed skin. There are two deep ones on her face, a jagged one running along the jawline, the other at the top of her forehead. Both stitched up. The recoil from the shotgun fucked with the wrist on her left hand. Not broken, but she'll need to baby it for a while.

I don't know whether to rage at her recklessness or rejoice over the spine my beautiful woman has.

After I rescued Evanee, my brothers invaded Crip's clubhouse, but no fire was exchanged. Crip was outnumbered and he had three men down, so he laid down his weapon first. Helped that Hangman was holding a gun to his head at the time.

Which brings us to now, Evanee smiling brightly while Hangman looks like he wants to throttle her.

Joker sticks his head in the door. "Crip's here, Prez," he says. "Wants a convo."

Hangman nods and points at Evanee. "She tries to leave, you fuckin' tie her down." He's a pacing bull right now, wanting to gore someone, but there's respect in his eyes when he looks at my girl. To Joker, he says, "We play this cool, right? Need the shit between us and those fuckers to settle down."

I raise my eyebrows at Joker when he nods. He's gonna have his hands full because Hangman's still too pumped to 'play it cool'. And me—I set eyes on the sonofabitch who almost killed my girl and I'll separate his head from his body.

After they leave, I drop a careful kiss on Evanee's forehead. "Your parents are out there wanting to talk to you."

"They can wait," she says as she gropes for my hand. "I need you."

I gently squeeze her fingers. "I'm here, baby."

"Not like that," she replies with a seductive smile.

I sit back in the chair, my face slack. “Are you fuckin’ kidding me? You’re torn up, bruised, broken, and you wanna fuck?”

She nods as she fumbles with the tape on her arm, flinches as she pulls it off, then slides the intravenous needle out. “I need you, lover. I need to feel you inside me. Your arms around me.”

I glance around the room, look at the open door. “We don’t got enough privacy.”

She winces as she sits up, then extends her left arm. “Help me stand. We’ll go to the bathroom.”

“No,” I tell her even though my dick is waving furiously at me. “We can fuck when we get home. You need to get better.”

“I’m good enough,” she argues as she inches off the bed.

I grab her as she starts to collapse. “You ain’t. This is not gonna happen.”

She gropes my crotch, runs her fingers up the hard ridges. “Take me into the bathroom. You’ll be gentle.”

“I don’t even know the meaning of the fucking word,” I hiss, but I’m already picking her up.

In the bathroom, I kick the door shut behind us and assess the situation. Tub, shower, toilet. Sink. Even a fucking urinal. “There’s no place to do this.”

“We could sit on the toilet,” she suggests, her eyes surveying it doubtfully.

“Fuck that.” I set her down on the toilet seat, then open the door again and peek my head around the corner. Room’s still empty so I slip out, grab the chair I was sitting on and carry it into the bathroom, flipping the lock on the door as I close it.

I set the chair next to the urinal, look at it, then change my mind and move it closer to the tub. It’s tight in here.

Evane’s eyes are half-closed as she watches me, her shoulders uncharacteristically slumping.

“Oh, baby,” I say as kneel at her feet and slide my arms gently around her waist. “This can wait ‘til your better. Later, at home.”

*It can't, it can't, it can't*, my dick is chanting.

Evanee agrees with it. “The one thing I learned today is that later might never happen. The clinic is replaceable, but you’re not.” Her bottom lip trembles. “I keep thinking of this morning when you left. I never told you I loved you, or to come home safe. Or to be careful.” She takes a gulp of air. “I can’t breathe when I think of you not here. I need proof that you are.”

My new, vulnerable Evanee. A side to her I didn’t know existed, and maybe it didn’t before this happened, but she’s right. When I thought I’d lost her, I wanted to die with her. “Me too,” I tell her as I slide my thumb under her eye, picking up a stray tear.

She smiles. “I’m pretty much helpless right now, so you’ll have to take the lead.”

“Like always,” I tell her tersely. She knows that even when she leads, it’s because I let her.

I slide my hands to the back of her neck and untie the string on her hospital gown. It has no business being on her anyway. It’s faded blue factory produced discount garbage that clashes with her colouring.

It drops down to her lap revealing her magnificent tits. “Awe fuck,” I groan as I bury my head in her cleavage. My dick is begging me to get moving, but I force it to stand down. It’s easy to take fucking for granted but this one matters, maybe more than all the rest. I need her as much as she needs me.

“My nipples want you, lover,” she says, her hand cradling my head, trying to force me over to one.

I slide my tongue up her chest to her neck, then beyond. “They can fuckin’ wait.”

She sighs as I gently press my mouth against hers, a chaste kiss that fires through me. This is love, I think as I take her

deeper.

She holds my head, opening to me, becoming frenzied.

Then she jerks. “Mmmh.”

I let her go. “I’m gonna hurt you doin’ this.”

Her face quickly shifts from pain to seductive. “I hope so,” she murmurs, her sleepy gaze holding mine.

“Don’t pretend you’re okay.”

She huffs. “Don’t pretend you don’t want to fuck. I’ll do it myself if you aren’t up to it.”

She’s goading me and my male pride reacts as she expected. I grip the back of her neck and press my forehead against hers. “I get started, I’m not gonna stop. You fuckin’ get ready.”

She draws her fingers through her wet pussy and shoves them into my mouth. “I’m already fucking ready, lover.”

She feels small and breakable as I help her to her feet, pressing my wood against her cunt, groaning at how turned on I am.

I look at the chair. She can’t sit on top facing me, and she can’t bend over because her legs won’t support her body right now. There’s only one way this is gonna work. “You okay to stand for a moment.”

“Of course,” she says even as she sways and clutches the counter when I let her go.

I make a grab for her, but she fends me off. “We’re never going to do this if you treat me like glass. Get naked, Trigger.”

