



WILTED FLOWER

A NEW BEGINNINGS STORY
SIENNA GRANT

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This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are all products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any similarities are entirely coincidental.

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FOREWORD

This story is part of The New Beginnings Anthology, raising awareness and money for the charity Living Without Abuse because everyone has the right to live without domestic abuse. The authors taking part in this anthology have agreed that all proceeds will be donated directly to the charity.

Living Without Abuse (LWA) believes that all people have the right to live safely and without fear of violence and abuse. On this site we offer information and advice to anyone experiencing domestic abuse and/or sexual violence. We can also provide support services to anyone living in Leicester, Leicestershire or Rutland. We are committed to raising awareness of domestic abuse and sexual violence, working towards its prevention and eradication, and assisting those affected by this crime to determine their own lives. <https://lwa.org.uk/>

Anyone experiencing any abuse please know that you are not alone and seek support.

Living in the UK? Find help here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>

Living in the USA? Find help here:

<https://www.thehotline.org/get-help/>

Living in the AUS? Find help here:

1800RESPECT - 1800 737 732 (Available 24 hours, 7 days a week)

<https://www.whiteribbon.org.au/helplines/>

PLEASE be aware that these stories maybe a trigger for anyone experiencing or having experienced domestic violence so please proceed with caution.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Wilted Flower is the prequel to Saving Chains, a new Mc series and this story,

deals with domestic violence.

****This story contains scenes of domestic abuse which some readers may find distressing and cause triggers. ****

So firstly, let's quickly chat about domestic violence.

It's a charity that is very close to my heart and if I can I'll always do what I can to help and raise money.

Domestic violence can happen in any home. It's real.

Physical, sexual, or mental, or even all three happens and even though we as concerned human beings don't want to think about it, it still happens. Unfortunately, no one knows what happens behind closed doors, and if we don't listen to victims when they reach out, they will never get out of that situation.

Unfortunately, it happened to me, a long time ago but I came out of the other side, I survived. It was hard to walk away. To admit I became a victim and although I didn't have really anyone to help me get out of that situation and the police didn't get involved like they do now, all it took was one person to listen to what was happening to me. I was 19, pregnant and had a 15 month old son. That day my life took another direction. I was rock bottom. I carried on for my son and the child I had on the way.

I'm putting this out there now in the hope that someone going through what I did, finds the hope and salvation that they need.

Please don't suffer in silence.

Just by reaching out to one person, they really could be your saviour.

Break the cycle.

Listen to people when they need you to.

It might just be name calling, or a slap here and there.

It's violence.

And violence shouldn't be allowed in any home. Whether it be a man, a woman, or a child. Domestic violence is abuse and it can't be tolerated.

Living in the UK? Find help here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>

Domestic violence hotline USA: - 1-800-799-7233

BLURB

Your childhood should be the best years of your life, or at least that's what people say.

Mine weren't.

There were so many occasions when I wished things were different. A different father. A better life. Someone to love my mother the way she deserved. To be nurtured by a father the way other kids were.

But again, it wasn't for us, and some have to learn the hard way.

My mom was the light of my life. A bright flower in such a dark world. Unfortunately, her petals wilted along with her will to fight. But while I tried to survive, I found a new kind of family, a family of brothers guided by sin.

It was my time now.

CHAPTER ONE

Levi

MY FEET TRUDGE along the sidewalk, kicking up the dust as I make my way home from school. Home. It's not really a home. It's not that I want to go back there, it's because I don't have a choice. I can't leave my mom with him. As I get closer to the house, it's like my body knows; anxiety takes hold, and my stomach clenches. I take deep breaths to calm myself as I slowly make my way up the path while a shaky breath leaves my lips. One word wrong said to him, and I'll get a hiding.

Before I slip my key into the lock, I look around me, call it being careful, preparing myself for the worst. I don't see his car, and in that moment, my body sags with relief, tension rolling from my shoulders when I realize he's not here. With my spirits lifted, I push on the handle and rush into the house, dropping my bag on the floor in the hall before kicking off my sneakers.

"Levi, is that you sweetheart?" She sounds happy today, not her normal low, hushed tone. I see her appear from around the corner, and she has a smile on her face. Her eyes light up as her gaze falls on me as she dries her hands on a towel. "How was school, sweetheart?" Her arm hooks around my neck and holds me in place to leave a kiss on my head.

"Alright, I guess." I shrug and move out of her embrace to go around her and make my way to the kitchen, grabbing some snacks. There isn't much, so I grab some crackers and head into the living room, flopping down on the couch to turn the TV on, then find some cartoons to watch. When Dad is at

home, the TV is out of bounds. He has his sport on and that's it. It's a luxury, so he says, and we don't deserve luxuries – his words. Asshole.

“Hey, don't eat too much junk, dinner will be on the table soon.” Mom calls out.

“K, Mom.” I appease her. I don't like upsetting her: I see what he puts her through. She doesn't need me being a pain in the ass too.

I'm fifteen years of age, and living in a world that I do, with an old drunk for a father who has nothing better to do than use us as his punchbag, is hard. It's hard to explain injuries at school, so now, if they're too bad that I can't hide them, I don't go. I skip school more than I'm there. I'm surprised Mom hasn't been called in. There have been times I've turned up at school with a black eye or unexplained bruises, but I don't say anything; what's the point. They won't do anything; they won't take us out of here and place us somewhere he can't find us. I can look after my mom; I do look after her, and one day, there will come a time when he will be gone.

While I'm lost inside my own head and casually flicking through the cable channels on TV, I find myself having the same thoughts. What it would be like to have a normal life. To have a family that loves you, would do anything for you, would kill rather than let anyone hurt you. Other than my mom, I don't think I'll ever know what that's like. My mom needs to survive, too.

“Levi. Dinner's ready.”

I throw the remote control onto the cushion beside me and scramble off the couch to rush into the kitchen, the smell of dinner luring me in. A pot roast sits in the middle of the table. It smells delicious. I quickly sit while mom dishes some veg and sausages onto my plate. If it wasn't for her, we'd starve. Mom can make a meal out of anything. We might not have a life where we get everything we want, and I might have a bastard for a father, but we don't starve. If she didn't have

food on the table, that would be another excuse for him to hit her.

She thinks I don't hear her crying in bed at night for hours. She also thinks I don't hear how he talks to her and the names he calls her. Most nights, I sneak out of my bedroom window just to get away.

"Please bless this table and our family," Mom prays, and, on a whisper, she goes on, "and keep my boy safe." I reach across the small square table, gripping her hand tightly, pointing an encouraging smile her way. She nods, she looks sad most of the time, but even with her own shitty life and her marriage, she still smiles then sits up a little straighter. "Well, tuck in."

As I scoop some mashed potato on my fork, the front door slams shut. I pause, taking the potato from my fork just as my stomach clenches again, and suddenly, I'm not hungry. Mom keeps her eyes on me, but the smile that was there just moments ago has disappeared. Our gazes lock on each other, a silent conversation and strength passing between us as his footsteps thunder down the hall. Next, the door swings open, and when it slams off the wall, my body jolts.

"Started without me. You ungrateful fucks. It's me that allows you to eat this food, but you can't wait for us to eat together." Mom nods at me to eat. My lips close around the mashed potato on my fork and drag it into my mouth and start eating. I eat my sausages so quick I end up with a pain in my chest and hiccups. I try to block his voice out, but he's loud, so I attempt to get my mind to go back five minutes to find that somber, calm place again. I quickly eat most of my dinner, even though I'm stuffed, and place my cutlery on the plate.

"Can I leave the table please?" I ask politely, aiming it at my mom more than him.

She nods, "Of course sweetheart."

"Stop fucking coddling him. The boy needs to grow up to be a man, not a pussy." Dad sneers as he opens the beer can that Mom has placed in front of him. he takes a long swig and bangs it back on the table.

“He will be a man, but it doesn’t hurt to be polite.”

“Who the fuck you talking to?” His lip curls as he swings his fierce gaze toward me.

“I’m just saying,” Mom replies, a shake evident in her voice. “I’m not coddling him; I’m just being nice to our son.”

“Mom, it’s okay.” I butt in and reach across to her hand, giving her some comfort. But that just makes him even more angry.

“Did I say you can speak?” his tone is harsh and full of hatred for me. Yes, hate. I don’t think I’ve ever felt love from him, but I don’t care, the feeling is mutual, and as soon as I get the chance, I’ll be out of here.

Pushing my chair back, I rise to take my plate from the table, scraping the leftovers into the bin and pick up the leftover sausage from my plate, biting the end off as I leave the room. I snatch my school bag from the floor as I rush past the front door and head to my room.

I shove my door closed and slide the lock across. The number of times he’s broken it off by kicking the door is crazy, but it doesn’t stop me. It’s the only power I have against him. This is for my peace of mind. I’ve become quite self-sufficient in the last year. I do all the fix up jobs when Dad has lost his shit, well, the jobs I can do anyway.

With the lock in place, I drag the chair across the room and lodge it under the handle. Let him try and get through that, I think as I throw myself onto my bed. I spend a minute wondering what will come of this evening. It doesn’t bear thinking about, but the mood he was in sets the tone for my thoughts. A rumbling passes my house, and as I shoot up to look out of my window, I see the back of bikes passing by. It’s not the first time I’ve seen them pass here; in fact, they pass by here a lot. Planting my forearms on the windowsill, I watch them go by in awe. The shiny chrome on the bikes has my gaze fixed on them. What it would be like to be one of them. That’s what I want. I want to be one of those guys. No one will beat on me; there’ll be no one that can treat me like shit. Not like he does, anyway.

After the bikers have disappeared, I drop down from my window and make a start on my homework. It's not long before I'm lost in Math, luckily, I do well with that. It's everything else I seem to struggle with.

With my eyes getting tired, I drag myself up with an exhausted sigh, rubbing my eyes before shutting my books. I throw my books to the floor and get up from the bed, removing my barricade and unlock the door, then as quietly as I can, I go into the bathroom on the landing to wash up, then brush my teeth ready for bed.

At my age, I should be out with friends, hanging around, maybe being a nuisance, but I'm not because I don't have friends. I don't have anyone to confide in. That may be my doing; I don't want to have to explain where my bruises come from, and I'm not a liar. I can't make stories up and make someone believe me; it just isn't in me. They would read right through me. And anyway, no kid in my position would admit the life they have if they were me. It's better this way.