That was my plan. I strip down to nothin’, getting’ harder anticipating the pull of my nipple rings as they slide up and down her back.

“Ready?” I ask as my eyes rove over her battered body. Doubt fucks with me and even my dick starts to frown.

Then she says in her sultry inviting voice, “I’ve been ready for hours.”

My love paralyzes me. “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

She tilts her head. “More fucking, lover. Less talk.”

Shit, she’s perfect. I turn her so her back’s facing me then hug her waist as I sit on the edge of the chair. I guide my dick into her as I pull her down onto it.

She grunts as she spreads her thighs as far as she can. “God, you feel good. So good.”

I kiss the side of her neck, nibble her ear as I slide in and out of her. “It’s fuckin’ magic.” I wish she were looking at me, her tits in my face, my hands gripping her ass.

Patience, my dick says like it’s Yoda.

She grabs one of my hands and brings it to her tit. “A little nipple play, please.”

All’s right with the world. She’s still bossy. I squeeze the nipple hard enough to make her gasp.

“Wish it was my teeth,” I hiss in her ear, shoving deep inside her. My nipple rings scraping against her delicate skin are making me wild.

“Faster,” she demands as she tries to lift herself. “Goddamn it!” she cries in frustration.

“Sit the fuck still,” I snarl at her as I slap her thigh.

She jerks at the pain and looks down at the redness I left behind. “That’s more like it.”

I palm her tits and use them as an anchor as I move faster. It won’t take much longer for me to come, but I can’t leave her hanging. “Would you fuckin’ get your fingers involved.”

“On it, lover.” Her throaty laugh gets me moving faster.

“I ain’t gonna last,” I hiss.

“You better fucking last, you bastard,” she snaps as she drags her fingers to her cunt and starts rubbing.

My nuts are sliding against the vinyl of the chair and my dick is overriding my will power. “Christ. I’m gonna come

baby.”

She’s breathing heavy now, her ass shaking against my belly. “One more minute,” she gasps.

“I don’t got a minute left!” I’m losing it. My balls tighten and I shove deeper inside her, pull back, shove again.

“Okay! Now,” she cries.

“You don’t fuckin’ give the orders, baby,” I growl into her ear. My balls seem to be under a different impression as they erupt, jizz tunneling through my dick so fast and hard it hurts.

She spasms as she orgasms, strangling my cock and turning me to jelly.

Her nails dig into my hands as she throws her head back and screams.

It takes everything I got not to slide off the chair and fall on top of her. “I fuckin’ love you, baby.”

Hot tears splash on my hands. “I love you too.”

I switch it up before I start cryin’ too. “Would you fuckin’ stop that. I’m losing my hard-on.”

Her low sexy laugh finds its way to my ears. “Don’t be ridiculous. You always have another in you.”

“I do, princess,” I reply as I help her stand, then stand myself. I turn her towards me, and gently press against her body. “You don’t. No more fucking ‘til you’re fixed.”

She presses her lips against my cheek as she cups my sensitive balls. “Parts of me still work.” I open to her as she slides her tongue inside my mouth, explores gently then pulls back. “See?”

I laugh as I sit her on the chair, get dressed and help her into the ugly blue hospital gown.

“Back to bed for you, baby,” I whisper as I pick her up and kick open the door.

“Oh!” Evanee exclaims as we come out of the bathroom.



Lyle and Brooke are standing stiffly at the end of the bed, mouths slightly open, eyes a little glassy.

“How long you been there?” I ask as I settle Evanee on the bed and pull the cover up to her chest.

“Long enough,” Lyle growls, his eyes flashing.

I shrug as Evanee watches me like she’s waiting for my cue. “How you ever gonna get grandkids if you don’t let us practice?”

She laughs then turns to her parents. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

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# CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

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## Trigger



Hangman's sittin' at the boardroom table drinking a beer as the brothers start to filter in for church.

"You're late!" he snarls, then grins.

Some of us laugh uneasily as we take our seats or in Eight's case, his position against the wall.

Joker strolls in last, sees Hangman and shakes his head. "What the fuck are you doing?" he says to him.

Hangman takes a swallow of beer. "Thinkin'. There's so fucking much noise goin' on I almost went to the Chamber for some quiet."

A table saw punctuates his words as it grinds through the room.

Joker squeezes his eyes shut then turns to Fender. "How much fuckin' longer 'til they're done?"

Fender shrugs. "Renovations don't get done in a day."

Joker's not appeased. "Get the noisy shit over first so we can think."

Jawbone snorts. "There ain't no in-between in construction. It's gonna be noisy until it's done."

Hangman turns to Hash. "You repaintin' the logo?"

Hash nods. "Yeah. It'll take a couple of weeks." The guy's as artistic as he is an asshole.

“Not ‘til the reno’s done,” Fender says to Hangman, not Hash. “He can’t start until the dust settles, and the walls are painted.”

“Let’s get this fuckin’ meeting over with.” Prez rubs his temples. “I’m getting a headache.”

Joker looks at his notebook. “Let’s start with fines.”

“Let’s,” Coyote agrees dryly. He’s still pissed about the ½ mil fine he got a few weeks ago, which is the source of all the fucking hammering goin’ on in the other room.

“Hangman,” Joker says. “A grand for punching Trigger.”

“Worth it,” Hangman smirks at me.

I give him the finger.

Joker looks down at his notebook. “Trigger.”

“No shit,” I say.

“You caused Hangman to break the church door.”

“You’re kidding, right? Hangman broke the door, don’t matter the reason.” I pause to think. “And it’s gonna be replaced by the renos anyway.”

“Quit your bitching,” Coyote growls. “You’re getting off easy.”

The guy’s laugh at Coyote’s pissiness.

I cross my arms as I glare at him.

“Moving the fuck on,” Joker snaps as he looks at me. “Three more fines.”

“For me? What the fuck do you mean three fines?”

“You punched Hangman. That’s ten bills.”

“I get fined three times for that?”

Joker grins slyly. “Another for Evanee goin’ after the Blackbeards.”

I gape at him. “I got nothin’ to do with that.” I’m not throwing Evanee under the bus, but she was acting on her own. I shouldn’t be held accountable.

Some of the guys are sniggering. “He can’t control his ol’ lady,” Reaper says to Coyote.

“I wasn’t there to stop her,” I exclaim. “This is fuckin’ bullshit!”

“You want us to fine the vet?” Hangman growls.

He’s got a point. “Fuck no. How much?”

Joker grins as he tallies up some numbers. “Ten-bills for attackin’ the Blackbeards without back-up. Another ten for getting a brother shot.”

“It was me that got shot!” I exclaim. “I shouldn’t have to pay for takin’ a bullet.”

“Don’t exaggerate, Trig,” Rocky snickers. “You didn’t exactly take the bullet. It whizzed by you.”

“He’s fucking lucky he has such a small neck,” Hash jeers.

I give him the finger. “It don’t matter if the bullet went in me or by me. It’s the principle of the thing.”

Hangman narrows his eyes as the table saw rocks the room. “We got fuckin’ principles too, so pay the fines.”

“This is bullshit!”

“Horseshit if you think about it,” Blood smirks.

Hangman glares at me. “Quit your bitchin’ or I’ll fuckin’ punch you.”

There’s no point arguing once Hangman’s made his mind up. “Take it outta my pay,” I grumble as I cross my arms.

Joker grins. “Not done, asshole.”

I’m getting’ pissed for real. “You said three fines!”

The prez smirks. “The last two count as one. You can’t separate them. If the vet hadn’t attacked the ‘beards, you wouldn’t have got shot.”

“You mean buzzed,” Red says. He and Rocky fist-pump.

There’s too much snickering goin’ on in the room for my liking. “Let’s get the fuck on with this.”

“You made us eat crow with the Blackbeards,” Hangman says, frowning at the memory. “Let a woman do our job for us. Crip was giggling like a fuckin’ schoolgirl after you hauled the vet out of there.”

“He had three fuckin’ guys full of buckshot and he was laughing?”

Hangman narrows his eyes. “They’ll all live. You were fuckin’ the vet in the bathroom while Joker and me were negotiating an armistice with Crip.”

“A what?” Hash says, his upper lip curling.

“A cease-fire, asshole. No more heads in beds. No more sendin’ in women to do our job.” He pauses. “And Crip will back the fuck off. No more threatening our families. No more blowing up clinics.”

I’m so fuckin’ furious I jerk to my feet, my hands curled, looking for someone or something to punch. “They fuckin’ could’ve killed Evanee!”

“Sit down,” Red hisses, yanking me back into my chair.

I swing at him, but he catches my fist in his hand and forces it onto the table. The big fucker’s fast, I’ll give him that. “I’m sitting!” I yell at Hangman.

“Jesus christ,” Joker growls as he squeezes the bridge of his nose. “Why the hell do these meetings always turn into a circus?”

“If the name fits, buddy,” Hash says to a few uneasy snorts of laughter.

Joker ignores him. “Here’s the thing, Trig. They blew up the clinic. In retaliation, Evanee took down three of their guys.” He shakes his head. “Mad Max ain’t as pretty as he used to be.”

“She deserves a fuckin’ medal for that,” Rocky remarks.

Hangman slaps the table. “We ain’t prepared for a showdown with the Blackbeards. Always something happenin’ here to distract us. If we can get Crip to back off for a while,

we can concentrate on the business of makin' a living and finding the fucking feds.”

“Maybe they've gone away,” Blood ventures. “Been pretty quiet on that front.”

Reaper and I exchange glances, but Joker's too smart to react. “Means they're lying low, is all. We can't expect they've gone away.”

“Back to Trigger's fine,” Hangman says to Joker. “How much?”

“Ten k.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” I'm livid now. “Ten fucking thousand dollars?”

“We need you to impress upon the vet that she stays out of Jury and Blackbeard business. We can't have our women being vigilantes.”

I run my hand over my head as I try to see their points of view. Evanee was reckless and she did have time to cool off, but she still went ahead with her plan. She walked into the Blackbeards' clubhouse when she could've called me or waited for us.

My stomach twists at the thought. Maybe me paying a fine for her actions will make her think twice about what she does in the future, but it sure as hell ain't gonna stop her from thinking about it. If I tie her to the bed or spank the hell out of her, she's gonna get off on it and beg for more.

“I'll pay the fuckin' fine,” I mutter because I have no choice.

“Good,” Joker says. “Moving on.” He looks at Hangman.

“Right,” Hangman nods. “Time to vest the vet and the thief. Everyone in favor say aye. Anyone against can fuck off.”

The room rocks with laughter as there's a unanimous show of hands.

The rest of church goes by in a blur, me barely paying attention as I think about how Evanee and I are gonna come up with thirteen thousand dollars. Fender will deduct it from my share of the club's activities, which will more than cover it, but we got other expenses.

We gotta rebuild the clinic, get the Beamer fixed up and start planning for the wedding. And we gotta get another fuckin' horse because apparently Lullaby's getting depressed and needs a companion. I suggested we could steal one, but Evanee thinks horse rustling might still be a hanging offence in Nevada.

Neither of us wants to find out if that's true.



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## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

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## Evaneer



A week later, I'm at my parents' house. The Hell's Jury clubhouse is well into the renovation, and the club needed a private venue. With a little persuasion from Trigger, my dad offered the use of the backyard for the party.