As I come out of the bathroom, I pull the door behind me closed as quietly as I can, I don't want to piss him off further. But then I hear his loud, harsh voice insulting my mom. Unfortunately, it's the normal nightly routine. I hear his shameful words, the names he calls her. Slut, cunt. My mom is none of those things. She's good, way too good for him. I wish I could help her... I stand on the top of the stairs wondering whether I should be brave and go down there, help, try and stop him, but my thoughts are cut dead. A piercing scream from the kitchen reaches my ears, and my heart sinks as I drop down to the carpet and sit on the top step. I sit quietly, listening, wishing. One scream is followed by a wail, followed by a thud, then comes more shouting. Telling her to kill herself. To die. How he wishes that he never met her and had a bastard kid with her. Deep, ragged breaths tear through my chest as I once again wish we could escape him. But I stay where I am while the tears pour from my eyes as I lift my fingers to my face and wipe them away, my breaths shudder from the pain my mom must be in.

His heavy footsteps sound on the wooden floor, and seconds later, the front door slams. I jump from the sound echoing off the walls and wait a few minutes. If he comes back, I'll have the same, and I haven't had a bad beating for a couple of months. I peer into the kitchen as I reach the door and find Mom in the corner, curled into a ball with her hands on her head, her soft, painful cries breaking my heart.

I don't waste any time, I go in, softly closing the door and drop to my knees at her side.

"I'm here, Mom. It's okay. I wrap my arm around her shoulders and pull her against me. Her cries tear my heart out as her head falls against my chest and I hold her, telling her she'll always have me. Her arms tighten around me as I let her cry it out as she holds on to me for what feels like a lifetime.

"I'm sorry baby. I'm so sorry."

"Shhh. Don't cry." I stroke her hair the way she does to me when she tends to me after Dad has beaten me. "I love you, Mom." she lifts her head, and I see the start of a bruise forming around her eye. Her lip is bleeding, and so is her nose. "I promise one day Mom, one day we'll get away from him. I'll keep you safe."

Her chin trembles, and her head shakes, "Sweetheart I'll never get away from him, he won't let me. But you, you promise me that one day you'll get away from here and you never look back, do you hear me, Levi." The tremble in her voice scares me, "That's what I want you to do for me."

With an agreeable nod, I tighten my hold around her before dragging us from the floor and I help her to a chair. I grab the first aid kit from the cupboard and tend to her cuts, pouring my love onto her and letting her know that one person in this shitty world loves her.

CHAPTER TWO

Levi

I'VE SAT out here on this roof for hours. I couldn't listen to Mom cry anymore it was killing me. After comforting her for what seemed like hours on her bed, she kicked me out and sent me to my own bed, said it was late and I needed my sleep, not that I would anyway, so instead, I came to sit out here. This is my place, sat out here under the comfort of the stars. Most people don't like the dark, not me. Out here, everything ebbs away. It's the four walls that scare me most. No one knows what goes on behind those walls, and unless we speak out, no one ever will.

There's a cooler breeze in the air tonight, and as it wraps around my body, goosebumps prickle my skin. It's so quiet out here. Right now, you could hear a pin drop, well, that's until the shrill cry of a cat pierces the silence, and the odd dog barks at something moving around in the night, but then I hear them again, the rumble of bikes in the distance. Lifting my chin from my knees and my back straightens from my hunched position as I look out, hoping to catch a glimpse of them. I shuffle toward the edge, my fingers tightly gripping the edge of the flat roof as I look out to the end of the road, waiting for them to suddenly appear. The sound gets louder, closer, then there's three of them riding alongside each other. I don't know what it is about them, but they make me happy, feel alive.

As they pass by, the one closest to my side looks up and nods his head my way. I smile and lift my hand in a wave. when he does it back, a smile form on my lips, a real smile,

something I haven't done in a long time. After watching them for a few minutes, I stand up, balancing on the edge as I look down, concentrating on the grass below as I prepare to jump.

My feet hit the ground with a dull thud, and quickly I jump back up to my feet and set off down the street, running toward their home, the compound that's situated just minutes from my house. My feet come to a sudden stop when I reach the high fences that surround it, and I look up in total awe. The sound of bikes has stopped now, and the night air is eerily silent again. As I go around the compound, I wonder what it's like inside. To be there, to be a part of something like that. Even out here, on this side of the fence, I feel safer than I do at home; it's such a strange feeling. I spend what feels like forever just staring at the inside of those fences. I can't take my eyes off the bikes sitting outside. There are guys in and out. Don't these guys sleep?

A twig snaps underfoot as I move across the front of the fence. One of the guys looks back at the sound, my stomach clenching with unnamed emotion as he looks directly at me. I'm not sure if fear or excitement has taken hold of me, but either way, I can't move or look away as the big biker makes his way toward me. "Hey kid. What are you doing there?"

My head tips back as I look up at him. His head is bald, and his shoulders are rounded as his leather vest sits on his large frame. A long beard hangs from his face, but his eyes are kind.

"N...nothing." I stammer. "I was just looking."

"You shouldn't be out here. You should be in bed." I shrug. "Don't you have a home to go to? I'm sure your momma will be worried about you." My shoulders shrug again. "What's your name?"

"Levi," I answer stronger this time, and he nods.

"Well, Levi, you better go home. It's not safe out on these streets at this time of night." I want to say it's safer than being at home, but I don't. My teeth clamp together, and suddenly I turn mute, scared to say anything I shouldn't. I look past him to the sound of talking; the biker turns his body slightly to see

what I'm looking at and smiles as he brings his gaze back to me. "You like bikes?" I nod as I carry on watching. It's just two guys talking and watching us. My fingers move through the holes in the fence, and as I grip it the wire cuts into my flesh slightly. Just then, a burst of a siren disturbs the peaceful air, and a patrol car slows down behind us. I watch as the huge biker straightens his stance and pushes his shoulders back, standing taller than he already was.

I turn to see the two cops watching us as they crawl by, and looking between them and the biker, he nods at them, and they nod back, then carry on past, still crawling by. "You better go kid, otherwise they'll be back. Do you need me to take you?"

"No thank you." I smile at the large guy, and he sniggers.

"Go on. Don't let me see you out this time of night again."

"Yes sir." I answer him politely, like I've been taught, but I will be out again. Backing away from the fence, keeping my eyes on him, I reach the end of the grass and turn around, running back the way I came.

Once I reach my house, I find the lights are still on in the living room. I go around the side and climb back up the drainpipe, trying to make as little noise as possible, and take my place back on the roof. The wind has picked up from earlier, it's even cooler now, and as I feel the first spots of rain, I crawl back inside my window, kick off my sneakers and strip out of my clothes to slide between my sheets. My thoughts soon go back to that compound and the biker who spoke to me like I was a person, not some annoying tic. And as I close my eyes, I drift off to a world where I'm wanted, I'm tough and no one messes with me.

The next few days, I spend as much time out of the house as possible. Although I don't want my mom to hurt or to be upset, I can't stay in there. Every night, I've done the same thing, gone to the compound, watching, and wishing that I was there instead of the prison I currently live in. The sound of the

bikes excites me, and the bikers make me long for a different life.

It's almost dawn by the time I return home this time. I've sat all night, hidden in a darker spot behind the fence. No one has seen me this time though, in fact, I haven't seen that guy since that first night or hardly anyone for that matter. Just as I lift my foot to the wall to secure it against the side of the house, a hand grabs my shirt. He tugs hard and I feel myself falling, then hit the ground with a sharp thud. "Caught ya, you little shit." With my shirt balled in his fist, he drags me along, back to the front door and slings me inside. As I hit the floor again, he releases me and just in that split second of freedom, I try to scramble away, my stomach churns with fright as the door closes with a loud slam.

"Leave him alone, Terry." My mom cries.

"Shut your fucking trap, bitch. He thinks he can sneak out of my house at night. I'll teach him a fucking lesson."

"Don't you touch him." Mom screams and stands in front of me, guarding me.

"No, Mom. It's okay." She launches herself at him, but he easily stops her advance. She's no match for him as his hand goes around her throat and squeezes tightly, her eyes beginning to bulge. I shift to my feet and try to get between them, my hands pushing against his chest as I use all my weight to get him to move away, but it's no good. Instead, I do something I've never been brave enough to do; I hit him, punching his stomach and chest, turn my shoulder into his body to shove him away from her, and eventually, his grip loosens, and he lets go. I push her out of the way as she gasps for air, and I stand in front of him, a tremble taking over my whole body as my bravery ebbs away, but I stand tall, just like that biker did when the cops came past. As my jaw clamps, his eyes turn black and his mouth sneers with hate. I don't see his hand pull back, not until it's covering one side of my face, my cheek feels like it's going to pop, and I hit the hard floor again.

“Noooo.” I hear Mom’s screams, and although it hurts, adrenaline courses through me and I jump back up, standing before him again and square my shoulders.

“Oh, think you’re big enough, boy?” He sneers.

I don’t answer, but I don’t back down either when he grabs my face, his fingers squeezing my jaw to keep me in place but I’m defiant and don’t show him my fear. I don’t care anymore. He hits me again, his knuckles connecting with my cheekbone and making it feel like my face is going to break open with his fierceness.

“I hate you. I wish you’d die.” I throw at him, but he laughs at me, that makes me even angrier as I hit the floor again. He rains hits on me one after the other, and by the time he’s done, he leaves me on the floor, a battered heap and walks away muttering what a pussy I am.

Soft arms pull my hands from my face, and her arms go around me in a warm embrace. I let her hold me, and for the first time in a while, I let myself break down, silently crying against her chest.

One day, he won’t be able to do this, he won’t be able to hurt either of us, and I swear that once I’m older, and bigger I’ll find a way of stopping him. Even if it’s the last thing I ever do.

CHAPTER THREE

Levi

STARING BACK at another black eye and bruising on my cheeks and jaw just angers me. I'm not sad, I don't regret sneaking out, and even if I get a beating every night, he won't stop me. I do feel bad for leaving my mom at his mercy, though. If I could get us both out of here, I would.