All the ol' ladies are here, the children, and other family members.

Emma, Coyote's sister, is talking to my parents – it's clear that mom's taken with the twins. Maddie is standing to the side, not engaging in the conversation, her attention fixed on Stark who's deep in discussion with Mothman. Stark glances up and catches her looking. He holds her eyes too long and she flushes and drops her head.

Wendy and Verity are standing next to each other, both impatient for the ceremony to get over with so they can go somewhere and smoke. They're waving their hands while they talk, getting louder with each exchange.

Trigger's dad, Bob, is deep in conversation with Rocky's grandma, Dot. Romantic that I am, I decide something is developing. Dicer, the doctor, is attempting to join them, but keeps weaving in and out of the circle.

Brielle is next to Jess, fidgeting. "How long is this gonna last?" she says. "I gotta get back to Lullaby."

I'm really starting to like that girl.

"And how're you going to get there?" Verity asks.

Brielle glances over at Hangman's 16-year-old son, who is sitting in a lounge chair next to the pool talking with Oscar, Sean, and Max. "Ash is gonna take me. It's his turn to clean the corral."

Aside from the party, there's another reason we're all here. Today, Bryce and I are getting vested.

I'm dressed for a barbecue and pool party: one-inch-high Gucci leather slides because my ankle is still healing, a gorgeous multi-coloured mini-dress over a PatBo plunging one-piece swimsuit, the latter at Trigger's insistence after he saw the bikini I originally planned to wear.

Bryce is wearing suede ballet flats and a crisscross back minidress. Simple but elegant. Her lips are flat, her eyes deadly. Her gaze is pinned on Coyote. "I hate this," she hisses to me. "I feel betrayed."

"Don't be ridiculous," Jess scolds. "You're planning to spend your life with him, so why not take this step?"

She side-eyes Jess. "I *was* planning on spending my life with him. Now, I'm not so sure."

"I don't understand what you're upset about," I say. "The only day better than this day for me will be my wedding day."

"Please, god," Bryce replies, rolling her eyes. "Let me die."

"But if you're dead, how will you be one of my bridesmaids?"

Jess and Hayley giggle. "You'll love it, Bryce," Jess teases. "A long flouncy puce bridesmaid dress. What girl wouldn't want that?"

"Can I be a bridesmaid?" Brielle asks, her eyes alight in anticipation.

Bryce ignores Brielle's interruption as she goes on the attack. "You say that, but you and Rocky are still living in sin."

Jess pretends she's insulted. "So are you. We were waiting for you and Coyote to get your crap together. Thought we'd

have a double wedding.”

Bryce’s rejoinder is interrupted by Hangman.

“I hate fuckin’ speeches,” he says with a charming grin as he launches into one. “Our ol’ ladies are the foundation of our club. They got guts, intelligence, patience and cu—”

“No, Hangman,” Coyote interrupts.

Hangman narrows his eyes. “I was gonna fuckin’ say, ‘courage.’”

Trigger, who is standing next to Coyote, snickers. “Bet you were also gonna say, tictacs.”

“Shut it,” Hangman snarls at both men. “Where the fuck was I?”

Mom winces and glances at Dot, who smiles in return. Dad looks like he swallowed a lemon.

“Maybe we could tone down the language,” Jess interrupts, her eyes intent as she slides them from Hangman to the kids and back to Hangman.

“You can’t be that subtle with him,” Verity murmurs.

“You were talking about our courage,” I remind him, anxious to get my vest so I can get my lover alone. I want to model it for him, the rest of me naked.

Hangman glares at me. “And stupidity. I don’t know what the f... is wrong with you and the thief. Runnin’ off, shootin’ at people.”

“Shooting at people?” Mom echoes faintly. She doesn’t know what I did after my clinic blew up. Dad, Trigger, and I thought that information would be best kept to ourselves.

“It’s nothing, mom,” I murmur then pin Hangman with my eyes. “Perhaps it would be best if we get to the vesting part.”

“Yeah. Before I change my fu—.” He stops, stymied. “The guy’s voted. It was a unanimous decision to let the vet and the thief join Hell’s Jury as ol’ ladies.”

“Let,” Bryce mutters, crossing her arms. “As if.”

I clap as I meet Trigger's eyes. They're filled with love and pride.

Bryce glares at me. "Don't you see how insulting this is? Calling us old ladies. I'm not old."

"It's just a term. Affectionate, really," Hayley replies.

"Could I fuckin' finish?" Hangman snaps at us.

Jess gasps. "Hangman!"

Verity rubs her face. "I need a smoke. Let him fucking finish."

Jess gasps. "Verity!"

"Shut it, Jess," Slag snaps from her perch on the marble top of dad's fully stocked bar. "I got things to do."

"She means she's not getting any younger," Jess mutters to me.

Hangman stamps his foot. "Enough!" He looks at Dot. "Gotta thank you for sewin' up the vests, Dot. You're a treasure."

Everyone cheers and claps, some raise their beers. Dicer falls over.

"My pleasure," Dot says as she flushes.

Hangman turns to dad and mom. "And to Evanee's old man and his ol' lady for hostin' us today."

Mom flushes, but not like Dot. She stares at Hangman with daggers in her eyes.

Dad tugs at the collar of his Dolce & Gabbana silk polo shirt as he acknowledges the round of applause with a grave nod.

Hangman turns to Coyote and Trigger. "Get on with it!"

My vision becomes a pinprick as I watch Trigger approach me with my vest. "Love you, handsome," I whisper as he helps me into it.

"Oh baby, the things I'm gonna do to you after the party."

I grab his shirt and kiss him long and hard, forgetting where we are and who we're with until I hear my dad clear his throat. "Evanee! Casper!"

We jerk apart, Trigger winking at me, and me smiling at him. "I can't wait," I say.

He swats me lightly on the ass, then we return our attention to Hangman.

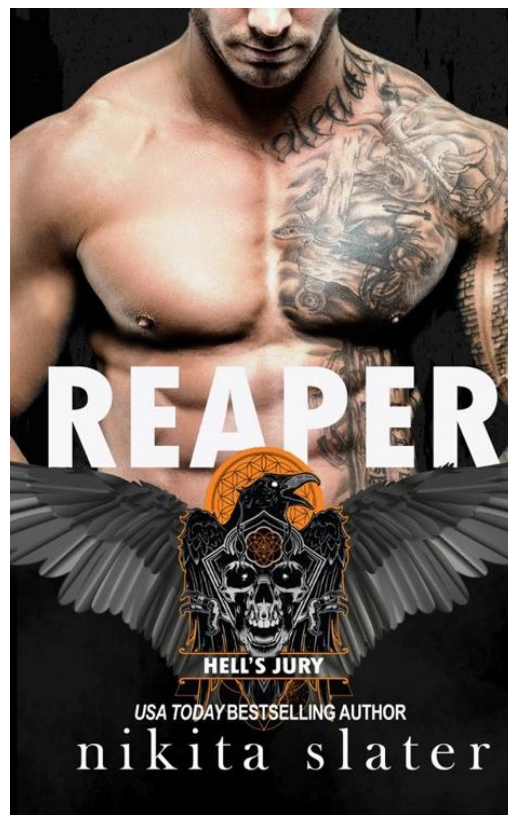
Hangman raises his beer. "Let's get this party started!" he shouts.

**THE END**

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## BONUS: COYOTE

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My night has gone to shit. I'm in Reno, a city I vowed never to come back to, robbing a house, that based on the intel I received, would be worth the risk ten-times over. I was assured that there'd be enough of a cash haul to allow me and mine to take a long vacation somewhere in Europe, even with the cut for my source. But Anthony's information stinks. Sure, there's a fucking safe, but when I open it, there's nothing but air inside.

I don't immediately blame Anthony, my cousin on my mother's side and just as fucked up as I am. Other than Rinna,



my friend and saviour, Anthony is the only other link to my past. Until now, he hasn't led me astray.

The only hesitation I had when he passed me the intel was where the job would be. Reno. The worst time of my life was spent in this city, and it's taken years to overcome the trauma. Not overcome, but carefully locked up in my brain alongside shame, grief, and guilt.

But Anthony, who knows little of my past, doesn't know the secrets I hide. He called me from Las Vegas and talked me into this job. He assured me that the house would be empty and not alarmed. He even told me where the window was that I could slip through. Easy, he said, but that was an exaggeration. I tore the ass of my catsuit as I wriggled through the narrow opening.

The safe is where he said it would be and is easy enough to crack, but the bloody thing is empty. I can't wait to tell my cousin that his 20% is blowing air.

I close the safe, move into the living room, my balaclava in my hand, deciding what to do. Search for another safe, or go on my way, which is what I should be doing. Then my mental acuity shuts down as the roar of motorcycles startles me. They're not on a midnight ride, don't drive past. Instead, they pull up to the house that I am unsuccessfully robbing.

My suspicions about Anthony start to take root. I always do my homework before a job. I know who this house belongs to, so I know, without having to peek out a window, that it's Blackbeard bikers in the driveway.

It's not the first time I've tangled with bikers, but I've approached with caution after a run-in with a one-percenter club in Montreal. It was a misunderstanding, but their president didn't see it that way. I got off with a warning to leave Canada and never come back. I'm surprisingly compliant when there's a gun to my head.

After I explained to Anthony why I was reluctant to rob a bike gang, he assured me that the Blackbeards rarely used the house, convinced me that his information was solid. Yet here they are, three men by my ears, unless they're riding double.

And they're dropping by after midnight. For what? Sure, bikers keep odd hours, but this house has an air of desertion. It hasn't been occupied for a long time.

Maybe it's a coincidence? Me, robbing their house at the same time three goons drop by for tea. Problem is I don't believe in coincidences. Not really. Not this kind. I'm almost certain I've been set up by my cousin-in-crime. The only thing I don't know is why.

I decide Anthony's betrayal is something to contemplate later as there are far more pressing matters to attend. At least three Blackbeard bikers are about to enter the house and I'm defenceless. Heading upstairs would only trap me and strolling out the front door doesn't seem like a feasible option for escape. Neither does the back door as I hear the rattle of a key from that direction. The window I came through won't work unless I can find a ladder in 10 seconds. Unlike the exterior wall, which is covered in rough stucco, the interior is too smooth for me sprint my way up.

Besides, who knows if one of the men isn't lingering under it waiting to break my fall.

I curl up behind an armchair as I hear the creak of the front door. Even before light floods the house, I know my hiding spot is not going to save me. This night is about to get longer.

One of the guys, short and husky in that steroid kind of way, saunters into the room, his eyes searching. Any doubts I had about Anthony setting me up are gone. They know I'm here. They know I'm trapped. The next time I see Anthony, I'm going to wring his neck.

The guy with the muscles walks to the centre of the living room, his head swivelling from right to left, stopping dead when he spies me. His lip curls as he starts to say something, but before he can utter a word, he drops like a rock, his body hitting the floor, his head bouncing off the hardwood.

Behind him is a man dressed in black. Not a catsuit like mine. Jeans, black biker boots, balaclava. Also, he's holding a gun, which I am not. He locks eyes with me and puts a finger to his lips, a warning to keep my mouth shut. That's not a

hardship. I know how to be silent and motionless. It's why I'm still alive.