I open her bedroom door quietly and see she's sleeping soundly on her bed. I creep inside and go around to the side she's on, kiss her cheek, stroking her hair gently and just sit with her for a little while, listening to her sleep. It's not a natural sleep; she's sedated. She's taken pills, her antidepressants to be exact. She's been taking them for a while now, she thinks I don't know about them, that I don't understand. I'm almost sixteen. I'm not a baby or a child anymore. I look after her and myself more than she looks after me now. Seeing that her eyes aren't even flickering tells me that she took more than the approved dose just so she can sleep. It makes me sad, pissed that he's brought her to this, but if it means he doesn't hurt her then I'd rather her sleep.

Kissing her head again and telling her I love her, I get back up to my feet, leave the room and close the door again behind me. When I hit the bottom of the stairs, the TV plays out loud. I peer around the door and see him still, a loud snore filling the room as his can hangs from his fingers, threatening to fall to the floor. I quickly leave before it drops and it wakes him up and he catches me, he told me I wasn't to go out other than to school but there's no way I'm going like this, this is one too

many bruises to explain and although I'd love mom to get help, I doubt she'll accept it anyway.

Pulling the door closed again, I run up the street and soon find myself back at the compound, but being in broad daylight makes it seem different, bigger. I walk around the side and away from the road where people can see me and slip through the bushes. With my foot flat against the wire, I climb up, scramble over the top and jump down again. I plant my back against the fence before I see a corner I can hide in, behind some large trash units. I race across the compound and squeeze between them, crouch down and hide away, enjoying the safety the gated area can offer.

It's been a while since I got here, but the sound of bikes is like music to my ears and has my attention again. I thought about coming out of my hiding place to have a look around, but I couldn't risk that because then my safe haven would be gone. If they find me in here, they'll up their security, and I won't be able to return.

A female voice catches my attention though, and being inquisitive, I crawl out a couple of feet to investigate. As her voice gets closer, I still for a second, my body freezing before poking my head out just a little further. I soon find the girl that the voice belongs to. Her long dark hair trails down her back, she's slim and has long legs that are dancing around to some music. I watch her, smiling slightly. Her voice is soft, and she seems so carefree. What I would give to be like that. But then I hear another voice, a much deeper one this time telling her to go inside. She answers, saying she doesn't want to because it's too hot to be indoors. It's not even that hot, I don't think so anyway. The weather has turned cooler over the last few days. Her voice is sweet but defiant as she answers. "I don't want to."

"It's not safe out here for you, go back inside." The deeper voice replied.

"Dad, if it's not safe here it's not safe anywhere." She carries on dancing to the music, not caring what her dad says but in a sweet voice and a pretty smile plastered to her face. I don't know what the music is, I can't hear it properly, I'm too

far away. I can only hear their voices because they're shouting. At that, she turns around and comes my way. I quickly scramble between the trash cans, watching her sail past me. I know I need to leave here and go home at some point for food, but it's not long before it goes quiet again. I guess that the girl must've been made to go back inside, so I spend some more time hiding out. I'd rather sit here behind the bins and hide than go back to a beating. I hear adults say all the time, that a person can only take so much. I've had enough of his crap. Just being inside here makes me feel safe, and I'm not about to end that feeling just yet.

I'm sure a couple of hours have passed since I saw the girl, and as I go to crawl out again and finally make my way home, I hear skipping, it's getting closer and closer. I push my back against the wall, making myself small just as I hear her singing softly. Her feet appear in the gap between the bins as she throws a bag inside. It's loud as it hits the side and drops inside the metal can, and the Converse I saw less than a minute ago, are now disappearing from my line of sight.

"Luna!" The deep voice yells, and then she calls back,

"I'm coming, Dad." She sounds annoyed, but now I know her name. It plays over and over in my head. I'd give anything to talk to her, but I can't. With her gone, I make a run for the fence and leave the way I came in, climbing back over and head home.

The next few weeks, I didn't go anywhere else. If I'm not at home hiding from Dad, I'm at the compound hiding. I've seen the pretty girl a lot over the last few days, but still she hasn't seen me. I'm there more than at home, but with every day that passes, Mom's depression worsens but then, so does his temper. He hasn't beaten her for a while now, so instead he hurts her with words, at least he does when she's awake. It's getting harder and harder to cope with these days – I wish I didn't have to. I take the brunt of his temper to spare my mom. I used to cry at night when I had a beating, now it's like a normal day. He drinks, I piss him off by breathing, and he hits me. Normal routine.

But even though I'm hiding away, I feel free.

I'VE BEEN STUCK behind this trash can for hours, my ass went numb a while ago, and my legs are hurting now from being on the cold ground, but I stay where I am anyway. I've got bruises on my back where he hit me with his shoe, and my eye being black is my usual look these days. My whole-body shakes as I wrap my arms around me, in the hope to quell the shivers that are taking hold of me. I curl tighter into a ball to keep my body warm, but it's getting harder as the days turn colder. The seasons are changing into winter, I just know if I keep hiding out here, I'll end up getting pneumonia. My teeth chatter loudly, I try to control it but it's no use, my body is cold, and it hurts even more than it did this morning. I'm not sure I can do this anymore.

“Hello. Who are you?” Her voice has my eyes popping open now, wide with fear of being caught and thrown out of the compound or worse, beaten for trespassing. I don't think my body can take another. “Are you okay?” a whole lot of questions shine in her pretty eyes. I was so lost in my head; I didn't hear her or see her appear in front of me.

My head shakes as I comfort myself some more. With a closer view, I see how pretty she is. Her dark but kind eyes match the color of her hair, and her pink lips pull into a small, sweet smile. Her cheeks blush slightly, but I don't smile back, I'm too cold and my body is aching. “Can you speak?” I nod back, “I'm Luna.” She pushes her hand out in front of her, she waits as I unwrap my arms from my body to take her hand. It's so much warmer than my own as she closes her fingers around it and we shake; it makes me not want to let go.

I nod. “I'm Levi.” My teeth still chatter from the coldness.

“You're freezing. Don't you have a home?” I nod again, but I don't say anything else. She pushes the bin out of the way, fills the gap it was once in and crouches beside me. “How long have you been out here?”

“All day.”

She concentrates on my face as her gaze roams over my bruises, suddenly I feel embarrassed. I look away, dropping my gaze to the ground. “Have you been in a fight?”

“You ask a lot of questions.” I grumble as my gaze moves back to her dark eyes, and I cock a brow.

“And you’re here when you’re not allowed to be, I think I win.” How can I argue with that? “How old are you?”

“Sixteen in a month.”

She smiles, “I’ve just turned fifteen. It was my birthday in August.” My body shakes even more as dusk begins to fall. “Maybe I should get you a blanket.”

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look it.” She swivels on her ass and faces me, “You know if my dad finds you hiding out here, he won’t be very happy. No one’s allowed inside the yard. Like no one. How did you get in anyway?”

“I jumped the fence.”

“But it’s huge.” She replies, her eyes widen with every word. “It’s like, well I don’t know how high it is, but it’s high.”

“I climbed. I’ve been hiding out here for weeks.”

“Oh,” Just then I hear feet pounding the ground, and see boots appear in my eyeline.

“Shit,” I whisper harshly, worried I’m about to be tossed out on my ass.

“It’s okay. It’s just Reaper. He’s a good guy. I better go though I think my dad is looking for me. I’ll get you a blanket and some soup. I’ll be back soon.”

“Luna. Where are you hiding now? Pres is looking for ya. He’s pissed.” With a bright smile, she crawls out of the gap she made for herself and leaves me alone, leaving me to either brave the cold for a while longer, to see if she comes through on her promise, or drag my shaky body to my feet and attempt

to climb that fence, right now though, I don't think I have the energy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Levi

“LEVI.” I hear my name, but the voice is unfamiliar to me. I’m not asleep just feeling drowsy, so instead, I keep my eyes closed. “Hey. Wake up.” I feel a gentle hand softly rock my shoulder, and I crack my eyes open a sliver. Through my blurry vision, I see Luna crouching in front of me. “I’ve got you chicken soup. I had to sneak it out.” A warmth settles over my legs as she covers me with the blanket that she promised me. I lift my aching head, opening my eyes wider as she passes me a travel cup. My arms hurt as I lift them to take the cup in both of my hands hoping to warm them up, my legs ache as I move them, in fact my whole-body aches. “You know you don’t look too good, maybe you should go home and get into bed.”

“I’m fine.” I add in a croaky voice. I don’t want to go home. I don’t even have the energy to get off the ground.

“If you insist,” Luna lifts a brow.

I take careful sips of the soup and swallow, “When I’ve drunk this I’ll go if you want me to.”

“I’m not saying you have to go, you just...well, you look sick.” she shrugs, dropping her gaze into her lap, “I mean I don’t want you to go.”

“You don’t know me.” I frown.

“Will you come back?”

My shoulders lift. “Who knows.” As I drink more soup, I feel myself warming up, but I still don’t feel too well. I don’t know how I’m going to get back over that fence.

“Lune?” The same voice from earlier calls out, I’m too tired to hide in the shadows this time. “Why the hell are you by the trash again?”

“Shit, it’s Reaper again. What is his problem,” she huffs, “I really need to go. I’ll be back.” As she stands up straight, she hesitates again, a smile twitching her lips. “It was good to meet you, Levi.”

Automatically, a small smile tugs at my lips back at her. “Thanks for these.”

As footsteps get closer to us, my body tenses up, “Why the hell are you hiding, Lune. You know if you’ve got some stray animal out here, your dad will go batshit...” His voice trails off as he appears. I push my shoulders back, placing my cup on the ground as my eyes lock with the same tall guy from earlier. “Who the fuck are you?” He asks, a scowl screwing up his face.

“Please don’t tell Dad.” Luna stresses. As my gaze strays to her, I see the worry settling in her eyes, and now I’m panicking. I don’t want to get her into trouble, but I don’t want to leave either. I attempt to get up so I can leave by myself, but I don’t have the energy to move my body, I can’t even lift myself from the asphalt. My legs are hurting, and my head hurts too.

“Dude, are you okay?” I shake my head as my ass lands back on the ground with a thump.

“I think he’s sick.” Luna replies.

“Fuck.” The tall guy says. “Well, he can’t stay out here. We either try and get him out of here and back to his own home or we get him inside and face, Pres. Your call.”

“I can walk. My house is only like 3 blocks away.” I finally get myself up onto my feet, but my legs feel shaky, and I fall against the trash can.

“There is no way he can walk.” I look between the guy Reaper and Luna and see them having a stare-off. “What do you know about this kid?”