The guy with the gun is tall and lean, graceful as he steals towards the arch of the living room, just beyond my sight. A few seconds later, I hear a grunt and then a thud. Blackbeard number two is down, and I let out a premature breath of relief. One left to go.

I'm not afraid. I do get scared at times because fear is a natural response, but long ago, I realized that it's irrelevant to the outcome. Therefore, it serves no purpose. Thus, my heart rate is steady, my breathing normal as I stand to run out the back door.

I'm partway across the living room, when the third guy materializes in front of me, pointing a gun. We stare at each other for a long couple of seconds before he breaks the contact. He looks over my shoulder, then crumples. The noise from the gun behind me isn't explosive, just a loud pop, the sound a silencer would make.

I stare at the dead biker as a bloody hole blooms in the centre of his forehead, then slowly turn toward my unknown saviour... or future murderer. He's pointing the gun towards me.

This is where it all stops, I think. In Reno, in a house I shouldn't be in, shot by a man I don't know. It's ironic. I've come full circle. I'm back where I started. Where I almost died, and now, where I'll take my last breath.

I tear up because every action in my life has brought me here to my death. I think of Sean, my son, and Autumn, my sister. My best friend, Rinna, who saved my life and has kept my family safe. They'll all grieve for me. Then of cousin Anthony, who betrayed me, the smug smile on his face that I'll never get the chance to wipe off.

I wait for the guy to pull the trigger. If he's expecting me to beg, he'll be disappointed. Begging rarely influences the result, especially when it comes to violence.

Instead of the bullet I've braced myself for, he walks up to me, presses the gun into my ribs, then rips off my balaclava. "You've really fucked up my night," he says in a dead voice that slides through my veins like ice water. His intense blue eyes stare into mine, cold and unforgiving. I realize I was wrong about my ability to suppress fear.

I swallow, then clear my throat. "Sorry about that."

His lips tip up, but he's not amused. His gaze doesn't waver from mine as he reaches out and takes a lock of my hair, pulls it towards him and inhales.

Everything inside me freezes as demons try to claw their way out from the box that I've locked down tight. If they escape, they'll destroy my soul and I'll lose the woman I've so carefully constructed.

"Don't," I demand as I knock his hand away.

He doesn't react as he hands me the balaclava. "Put it back on."

It's a life vest for me, the safety of darkness, and I cover my head, feeling secure inside it. Stupidly.

Then he does something that outrages me. He fucking turns his back on me as if I have no power to hurt him. I hold my breath as he walks across the room and yanks a cord attached to a floor lamp out of its socket.

I tense, getting ready to run.

"Don't." His back is still turned, but the warning in his voice promises death.

I freeze as he snaps the cord from the lamp, then returns to me. "Turn around."

I blow out a breath as I think about what to do. I'm fully aware my fight or flight response is one bad idea away from defending myself.

I've hesitated too long as he lightly grips my shoulder and turns me so I'm facing away. He wraps the cord around my wrists and then yanks me backwards into his hard chest. "We're going outside." His words slide over me like melting

ice. “You’re going to walk in front of me without speaking, without struggling or trying to run away.”

It’s an expectation, not a warning or command.

“And then?” I whisper.

“I’m going to lock you in my van and come back to clean up your fucking mess. Keep your mouth shut and be grateful you’re still breathing.”

An unsettling thought invades me; serial killers have vans. I decide to try begging on for size. Experiment with it. I turn enough that I can see his face. “Please don’t hurt me,” I whimper.

If Autumn could hear me now, she’d vomit.

He tilts his head as if he knows I’m full of shit. “Okay.”

I raise my eyebrows at him and his lips quirk.

He leads me out the back door and we walk in the shadows, our breaths heavy in the oppressive silence of the night, our footsteps barely a whisper. Two blocks down we get to the van. It’s seemingly innocuous parked next to a curb under a broken streetlight. He opens the back doors and picks me up like I’m a six-pack and places me inside, then forces me further into the interior as he climbs in behind me.

The van is spacious, but he fills it with his presence. It smells like it has been freshly laundered and despite the summer heat, it’s cool. Under the dim interior lights, I see monitoring equipment, screens, headphones, all sitting on a desk-like table that seems to be bolted to the wall.

“Who are you?” I say, my heart leaping at the idea that maybe he isn’t a serial killer. Maybe he’s a cop.

He doesn’t respond as he sets me in a corner, forcing me down on my belly. The soft, thick foam under me causes my stomach to drop. He probably is a serial killer. He bends my legs at the knees and binds my ankles with the remaining electrical cord, then attaches it to my wrists, tightening it enough to make me grunt in pain. Then he pulls it tighter.

“I think you’re good at getting out of tight spots, and I’d like you to stick around a while so we can talk.” His soft sinister voice makes my pulse jump. As he tests the knots, ignoring my protesting squeak, I tell myself to settle down.

He’s right. I can get out of most situations, but I may have met my match tonight.

He sits back on his heels and admires his handiwork, then pulls my balaclava off my head. “Wouldn’t want you to be uncomfortable.”

I roll awkwardly onto my side so I can watch him as he moves around the van. He flicks a switch on his control panel and slides earbuds into his ears. Then he picks up a small rectangular kit and a backpack.

He turns to me again, taps on one of the earphones. “It’s going to take a couple of hours to clean the house.”

My heart falls at his words. “You’re kidding, right? You’ll be there for hours cleaning up the bodies.”

He holds my eyes until I drop mine. “I don’t give a shit about the bodies.” He checks the time on the flashing panel and frowns. “Should be back by 3:00 AM.”

The lights fade, then he’s gone, and I’m tied up like a pretzel alone in the dark.

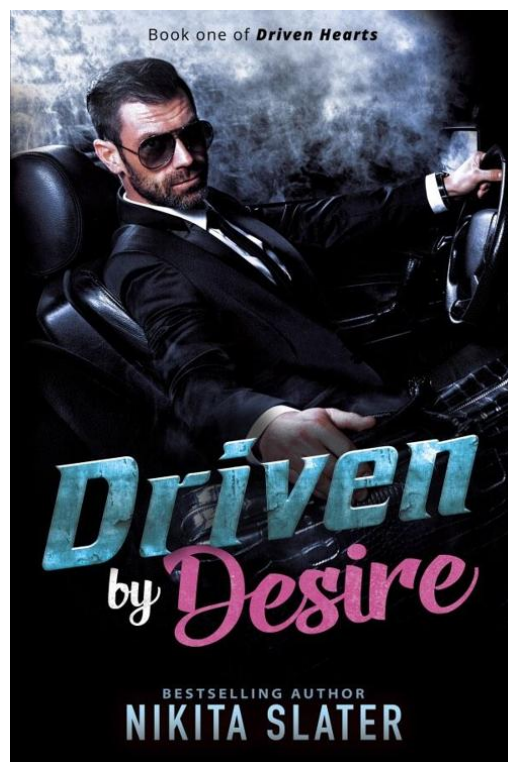
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## BONUS: DRIVEN BY DESIRE

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“Fuck,” Riley grumbled, twisting to make sure she was correct. Nope, she didn’t have the right tool.

It was late at night and all the guys had gone home so she couldn’t call out to one of the other mechanics and ask them to hand it to her. Damn. With an aggrieved sigh, she pushed herself out from under the car. Shoving her long ponytail out of the way, she crawled toward the toolbox and rifled through until she found what she was looking for. Loud, thumping music filled the garage from where her iPhone was plugged into its port on top of one of the tool benches.

Turning back toward the '69 Camaro, Riley adjusted her lamp and prepared to slide back under. This baby was a thing of beauty. It called to her from the moment it entered her shop, which is why she was still working on it at 2:00am. If she did it up right she'd be able to turn a pretty profit on this little sweetheart and take Cilia on vacation. They desperately needed some bonding time.

The music switched off and a deep voice reverberated through the darkness of the garage. "I'm looking for Mr. Bancroft."

Riley froze for a few precious seconds before her head snapped up, judging the distance between a shadowed man and the gun in her toolbox. He stepped forward into the circle of her light, closing the distance between them. Riley's heart slammed against her ribs as his face became visible and she recognized the most ruthless man in the city. Solomon Hart, mafia kingpin, was standing in her garage, staring down at her with cold intent. He now stood directly between her and her gun. Not that she thought it would do any good against a man like him.

Riley felt incredibly small and grimy next to his large, well-dressed frame. She sat crouched on the concrete beneath him, wearing her usual tank top and grimy, oil-stained overalls with the top left to hang down. Her shiny, dark brown hair was pulled back in a messy ponytail and she wore no make-up.

He seemed to be looking her over, taking in every inch of her with interest. Her eyes narrowed in return. She was used to guys staring. She was a thirty-year-old female mechanic, working in a garage full of men. She looked younger than she was and knew she was attractive. Definitely fantasy material for some guys. Which is why she tended to work in the office and on cars in the back, well away from the clients. Very few people knew who actually owned the garage.

"How did you get in here?" she demanded, pushing herself up and standing to her full height, which was still several inches shorter than him. She crossed her arms in front of her chest and glared at him. She had a damn good security system



or she wouldn't have been alone in the shop blaring music in the middle of the night.

He ignored her question and raised a dark, thick brow. "Mr. Bancroft?" The single question sent a chill down her spine, letting her know that the next words out of her mouth better be an answer, because Soloman Hart was not a man known for patience.

Riley pressed her lips together for a moment and wondered how best to answer him. The truth of 'Mr. Bancroft' was complicated. And Riley was starting to suspect she may be in some danger. The likelihood of a man of this caliber showing up in her garage for any reason was slim. Which meant something not good was going down. Soloman had men to deal with his car issues, he didn't deal with things like this himself.

She moistened her lips and then stopped when his sharp eyes followed the movement. Taking a breath, she said, "Mr. Bancroft is dead. He died two years ago."

His brows drew together in a frown that made Riley shiver from head to toe. Yeah, he didn't want to play games with her. His next words confirmed this thought.

"Don't fuck with me, little girl," he growled. "Everyone knows Alan Bancroft is dead. I'm looking for the owner of this garage. Alan's son, Riley Bancroft."

"Okay," she whispered. "Why are you looking for Riley?"

Holy shit, she was going to die! The look on his face suggested that the last person that questioned him instead of instantly giving him the answers he was searching for had died a really extra terrible death.

Surprisingly, he answered, his deep voice clipped as he spoke. "Someone stole one of my vehicles yesterday. It was my favourite and I want it back. Thought it might show up here."

Shock flickered across her face. Who would be stupid enough to steal one of Soloman Hart's cars? Well, that explained why he would show up on her doorstep himself at

2:00am looking for answers. She ran the biggest chop shop in the city. Only very few people knew she ran the garage. She had a very good team of mechanics, mostly inherited from her father, that helped keep her safe behind the scenes. Few people even knew the name Riley Bancroft. Except, somehow Soloman did.

“Wh-what kind of car?” She asked hesitantly, hoping like hell it hadn’t gone through her shop. She usually did her homework and found out where the vehicles came from so this kind of shitstorm didn’t come down on her head, but that didn’t mean things didn’t get under her radar once in a while.

“Koenigsegg Regera.” His voice held no inflection as he named one of the most expensive vehicles in the world. A car that would be one of a kind in the United States.