“Kid? Reap, he’s a year younger than you. Dad would’ve helped you if you needed it, and not just because your dad was one of the brothers.”

He huffs, but I can see Luna knows how to wrap him around her little finger. “Fine. Let’s go see Pres then.” He says, and they both look around at me and he sighs again, frowning slightly, “He does look ill.” My face feels flushed, and I throw off the blanket.

“Hey, dude? I’m gonna get you help, okay?”

“No, I’m good. If they find me here and know that I’ve been sneaking in here, I’ll get a beating. One worse than my old man can give me. Fuck that!” Forcing my feet to move, I slowly start to move past him, my weary body shifting forward until his hand wraps around my arm and stops me.

“Hey,” he turns me slightly, “the brothers won’t hurt ya, they may look mean as hell but they’re pussycats really.” He smiles, relaxing me some, “Come on let’s get you inside, in the warm. You can have my bed for the night.”

With an arm each around my back holding me up, they walk me across the yard. My breathing quickens, but I’m anxious with every step closer we get. What if they kick me out? What if they give me a beating, I’m not strong enough to stand up for myself. Not today anyway. “You know guys, maybe this isn’t such a good idea.” I attempt to release them, but neither lets me go.

“You need a warm bed, some painkillers and some sleep.” Reaper says without room to argue.

“Levi,” her voice is comforting and has my head turning her way, “my dad will help, I promise.” My eyelids begin to droop with exhaustion, the thought of a warm bed sounds damn good. I nod back at her and let them lead me to wherever they’re taking me. I guess this place can’t be as bad

as home, so instead of resisting, I just move my feet along with them.

We enter through a heavy door, straight into a bar. There're women in short skirts and low-cut tops with spiked shoes, and guys in biker gear drinking, smoking... I'm not sure what I expected.

“Sit him down. I'll go and see Dad.”

Reaper stays with me as my body lolls back in the chair, weak from some kind of flu I seemed to have caught, and my eyes close again. If I'm honest, I'm glad I let them talk me into staying here. I'm not sure how long Luna is gone, but it's not her voice I hear first.

“Hey kid. Do I know you?” My eyes pop open at his loud, gruff voice. I look at his face as recognition hits me. It's the guy who found me outside the compound a few short weeks ago. A tiny nod just about shifts my head in reply.

“He's sick, Dad.” Luna butts in.

“Where did you find him?” I hear him ask,

“By the trash, hiding.” Luna replied.

“Hm. Well, I can't kick him out like that. Reaper, find him somewhere to sleep. I'll deal with it tomorrow.”

“Hey, kid?” I lift my head and lock eyes with him, “Don't go running off tomorrow, we need to have a talk, and then you can tell me how you got that black eye.” I don't answer, instead I let my head drop until my chin is hitting my chest as his hand splays across my forehead, “Jesus, he's burning up. Take him to lie down and get him some medicine to take.”

“You take him to yours; I'll get the medicine.” Luna orders Reaper.

“Can you walk?” Reaper asks. “As I nod, he helps me up, holding me firmly with his arm around my back before leading me down a hall.

Reaper opens the door and I go inside, and without even thinking about it, I drop down on the unmade bed. “Are you sure about this?” My eyelids are already closing as I think

about sleep, my hands on either side of me on the mattress holding me up.

“Yeah, man.” Reaper replies like it’s a stupid question. “You need to rest. I’m good on the floor.”

“I don’t mind sleeping on the floor.” A rough cough interrupts our conversation, and Reaper cocks his head.

“Yeah, I think that’s how you got like this. Take the bed man, it’s all good.” As I lie down, a knock sounds on the door. “That’ll be Luna.”

Pulling open the door, she comes in and puts some hot lemon, a bottle of water and two tablets on the nightstand. “Hey, I can’t stay, Dad will kick my ass. I’ll check on you in the morning, kay?” I nod, unscrewing the cap and drink some water, quenching my thirst and soothing my dry, sore throat. “Take the pills, you’ll feel better.” I look at them like they’re about to kill me or something. I’d rather not take them, but if I don’t that’ll be more questions, and I don’t want them feeling sorry for me; no more than they already do, anyway. I pick up the pills and swallow them down with the bottled water, drinking half of it. As she’s about to go back through the door, I stop her.

“Luna.” I call out firmly but with a croak in my voice, she turns back and smiles, “Thank you.” I say, her smile gets wider.

“See you tomorrow.” She leaves the room, so it’s just me and Reaper.

“She seems nice.”

I try to make conversation, while Reaper nods. “She’s a good kid, got a big heart.” He throws blankets on the floor with a pillow on top, then settles down folding his arms behind his head and lying back. “You better get some sleep; Pres will have you answering a million and one questions tomorrow.”

“Thank you for helping me.” Conversation is kept short, but I prefer that. That way I don’t have to delve into anything.

“No problem.”

As the silence falls in the room, I quickly drink the hot lemon that Luna has made for me, and I lie back down again. My body is red hot, and the hot lemon has made me hotter, but my eyelids are already heavy. I don't fight the urge to sleep anymore, instead I let it take me under.

CHAPTER FIVE

Luna

“SO, where would you like to start,” Dad asks, sitting opposite Levi. His forearms rest on the arms of the chair, and his fingers drum against the edge while he waits on an answer. “Do you want to tell me why you were hiding out on private property, or maybe you can tell me where you got that from.” Dad nods his head toward Levi’s face. Levi looks from Dad to me, then back to Dad again. “Or maybe if I told you I could prosecute you for trespassing then you’ll give me some answers.”

“Please...” His head shakes frantically, “...please don’t.”

“Dad,” My eyes widen, and the tone in my voice goes a pitch higher at the way Dad hands out a threat, without even thinking twice about it.

His side look of ‘be quiet’ has my mouth closing, and he goes on, “You better start talking then.”

“I’m sorry.” Levi shrugs, a heavy breath filling the air as his body sags in the chair. Reaper sits one side and I the other, like we’re there to support him, and we don’t even know if he’s worthy of our support. His hands fidget in his lap, winding his fingers around and watching as they tangle. “I loved to watch the bikes pass my house. I always wished that it was me on those bikes, that way I’d be free. The first time I sneaked into the yard was in the middle of the night, it was only meant to be one night. Have you ever wanted to run and hide away from the world and all the shit that happens in it?”

Dad and I look at Levi as Dad's brows pinch, "How old are you, Levi?"

"Sixteen soon." he glances up and locks eyes with my father.

"That's a cynical outlook on the world for a young kid, so tell me, what are you running from?" Levi shakes his head, but if I know my father, he won't leave it until he's got what he wants. "Come on, you can tell me."

"I can't, you won't believe me." Levi's head still shaking as he replies. Dad leans forward, settling his arms on his thighs.

"Try me, because if it's what I think it is, and I'm right about how you got that bruise on your face, then believe me, I'll be more than pissed, but you have to tell me." Levi locks eyes with him like neither of us are even here. "You can trust me, Levi." Dad adds to calm his nervous exterior. "You see this," Dad points to his patch, and Levi nods his head, "That's a vow of honor, brothers. When we wear that patch, we do it with pride, honor, honesty, and morals. You get that?"

On a breath, he rolls his eyes to me, then at Reaper, and we nod in unison. Eventually, he answers, "My dad." He answers in a low tone, like he's ashamed of the answer he's given.

Dad straightens up, his jaw tight like he's trying his hardest not to lose his shit. I've seen that expression many times with the other guys in the club. "I'm guessing that's not the first black eye you've ever had then?" Levi slowly shakes his head and stands up, reaching over his head to pull his t-shirt up his back. I'm shocked at what's staring back at me. Considering I've been brought up in a club, I've never been allowed to see what goes on. I know violence happens, but I'm sheltered. I don't have another choice other than to be here, my mother left a couple of years back, and we never knew where she went, and no relatives would dare question the mighty Thomas Scott.

Dark bruises and red welts cover his back, and thoughts of my mother are gone instantly as a lump forms in my throat. I put my hand to my mouth to muffle the shocked gasp that falls

from it. Dad lifts Levi's arm up slightly so he can look at his ribs. A mix of purple, black and yellowing skin shines back at me. "Okay kid, put your t-shirt down."

With his shirt back in place, Levi sits back down, but doesn't look any of us in the eye. Reaper and I share a look before we both look at Dad. "You're safe here, Levi." he lifts his head slightly and eyes my dad, relief filling his gaze. "So, you like the clubhouse, huh?" Levi nods. "Okay, from here on out this is shelter, but you come through that gate, not over the fence. No more hiding."

Levi smiles. "What about my dad. What if he finds out I've been coming here?"

Dad ponders on something; I can see him thinking. "Then he'll meet his match, kid. Have you got a cell?"

"No, sir."

"Okay, leave that with me. But once you've got it, any problems, I want you to call me or call Reaper. You got that. Any problems at home, you call. I don't care what time of day it is; you make sure you make that call."

His lips spread into a smile across his face.

"Do you go to school?"

"Not often."

"Alright. You can work here. I can find you something to do. Would you like that?"

"Yes," He quickly answers, still smiling like his Christmases have come all at once.

"And I want you to make me a promise," Dad hesitates for a second. "I want you to tell me every little detail about your father. I don't like abusers, especially child abusers." Levi chews on his lip, but nods. "You can trust me, Levi. I don't break promises, but you need to give me the same trust. Everything else will work itself out." Dad stands, and as Levi stands with him, he slides his arm around his shoulders and pulls him in. "Stick by Reaper, he'll teach ya, kid."

Dad's large hand messes Levi's hair as he rubs it. Dad might be this mean and moody president leading a motorcycle club, but he's a teddy bear sometimes. He goes to walk away but Levi calls out, "Sir?" Dad turns back, "Aren't you angry that I kept sneaking into your yard?"

He sighs, "Maybe a little, but there've been lots of guys in and out of here over the years that have needed shelter, or guidance of some kind," Dad grins, "I know a cry for help when I see one."

"Thank you." Levi says a little louder, his shoulders squaring as he stands taller.

Dad nods at him and turns away again, his footsteps loud as he begins to stomp away then stops, "Oh, and Levi,"

"Yes, sir?"

"It's Pres," As Levi sits back down Dad's footsteps echo, even after the door has closed.

I was awake early this morning because I was worried about Levi. He has a tough exterior, I can see that, but I don't think he's as tough as he thinks he is, and I was hoping that Reaper wouldn't give him a hard time once I left them alone. Reaper can be very protective, like a big brother kind of protective. He's a pain in my butt at times, but it's nice to know that he has my back. Reaper is reliable, dependable, and my brother from another mother.

"Right then," Reaper pipes up, "what you want to do first?"

"I don't know." Levi shrugs. "What do you usually do?"

"How are you feeling today?" I interrupt, my gaze roaming his face, concerned that last night he was coming down with a virus.

"I'm good..." his brow lifts, cocking the corner of his mouth up with it. "Thanks." He adds, remembering his manners. "I feel much better."

"Good. I'm glad."

“Well,” Reaper pipes up, “you can’t start the day without food, and Kerry, the cook, she makes a damn good breakfast.” I snigger, shaking my head at Reaper.

“What’s funny?” Levi looks between us, confused.

“Him,” I nod at the idiot walking toward the door. “He always thinks of his belly first. Come on.” I start to walk then spin back on my heel. “He is right about Kerry though, her cooking is amazing.” I walk backwards, enticing him with the lure of food and he smiles. He has such a cute smile. “Bacon, eggs, whatever you want.” His eyes widen, “and however you want them cooking.” I add, spinning back around and waltzing through the open door.

I hear him right behind me but don’t stop, then his hand is on my arm, “Luna?” I turn to face him, “Thank you.” He stands an inch or two taller than me and as I smile, I look up into his brown eyes to see specks of gold. His cute smirk has me smiling back, the worry lines that have been set in his forehead have lessened, and right now, I can see something more than a guy treating me like a sister, like Reaper does. No, the unfamiliar feeling in my chest tells me he could be so much more than that.

CHAPTER SIX

Levi

LUNA WAS right about the food. I had a plate full of scrambled eggs and bacon, then washed it down with juice. I was like a homeless person who hadn't eaten for days, but I was starving, since I hadn't eaten or slept properly for two days. Other than the soup Luna had given me last night. Today though, I feel much better, the full night's sleep and hot lemon must've worked.

After eating, Reaper took me on a tour of the clubhouse. The place is amazing. He showed me his bike, and Pres showed me his. I was in awe of all the shiny chrome and black, and I can't believe how big they are. He then introduced me to some of the older bikers. He introduced me to a guy named Popeye. He had muscles popping all over the place, I could see why he got that name. He wore a tank with his leather cut. It had the same symbol on the right side as Pres', then another in a bigger version on the back, saying Brothers of Sin. Then, I met another guy named Snake. A tattoo of a snake etched to his bald head leads around his neck, and the tail disappears under his shirt. These guys are a little intimidating at first, but they seem friendly, and they welcomed me. A couple of them looked a little wary, but I couldn't expect everyone to accept me with open arms. I'm an outsider until I prove myself, even I know that. After shaking my hand, they asked my name and asked if I was sticking around, then said if I wanted to be a real biker, and a real part of the club, then I needed a road name. In that moment, I knew that I wanted that more than anything.

Then we hung out with Luna. She told me some of the things the guys do, apparently, they have parties for everything. But most of all they were a family. I've never known a real family other than my mom, and I was excited to get to know them all.

As the rest of the day passed, I was getting more and more anxious, and I knew it was because I had to go home at some point today. If Mom wasn't too out of it, she'd be worried about me. Dad, he couldn't give a shit, and to be honest the feeling is mutual. I don't care what he does or if he drinks himself to death. I only want to go home to check on Mom. I don't want to leave here at all, but I need to.

"What's wrong?" Luna asks from her place at my side, while we sit eating fries outside in the yard. She could probably feel the anxiety rolling from me.

"It's time to go home soon. I have to check on my mom."

"Is she poorly?"

"Only from the way he's made her. She uses pills to numb the pain. I've looked after her for a while, but she's lost her spark..." I breathe, closing my eyes tightly as the description of my mom makes my heart hurt. "I hate seeing her like it, and I wish I could get us both out of there." Staring into the distance, I place one fry after the other in my mouth, numb as I watch Reaper washing the guy's bikes. He said it's one of his jobs as a prospect. I have no idea what a prospect is, but it sounds good. I hope I get the chance to be one.

"I'm so sorry, Levi." Luna's quiet tone breaks my concentration on Reaper, it's full of emotion as she moves her head to rest on my shoulder. The strawberry scent of her hair drifts up my nose, distracting me from my thoughts. Damn, she smells so good.

"I don't tell anyone what goes on at home." I admit quietly.

"Not even friends?" A confused look appears in her eyes as I shake my head.

“I don’t have friends. Maybe the odd one or two at school, but I’m never there so you can’t class them as friends. They don’t check up on me, or ask why I haven’t been...” I shrug.

“That’s awful, Levi.”

“I’m used to having no one. It’s not a big deal.”

“Yes, it is. Everyone should have someone they can turn to, even if it’s just one person.” Her face turns sad, but I don’t want her to feel sorry for me.

“Hey, I survive.” I shrug again before I reach between us and find her hand. My fingers slide between hers and I hold on, loosely at first. I hold my breath thinking she’s going to reject me, but to my surprise she tightens her fingers around my hand.

“Well, you have us now,” our gaze’s clash. “You have me.” The thought of having Luna as a friend makes me feel something other than the normal feelings of wanting a friend, and we smile at each other.

“I’d like that.” A cute blush appears in Luna’s cheeks. “Thank you.” She sighs and shifts her gaze into her lap where our hands are still joined.

Enjoying her comfort, I release her hand to put my arm around her shoulders. She inches closer until there’s no gap between us, and we sit for what feels like hours just watching, not saying anything to each other, and the only sounds around are in the distance.

But the time to leave comes around way too quickly. I almost pussy out and decide not to, but I know I need to go. If I don’t, I’ll never go and I’ll be leaving my mom at his mercy, but even with that thought bouncing around in my mind, I still don’t move.

We’ve been sat here for around an hour. It’s not until I hear my name that I take my arm from around Luna, and I look up. Luna’s dad is leaning against the wall of the clubhouse smoking a cigarette, watching us. I jump to my feet as he motions with his hand, calling me over. Our quiet time is over. I run over to the club President to see what he wants. If I want

to be like one of these guys, I need to get used to answering to him.

DUSK IS FALLING as I make my way home, and everything runs over in my mind. The way I told them so easily about my home life, the way Luna, someone I've literally just met, made me feel so different to anyone else I've ever met. I've never connected to another person the way I do her.

We live in the second house along, so as I turn onto my block, I can see our house, but my steps falter at the sound of shouting, a woman screaming so loud it sounds like she's being murdered or something. My feet begin to move quicker when I realize it's my mom screaming, I break into a sprint until I reach the door and push down on the handle, barging through it. But I stop dead when I see her in a heap. "Mom?"

"Where the fuck have you been?" Dad roars, stopping me in my tracks. Before I can help her, he's grabbing me by the shirt and dragging me up until his face is in mine. His whisky smelling breath stings my nose, and I turn my face away, swallowing and gritting my teeth as hard as I can to try to be brave. "I asked you a fucking question!"

"Nothing to do with you." I fire back, so much hate staring back at the man that helped to put me on this earth. I don't want to be weak against him, I want to be strong. Why can't I just stand up to him, that's what you have to do with bullies, right? If you stand up to them, they back down. My back slams against the wall and my breath leaves my body in a sharp gasp. As he releases me, I slide down the wall and drop to the ground with a thud, urging my lungs to work. As the breath begins to filter through my organs, I scramble onto my knees, hoping to get to Mom before he can stop me, but his fingers wrap around my foot and he tugs hard, yanking me back. My palms plant to the carpet, hoping to get something to grip to but it's useless. He flips me over. My teeth grit as I wait for the impact of the first punch coming towards me, and I take it. My face feels like it's about to cave in on itself, my eye

feeling like it's going pop, and with my eyes shut tightly, I don't see the one after.

"Where the fuck have you been." He shouts, thinking I'm going to tell him now. "Tell me or I'm going to beat you so fucking bad, you'll be drinking through a straw." He screams in my face.

My eyes open, and I look directly into his, seeing the hatred that simmers there, then I think fuck him, and say it slowly. "I hid at the biker yard."

He rears back slightly then narrows his eyes. "You think those pussies can protect you?" I don't answer, I can't because as much as they said to tell them, I don't know if they will. "I'm your father, I can do whatever the fuck I like. If I want to punish you, I will." With my shirt tightened in his fist, he drags the top half of my body up.

"Then do it, I'm not scared of you anymore." I fire back in a quiet tone. He laughs, but it's not a good laugh, it's one of those that speaks so many words. His fist connects with my nose, wetness building inside, my nose immediately blocking, and unable to breathe through it. It's then I feel the trickle of blood that leaks from my nostril. Dad sneers but I don't say or do anything as he hits me again. He rains punches down on my face and body. I'm numb, I hear Mom screaming at him to leave me alone, but he doesn't listen. He never listens. One blunt strike leads into another, and by the time he's done, I'm in too much pain to move.

I don't remember making the way to my room. I don't even remember getting into my bed but as I wake up, Mom is lying next to me, asleep. She probably took more than the recommended dose to numb the pain after she crawled to my room. Her face is puffy with cuts, her eyes black and her lip split. Tears fill my eyes but I'm too weak to stop them.

Why can't I be stronger.

Why can't I be like those bikers.

I just want to protect my mom.

With that thought, I drag my aching body up to sit in the bed, careful not to wake her, and move my hand to cradle my ribs as I gently leave my bed.

I refuse to be weak anymore.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Levi

IT'S BEEN a week since I left Luna and the clubhouse, but every time that I look in the mirror, I'm reminded of the promise I made about letting them know when he hurt me again, only I couldn't. I couldn't shake off the feeling that I was weak, that I let him beat me again. I let him hurt the woman that gave birth to me, the one who has tried to keep me safe all these years. Dad's right when he tells me that I'm not big enough, but one day I will be, and when that day comes, he'll need to watch his back.

The swelling on my face has started to go down, but there is still some bruising around my eyes and a cut across my nose, but honestly, my body hurts more than my face. It aches, it hurts to breathe and every time I move, I'm in agony. On top of that, my ribs are still black. If I'd gone to the emergency department, I think they would have told me that I may have broken something, but I couldn't risk that, they'd investigate and would take me away from my mother, so instead I've stayed hidden away, either in my room, or in Mom's room tending to her.