Riley took a few seconds out from her terror to be impressed. Damn. Soloman must like him some nice luxury racing automobiles. Too bad the man was such a cold-hearted, ruthless bastard. Under different circumstances she wouldn’t mind getting under the hoods of his fleet, see what he had going on up in there.

She breathed a sigh of relief. “Nope, I definitely would’ve noticed one of those. Never even seen one in person, let alone had one in here.”

He nodded, still studying her carefully as though taking in every minuscule expression that crossed her face. Finally, he said, “I’d still like to have a conversation with Mr. Bancroft.”

Fuck. That was going to be a problem since there was no Mr. Bancroft. Instead, she nodded her head.

“Sure, no problem. I’ll have him call you tomorrow.” She’d get one of the other mechanics to call and reassure him that his car was never there and if it showed up he would be the first person they called.

He reached out and took her hand before she realized what he was about to do. He held her fingers in a grip that told her she shouldn’t pull away from him. He had tattoos over his hand and knuckles. He looked down at the black, chipped nail

polish and rubbed his broad thumb over the tops of her much smaller nails. She shivered at his touch. Based on his reputation and the few glimpses she'd had of him she'd always considered Soloman Hart cold, but his hand was surprisingly warm.

“What’s your name?” he demanded, his voice deep and compelling.

Riley tried to pull her hand away, but he continued to hold her. She turned her body away and said in a haughty voice, “None of your business.”

He stiffened next to her and she bit her lip, worried that she was about to find out what made this powerful man so feared among their underworld set. He chuckled lightly, running his thumb over her knuckles. “I think you’ll find I can make it my business.”

She shivered and dropped her eyes, still refusing to answer. She did not want this man finding out who she was. For more reasons that the obvious. When he was alive, Alan Bancroft had taught Riley everything he knew, but he'd kept her existence on the down low in case they ever needed to pack up shop and run. There was also the complication of her mother. Cilia Bancroft, shady accountant to the super rich, was a handful and best kept out of the notice of men like Soloman Hart.

“You can fly, little bird,” he said quietly. He looked down at her, capturing her brown eyes with his bottomless dark eyes. “I will let you go for now.”

“F-for now?” Riley asked hesitantly.

He released her hand and stepped closer, towering over her, his chest nearly brushing hers. Riley gasped at his unexpected movement and tried to move back. Her leg bumped against the car she'd been working on and she was forced to stand still next to him. Her head swam as his subtle, masculine scent enveloped her. It made alarm bells go off in her head. He didn't immediately move away from her.

“For now,” he confirmed. “I think the day will come that we will see... a lot more of each other.”

Her mouth opened and she stared at him. Was that a threat? He was looking down at her with something she couldn't entirely define. Speculation? Possessiveness? But how was that possible? He didn't even know her. Though she'd seen him before, they were just meeting officially for the first time.

His eyes brushed over her one last time and she had a keen awareness that she was being granted some kind of reprieve. But it came with a time limit. One that would eventually run out. Her heart slammed against her ribs.

“Do you know who I am?” he asked.

She blinked and then nodded slowly.

“Say my name,” he demanded.

Riley gaped up at him for a moment and then, desperately wanting the dark man to leave, she gave him what he wanted. She licked her lips and whispered, “Soloman.”

He turned and strode away from her, resetting the alarm before leaving the garage.

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Soloman slid into the passenger side of his second favourite vehicle. Turning to his friend and bodyguard, he said, “Did you catch that?”

Roman nodded. He had been standing in the shadows near the door where he'd disabled the alarm and unbolted the lock to allow his boss entry to the garage. Though Soloman didn't need back up, the two rarely worked separately, especially since Soloman's climb to the top had earned many enemies. Both knew it was better to have a loyal man guarding each other's backs than to go it alone.

“I want her,” Soloman said quietly, not taking his eyes off the passing street lights.

Roman grunted, but didn't say anything. He already knew. The boss rarely pursued women, beyond having them brought in for a quick fuck. That he even asked for this one's name was surprising. "I'll find out who she is."

Soloman nodded. "I want to know everything. There's something about her... I think I might keep her for a while."

Roman grunted. He'd get their information guy out of bed and working on the problem of the chick immediately. Find out who she was so the boss could get laid. Soloman Hart wasn't used to being denied. No one needed to be around the man when he wasn't happy. Much better to just bring him the woman's information and then the woman herself all wrapped up and tied in a bow. Fewer people would die that way.

"And find out where the fuck Riley Bancroft is," he snapped, drumming his fingers restlessly on his leg. "I want my goddamned car back."

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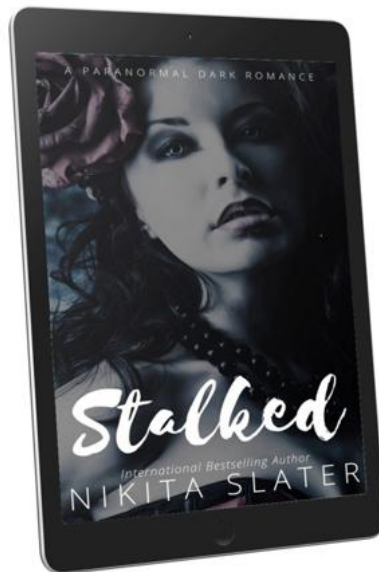
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nikita Slater is the USA Today Bestselling Author of action-packed suspenseful romance. She writes dark romance, mafia romance, and post-apocalyptic dystopian romance. She lives on the beautiful Canadian prairies with her son and her crazy awesome dog. She has an unholy affinity for books, wine, pets and anything chocolate. Despite some of the darker themes in her books (which are pure fun and fantasy), Nikita is a staunch feminist and advocate of equal rights for all races, genders and non-gender specific persons. When she isn't writing, dreaming about writing or talking about writing, she helps others discover a love of reading and writing through literacy and social work.