That piece of shit hasn't been here much for the last few days, so Mom and I have had a reprieve. When he is here, we don't speak, and Mom doesn't get out of bed. We've managed to look after ourselves and each other. I wished he'd leave for good, but we're not that lucky.

After a week of not seeing Luna, I kind of miss her. I don't know how I got so attached to her in such a short space of

time, but I have. I've never got close to anyone, or wanted to, never told them my deepest, darkest secret either.

"You alright, Mom?" I ask from the doorway of her bedroom. She barely wants to get out of bed now, she's a shell.

"Oh, my boy, come here." Her head rolls my way as she reaches out for me, she tries to smile but there's nothing to smile for. I get that. I push from the doorway to cross the room and perch myself on the edge of the bed. Her hand holds mine as I look into eyes that are so like my own and every feeling, every emotion finds its way into my soul. I'm angry he can do this. I'm sad that my mother has come to be this person because of one man, she used to be so full of energy and life, and I'm hurt that I have to watch it happen, time and time again. "I love you, Levi."

"I love you, Mom." My brows pull together, but I don't question it.

"Are you feeling, okay?" She asks, causing me to frown.

"Don't worry about me, I'm good."

"Oh baby, you're so strong. You know I'm proud of you, right?" I nod but I don't feel much like I deserve it right now. "I am. You will always make me proud, no matter where you are or what you do, but remember you'll always be my baby. My boy."

"I know, Mom. How are you, are you still hurting?"

She nods, "Yeah, could you pass me those pills, sweetheart." I reach across and grab the bottle, her antidepressants. I wish I could get her to come off them, but I know she won't. She's hooked on them now; I don't think she could stop if she wanted to.

Sighing, I pass them to her, "You know Mom, maybe you should try and cut down on these. For me?"

My gaze finds hers, and her sadness is clear when a tear rolls down her cheek. I gently brush it away, "I'll try, sweetheart." I get the water so she can take her pills then place it back on the nightstand when she's done. I move around to the other side of the bed and lie beside her; she reaches out for

me and lays her head on my shoulder and gets herself comfy. We lie there in silence, just the sound of our breathing filling the emptiness of the cold room. Once I know she's fast asleep, I take the duvet in my tight grip and drag it up to her chin, carefully cradling her head and lay it on the pillow.

Before I leave, I pause at her bedside. It's my birthday tomorrow. I'll be sixteen, but as I look at her, I wonder to myself if she'll be alert enough to even remember the day, let alone the actual date. The day she brought me into the world. The day when I had no idea what kind of person I was being born to. I swipe angrily at the wetness that has collected beneath my eyes, unshed tears blurring my visions and breathe.

With one last look at my mom, and a kiss on her cheek, I tell her I love her one more time, hoping she can hear me. Once I know she's warm and covered up, I leave her side and make my way out.

I'm a little apprehensive by the time I reach the club gates, my stomach is churning with nerves. I wasn't sure if they'd still welcome me since I haven't been around for the last week, and when they see my face they'll know why, then they'll realize that I didn't trust them enough to tell them. Shit is fucked up.

The padlock on the gate is locked when I try to open it. I promised I wouldn't climb the fence again, and with no way of getting in touch with the guys or even Luna, I guess I'll just have to stand here and wait. I drop my ass to the ground and lean my back against the wire fence, waiting patiently.

I'm not sure how long I've waited, but when the fence rattles behind me. My head twists around to see Reaper standing behind me.

"Fuck, look at your face man." I move to my feet as he unlocks the gate and opens it for me to go in.

“Thanks,” I reply sarcastically with a smirk, and enter the compound.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Reaper asks after locking the gate again and catching up with me.

“Nope.” I reply curtly, but I don’t mean to. His side eye burns away like a laser aimed at my face; I know he has questions. I know I’ll have to tell them eventually, but right now I don’t want to talk about it. Silence falls between us as he leads me through the compound, his fingers flying over the keyboard on his cell as he messages someone. I stop as I reach the door of the clubhouse to wait for him. I’m not courageous enough to go in by myself yet. I don’t know them all.

“Come on,” he says passing me and leading me inside. “let’s get the Doc to take a look at ya.”

“I’m good.” My feet stop dead, and I refuse to go any further.

Reaper spins around to me and snorts, “You’re not good. I saw the way you got up from the ground.” he huffs, “Look, I’ve had a beating. I know how your body feels after one, so you can either come with me to see Doc, or we can go to Pres, and then you won’t have a choice.” He drops the ultimatum on me, knowing I’ll follow him, fuck.

We pass the bar and head through to the hall and start down it, passing rooms as we go. Turning the corner, we walk further on until we reach the end and Reaper knocks on the last door. As a voice comes from the other side, Reaper opens it up letting me go in first. A guy sporting a well-trimmed beard, and well-kept short hair is in the room, but when I see him wearing a cut, I’m a little confused. “The doctor is a biker.” I ask.

“He’s one of the brothers.” Reaper answers as the doctor answers at the same time.

“I am indeed. What can I do for you?”

Reaper glances at me before turning back to Doc. “He’s had a beating. Can you look at him for me?”

“Yeah,” There’s hesitation in his voice. “Sit down, mate. Reaper, does Pres know you’re bringing strays into the club?”

“Yes. Pres knows him.”

“Okay then... so little buddy, do you want to tell me where you got these cuts and nice shiny bruises from.” I’m so done with hiding what happens to me that I blurt it right out.

“Yeah, my dad is a piece of shit.”

“Jesus, fuck,” He curses, a more solemn tone to his voice now, “Okay, tip your head back.” His hands are firm on my face as he looks at my injuries pressing his thumbs lightly to the bridge of my nose. It hurts and my teeth grit, “Yeah, all this bruising should go eventually, there’s a nasty cut across your nose, and from the feel of it, it’s broken. Do you want me to try and straighten it? I’m not sure it’ll be perfect, but I can try.” I don’t hesitate as I answer yes. He gets a firmer grip and presses hard, the bone crunching beneath his fingers. The pain sears through my face as I bare down on my teeth again and tense, with a growl coming from the back of my throat. My hands ball into fists as I squeeze tightly and swallow down the pain. Pain is my friend. It’s familiar. As he releases me, sharp pain shoots back through my nose and face, making the breath heave from my chest. “You alright?” I nod, closing my eyes, “Okay, I want you to take these, they’ll help.” He drops two tablets into my hand, I look at them like they’re foreign.

“I don’t want them.”

“Your face is going to ache and hurt without them, buddy.”

“I can take it. I’ve taken worse. I don’t do pills.”

“Okay.” Doc soothes, I give them him back and pull off my shirt.

“Can you take a look at these though for me?”

“Fuck man, I thought your face was bad.” Doc exclaims, sucking sharply through his teeth. His fingers trail over my ribs, then he turns me around tracing his rough hands over my back and kidneys. “Right, sit back down.” I do as he asks, Reaper has been quiet through all of this, and if I hadn’t seen

him leaning against the wall, I would think he had already left. The doc presses his fingers against my ribs, and I shout out, biting down again on my teeth. My fingers gripping the edge of the chair every time he touches them. “It looks to me like you have a couple of broken ribs, but I’d say you got off pretty lucky.”

“Thanks,” My sarcasm really is out there today. “I don’t feel too lucky.”

“What’s your name, dude?”

“Levi,” I reply, still breathing through the pain he’s put me in,

“Well, Levi, I’d say you’re made of strong stuff. There are guys that would’ve been in hospital with this. When did it happen?”

“Last week.” I answer sheepishly, knowing Reaper is behind me.

“Last week?” the doc repeats,

“Yeah, six or seven days ago,” I say quite blasé about it all.

“Right, hold your shirt up if you can.” With my good arm I inch it up further, but I struggle to grip it with the pain in my side. “Reap, come help.” He comes over and holds my tee up while Doc goes to fetch something. When he turns back to us, I see bandages in his hand. “Right then, I can’t do much for broken ribs, they need to heal on their own, but I can help them on their way. I’m going to strap up your ribs, but it needs to be kept tight, and you need to keep it on, and we’ll check them again in two weeks.” I thank him for his help. In fact, I’m so thankful to all these guys for welcoming me into their club and treating me like one of their own. He wipes an anti-bacterial wipe across my nose to clean up the scab that has already formed and then sticks some tape across it. “Okay, you’re done. You need to rest those ribs.”

“Thank you.”

“No problem, bud.” He smiles at me, and with a half a smile back, I turn for the door.

Just as Reaper and I are leaving, I see the darkness of Luna's hair swish at the end of the hall. "You, okay?" Reaper asks and I answer quietly, Luna spins on her heels and her eyes widen when she sees me, making her way quickly toward me.

"You came back. Oh, my goodness I didn't think you would." She stops dead in front of me when she sees my face. "What the hell?" She exclaims, her hand covering her mouth in shock.

"I'm good." I guess I can say that until I'm blue in the face, but I bet they won't believe me.

"Lune, he's been to see Doc. He'll be alright. He patched him up."

"I've been so worried. When you didn't come back, I thought that was it, and after what you said about your scumbag dad, I didn't know what to think." She throws her arms around my neck, her head resting against mine as she sighs softly. She takes her arms from around my neck and puts a gap between us and as she does. I see the worry lines creasing her forehead. "So can you hang out?"

Answering her question, a little too quickly she smiles. I've missed that smile. She takes my hand and leads me away, with a small tug on her hand she stops, and I turn around to Reaper. "Thanks for helping me," he lifts his chin, appraising me, "catch you later?"

"Sure, dude." He gives me a chin lift and I smirk before turning back to Luna and let her lead me out into the clubhouse. With a diversion to the kitchen for food and a soda, we head outside of the compound, back to where we were the last time I was here.

"Were you really worried?" I ask her as we finish our sandwich.

"Yes. I kept asking Reaper if you'd been by, I've pissed my dad off by asking questions, thinking you had and none of them were telling me the truth."

"Why did it piss off your old man?"

“Because Levi, I’m the president’s daughter. I’m off limits. And honestly, the only other guy around my age is Reaper, and he’s like an irritating brother.” Her eyes find mine as I turn my head to face her, looking directly into the luxury of her brown eyes, but something tells me she doesn’t want to think of me as a brother. And I guess since I’m not really a part of the club those rules don’t apply to me.

Taking her hand in mine, I rub my thumb across her knuckles and breathe as her teeth capture her lip. My gaze roams over her pretty face, “What if I said I liked you, Luna?”

She lifts her shoulder and lets it drop, “How about if I said I liked you back?”

Smiling I lick my lips, “So what if I said I’d like to kiss you.”

She looks around us and brings her gaze back to mine, and something sparks in her eyes. I can’t decipher what though. “I’d say, go on then.”

My heartbeat quickens in my chest, my mouth dries as I swallow. Before I can change my mind, or talk myself out of it, I take her chin between my finger and thumb in a soft grasp, pulling her lip from her teeth and hesitantly, I press my lips to hers. Confidence isn’t my strongest point, but I let my feelings do the talking. As my lips press firmer to hers, she moves her hands to my shoulders and mine cup her face, then I kiss her.

Heavy gasps leave both our lips as we part, but we don’t look away. “It’s my birthday tomorrow, will you spend the day with me?”

“I’d love to.” She smiles wide and joins our fingers as we sit in silence again. Just enjoying each other’s company.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Levi

THE HOUSE IS quiet when I get up. I don't think Dad came home, because I can't hear his resonating snore that thunders through the house after a drunken session. That means I don't have to tiptoe around the house, worried I'll wake him up, which then leads to another caning. Even that couldn't ruin my mood today though. It's my sixteenth birthday, and I get to spend it with Luna.

All I've thought about all night is her.

I wash as quickly as possible since I can't shower because of my bandages, I need someone else to put them back on for me, and I don't have anyone to do that. Then I dress as quickly as I'm able in some dark jeans and a white tee.

Once I'm ready, I splash some cologne on my face that Mom bought me at Christmas and go into her room. I tap softly on her door, my hand wraps around the doorknob and I hear her, "Come in." My brows pinch at the sound of her voice, and I peer around the door as I open it. She's sitting up in bed looking toward the door. "Ah sweetheart, are you alright?"

"Are you?" I ask hesitantly, I'm confused. For weeks she's either been crying or out cold on her antidepressants, sleeping like she's in a coma.

"Oh, don't worry about me. I have something for you, though." A nervous smile tips her lips, and she goes into the

drawer in the nightstand. Whatever it is, it's in a small gift bag. "Happy birthday, sweetheart."

"You remembered," I say as I take the bag from her, scared to even be happy.

"Oh, my boy, of course I remembered. You're only sixteen once. I know..." tears fill her eyes, and she licks her lips, "I know I've been a little out of it, but I'm alright." Her head nods reassuring me, "Open your present."

Looking between her eager eyes and her shaky hands, I look inside. "What's this?"

"It was your grandfathers. He always wanted you to have it when you were old enough." my gaze lifts to the smile on her face. "It was his grandfathers before him. He met you when you were a baby. I think you were six months old when he died. He had cancer."

"How come you've never told me about him."

"Your father and him didn't get along. But this is yours. Treasure it." I look at the tarnished gold pocket watch, then turn it over and see the back engraved with words. "Love Pops."

As I look back up, I smile at her. She seems so with it considering she's been so out of it on her meds. I'm still confused, but I'm rolling with it. "I love you, Mom." I lean forward and pull her into a hug.

"Oh, baby I love you. But please go and enjoy your day, and don't let anyone or anything ruin it for you. Do you hear?" I nod into her neck, unshed tears in my eyes threaten to fall, but I blink them back.

"Okay." I agree smiling wide. Happy she's coherent, and even happier that she's remembered what today is. Seeing her like this tells me that no matter how much he's tried to break her spirit, my mom is stronger. Moving my arms around her neck, I hug her tightly, holding on to her like she's going to disappear from my grasp. Her arms slide around my sore ribs, but I bite back my pain for this. I could never hurt when my mom is like this.

“So,” she rears back slightly, “how are you spending your birthday?” As my arms fall from around her neck, we sit side by side on the edge of the bed.

“I’ve met a girl.”

“Really,” she smiles through the tears in her eyes and slowly they trickle down her face.

“Yeah, her name is Luna. We’re spending the day together.”

“Oh, is she pretty?” Feeling a little embarrassed, my head dips but I nod my answer. “You deserve the best, sweetheart. Now give me a kiss and get going.” Smiling, I lift my head and kiss her cheek like she asks. “Be a gentleman and don’t keep her waiting.”

A smile tugs at my lips, “Get some rest, Mom. I’ll be back later.” She rests her head on her pillow.

“Enjoy yourself, that’s all I want you to do.” As I head for the door, I look back over my shoulder, squeezing the pocket watch in the palm of my hand and smile, kissing my fingers and blowing it to her. “Love you.”

“Love you, too.” With a small wave I turn and leave her bedroom, and rush down the stairs, through the house, before shoving my feet into my trainers. I pick up my house keys from the table, then tug open the front door. My elation soon turns to anger though when I see his car pulling up outside.

As the engine turns off my body turns to stone, I can’t make my feet move. My pulse picks up, but I can’t be scared anymore. I square my shoulders and stare back at him, no fidgeting of my hands or twitching in my eye. I pull in a breath and move from the step as he gets out of the car. As the door slams, I flinch slightly. He sniggers as he makes his way up the path. I cut across the path away from him, “Where the fuck you are going?” He asks bluntly.

“Out.” My answer is sharp, but I don’t give a shit.

“Where’s out?”

“To spend time with someone that cares about me. Someone who knows it’s my fucking birthday, so screw you.” I sneer, shoving my hands into my pockets, making my way down the sidewalk. I’m not answering to that piece of shit anymore. I walk a little faster to get where I need to be, my walking pace soon turning to a jog until I’m just meters away from the clubhouse. I stop when I see Luna on the other side of the fence. I smile and jog the rest of the way to her. She looks happy as she opens the gate, welcoming me, and we walk in together. “Hey,” I greet her.

“Hey, to you.” She answers as she turns to stand in front of me. “Happy birthday, Levi.” As I smile, I feel my whole face do the same, she makes me feel happy, something I’ve never fully felt. Her lips brush my cheek tenderly, but she takes them away as quickly as she put them there, but I’ll feel that small kiss for hours as my cheek tingles. She links her arm around mine and we start walking through the compound. “I’ve got something for you.”

“You didn’t have to do that.” She spins and places her back against the door of the clubhouse.

“It’s your sixteenth,” she shrugs and smirks, licking her lips, “you deserve something.”

“Spending it with you, is more than I could ever ask for.”

“You’re sweet.” A blush fills her cheeks, I realize then that I can’t get enough of that look. “Come on. You’re going to love it.” Before she turns back to the door, she grips my hand tightly and pulls me inside behind her. As I step inside though the place has been decorated with banners and balloons. I get a little choked up inside. No one, and I mean no one, has ever done this for me.

“Wow. You did this for me?” I ask, looking directly into her big brown eyes.

“Of course, I did. I don’t see anyone else here that’s sixteen today.”

I get a handle on myself before I look like a pussy and start crying in front of Luna and big bad bikers, then with my hands

on her shoulders, I smile, “Thank you, Luna.” I tug her against my body and hold her tight, expressing my gratitude the best way I can in front of all these guys. The guys I’ve already met are here, Snake, Popeye and Doc. Reaper is here and then Pres walks in, a box wrapped up in his hand.

“Happy birthday, kid.” He hands the box over and nods as I smile at him.

“Thanks, Pres.” His eyes light up when I call him by his title. It feels so good, like I’m part of something. Even though I have no real place here, in my own mind, I’ve found it.

“Well, open it then.” He exclaims with a smirk. “Damn kid, Luna would have had that torn open already, what you are waiting for?” My eyes roll as I tear the paper from the rectangle box. A picture of an iPhone stares back at me.

“Seriously?” I lift my gaze from the cell to Pres, “this is for me?”

“Yeah, seriously. Now there’s no worrying about that bastard you call dad. If he lays another finger on you, you ring one of us. If you don’t know how to use it, I’m sure Reaper or Luna will help.”

“I don’t know what to say. I guess, thank you.” A booming laugh comes from Pres. I open the box and take out the shiny black, brand-new iPhone and turn it on.

“You can have all of our numbers just in case, now come talk to me.” Pres says. He walks over to the corner of the room; I follow him, and I stop in front of him.

“Pres?” I question as he tips my head back, paying close attention to my face.

“How is it?” He’s talking about my nose.

“It’s not too bad.”

“And your ribs.” Pres asks, eyeing me carefully.

“Hurting, but Doc said they would.”

“If you need him to check you over, you go, alright.” I agree with him in an instant, “now let’s get this party started.”

He slides an arm around me, “I mean it’s not the normal kind of party we have here, but I guess I can make allowances,” he cocks his head smirking as I lift a brow, “since it’s your birthday and all.” He smirks back at me and leads me back toward the others.

“Now give the birthday boy a beer.” Pres shouts.

After Popeye brings the beer over to me, I argue with myself over whether I should drink it. I don’t want to turn into my dad. If I start drinking, will I be like him? I toy with the bottle, picking at the label that wraps around it. “What’s wrong?” Reaper asks, which gets Pres’s attention.

“I don’t want it.” I shrug.

“Drink it, it’s your birthday, it’s just a beer.” Pres reassures me.

I sigh and place it on the table. “I don’t want to turn into him. What if I turn into him?”

“Hey, kid. One beer doesn’t turn you into an abusive cunt. That’s something that’s already there, it just takes a trigger. You’ll never be like him, I promise.” I nod at Pres, but still, I’m not too sure. “I promise you Levi, I won’t let you turn into a bag of shit like him. You have us now.”

My shoulders sag, and lifting the bottle to my mouth, I take a sip, the tangy, wheat taste is foreign on my tongue, but I swallow it down anyway. “We’ll teach you how to be a man, we’ve got your back, kid.”

Luna doesn’t leave my side all day. We eat, sit and talk; we laugh watching the guys drinking and having fun. There’s a couple of women hanging around in short skirts and low-cut tops, not my type, but I don’t even know my type. As I look at Luna though, something tells me that she is my type. She’s the only girl I want to look at. And when her dad has left the room with one of those women on his arm, I take her face in my hand and kiss her, she kisses me back with as much gentleness as I give her. God, this girl.

I have another couple of beers as the day goes on but nothing too much. As much as I believed what Pres said to me

earlier, I don't think I could drink much more of it. I ended up sleeping in Reapers room, only this time I took the floor, well after a solid discussion with him anyway.

Banging on the door the next morning wakes me. The sun is shining through the window, right onto my face. As my eyes open, they squint at the sunbeams, and I lift my aching and still sore body from the makeshift bed to open the door. I smile at Luna's fresh face as she stands before me. "Morning." I don't answer, I just nod my head. "Fancy some breakfast?" she asks as I smile back. If you're going to get me to do anything, use food.

"Yeah, I'm starving."

"Reaper?" Luna calls out and a grunt comes from under the bedding. "Ugh, Let's leave him." She says, 'he'll find us,' and turns back to go out of the room. Grabbing my new cell, I slide it into my pocket, and we go through to the main room and into the kitchen, asking Kerry to cook us something.

Once we've finished, I push the plate away from me and drink my soda before looking across at Luna. "I'll have to go home soon. I need to check up on my mom."

"Can I come with you?" she asks quietly.

I breathe softly, noting the desperation in her eyes, "I don't think that's the best idea. If he's there and he kicks off it's not going to be pretty."

"Dude. I'm a biker's daughter. Do you not know that I'm badass?"

Holding her hand in her lap, I chuckle. "I know you're a badass, but if he hurts you as well, I can't protect you." The pretty smile falls from her face then her head dips. I lift it back up with my fingers beneath her chin, "Thank you, but I can't risk it." She nods in agreement, thank goodness, but looks like she's about to say something else. "What?"

"Take Reaper with you then. You can't go on your own." Just to appease her I agree. Maybe I have found my place after all.

REAPER WALKS by my side as we make the journey here. We've talked about everything, his job as a prospect, and what that means. My parents, and the piece of shit that is my flesh and blood. Pres... But then I did something completely out of character; I told him about Mom. How she's addicted to meds, how he beats the shit out of her too. He bit back the anger he felt. I could see it swimming in his eyes. Then, with a rare smile, when I think of her, I also told him about yesterday, how she remembered it was my birthday, and I showed him the watch she gave me. In fact, I can still see her smiling face in my head.

The house soon comes into view and my whole attitude changes. My body tenses when I see his car sitting at the curbside as we reach the house, but I take a deep breath and carry on. I'm just here to see my mom, check on her and leave. If I keep using that mantra, maybe I can get in and out of here without ending up with another beating and more bruises.

"You okay, dude?"

"I'm good," I look at Reaper. He's fast become a friend, someone who will stand beside me, "Thanks." I leave him at the bottom of the path and push my key into the door. "I won't be long." I try the handle and the door opens. The house is quiet, so I walk in quietly. Maybe he's pissed again and asleep. The number of times he's been pissed and fast asleep, any shithead could've walked into this house and burgled it while he was out of his head. He didn't give a shit.

I peer around door of the living room to see him in his chair, his upper body leaning forward with a cigarette in one hand and as I look around him, I find a bottle of scotch hanging from his fingers. My teeth clench together as I wonder what I'm about to walk into, but he doesn't say anything. He turns his head slightly to glance over his shoulder at me. I stand firm, ready for whatever he's about to throw at me, but nothing comes. Without saying a word to him, I back out of the door and take the stairs two at a time.

Her back is to me when I open the door. “Mom.” I call out, but nothing. When I left her yesterday and she was talking to me, I guess I thought she would still be like that today. My heart sinks when I realize she’s out of it. So instead, I cross the room, move her hair from her face and lean over to kiss her head. Snatching my head back I look more closely, “Mom?” She doesn’t even a twitch at the sound of my voice. My heart beats like crazy in my chest, pumping blood quickly around my body until my ears feel like they’re going to burst. My gaze darts from the bed to the nightstand, my fingers itching to shake her, but the lack of movement has me scared to touch her. Water fills my eyes when I see the pill bottle...empty.

My breath comes in spurts, fast, irregular. I can’t control it. My heart pounding as I reach for the bottle and lift it up, I want to prove to myself that there’s nothing in there. My chin trembles before I let out a cry, squeezing the bottle hard in my fingers, and clutching it in my fist. With rough spurts of breath filtering in through my nose and my jaw tight, I reach for the bedding. I’m hesitant to see what I already know I’m going to find. My mouth is as dry as a bone, I barely have any saliva to spit, let alone to swallow past the huge boulder that’s formed in my throat. I attempt to steady my breathing, grip the sheet in my fingers and with a shaky hand, I inch it back slowly.

My stomach churns. I feel sick as tears finally slide down my face. Lifting my fingers to her face, her lips are blue and she’s as pale as the white sheets on the bed, her skin cold to the touch. Eventually, as it hits home fully, I break. A strangled cry pouring from me as I grieve for the person that loved me so unconditionally, nurtured me, loved me... leaning over her, I hug her but there’s nothing. She doesn’t hug me back; she isn’t able to tell me she loves me. I cry for her, call her name... nothing.

I just want to see her smile, but I’ll never see that again.

My mom has gone.

She’s left me, but what’s more, she’s left this shitty place to be in a better one. How can I deny her of that after everything she did for me?

She wasn't so strong after all, is all I can think...he broke her.

I'm not sure how long I've been up here, sitting on the bed, my knees pulled into my chest just watching her. It's crazy how a person can look so peaceful in death, that makes me cry even harder. Stuttered breaths heave from my lungs when I realize my cell is ringing in my pocket. I pull it out to see Reaper's name flashing up on my screen but push it back in my pocket again. I kiss Mom's head one last time and get up. Anger sears through my blood as my hands curl into fists. That bastard has been sitting downstairs while my mother has lay dead in her bed. My lip curls and my body shakes. I'll fucking kill him.

I take the stairs quickly and jump down the last few before barging into the living room. He's still clutching that fucking bottle of Whisky in his hand. "What have you done? You fucking killed her!" I kick the bottle from his fingers.

"I didn't do anything, she killed her fucking self!" he stands up, slightly unsteady on his feet, so I take advantage and kick him. He drops into the chair before springing back up, a little too quickly for an alcoholic that's probably been swigging Whisky for fuck knows how long.

"You fucking did this. Did you know she was dead. Did you know? Did you help her. Did you feed them to her?" I fire questions but I don't give him time to answer them. "I should kill you where you fucking stand. You took her from me." I'm so incensed and filled with rage I don't see his hand fly towards me, he smacks me up the face and grabs me around my throat.

"You haven't got her to rescue you now, you little cunt." His fingers are tight, squeezing me, "What you got to say now?"

"I'm going to fucking kill you one day." I snarl in his face.

A door slams off the wall, "Fuck." I look over my father's shoulder to see Reaper. He puts his cell to his ear and relays my address down the receiver. "Put him down."

I scratch at his fingers to get him to release me. “Your little friend isn’t going to help you.” He sneers, throwing me to the floor. I cry out in pain as my back hits the ground, the pain doubling from my already broken ribs and bruises. “You’re just fucking weak. You’re not even worth the fucking effort.”

Suddenly, and in no time whatsoever, the sound of bikes reaches my ears, it’s so familiar to me now, it’s like a comfort. The engines quieten, and before I know it five or six bikers are filling the room. Pres shouting to get me out of there. Doc comes over and helps me up. “Come on, bud, let’s get you out of here.”

As we make our way to the door I stop and look at Pres. “My mom’s dead.” I tell Doc but then say it louder for everyone to hear. “He let her die.” I swipe the wetness from my face, “he took her away from me.” I stay long enough to see Pres throw a punch toward him, it connects with his nose, and it explodes across his face. A small amount of satisfaction seeps into my body, and I smile.

“Take him out, Doc.” Pres bellows.

Once I’m outside, I break, my knees buckle, and I hit the grass beneath me and cry for everything he put us through. I cry because finally she’s at peace and out of this shit fucking life.

CHAPTER NINE

Levi

One year later

I'VE THOUGHT a lot about my mom over the last year. I have so many things I want to tell her and there's so many things that she's missed in my life, I just hope she's happier where she is now. I miss her with all my heart, but honestly, she's better off. It's taken a lot for me to admit that.

I don't think I'll ever get the sound of sirens out of my head; they rang in my ears for days after. Paramedics and police rushed in and out of the house after Doc checked her and rang the emergency services. Reaper stayed with me as they took her out, a sheet placed strategically over her body and face so I couldn't see. The cops questioned Pres, Doc, Reaper, and me. Eventually, they determined it was suicide, no matter how many times I told them he drove her to it, there was no foul play. My trust in the justice system was gone. I was failed. Instead, they allowed him to walk free. One day, karma will find that son of a bitch.

It was only a few days after finding her that we held her funeral. The MC footed the bill, said it was their responsibility now. Pres might not have been my legal guardian, but he said she deserved something special. I'll admit that it made me cry. It was all I ever wanted, but I didn't allow Dad to come to the funeral, and two of the guys stood guard to make sure he didn't try and get in on it. It took me a while to come to terms with the knowledge that she's gone, and that I couldn't save her. I couldn't help her no matter what I did or even tried to

do. It was hard. What was harder was that, on the day of my birthday, she seemed so much more put together. Should I have stayed at home that day? Maybe, maybe not. But it'll be something I'll always question.

Luna and the MC have been so good for me. They've stood by me, and they've taught me so much. I know I'm a stronger person now than I ever was back then, I'm not so quiet either, you could say I've come out of my shell, and I've bulked up a bit. I've been working out with Reaper and Popeye. Pres has even taught me how to ride.

While I'm stuck inside my head, thinking about my life, I didn't realize the brothers had started coming out into the yard, at least not until I see Luna jogging excitedly toward me.

"What's got you looking so happy?" My chin lifts at the girl who saved me. She greets me with a wide smile before nibbling on her lip. "What's going on?"

"It's a surprise, you need to cover your eyes." After my upbringing I'm a little wary but I look into her eyes and relent. I have a strong urge to kiss her right out here on the compound, Pres would kick my ass, but I don't care. It's no secret that we like each other, we have done since we met, but her words always come back to me, "*I'm the president's daughter, I'm off limits to everyone.*" I always thought that didn't apply to me, but I've never tested the theory, well apart from a kiss, but we were only fifteen. Breathing softly, I capture her chin between my fingers and tip her head back slightly, an adorable blush fills her cheeks as she licks her lips, and I smile just about to test the waters... "One day Lu, one day."

"Luna," Pres shouts, and she jumps away from me suddenly. "Cover his eyes."

"Not a fucking chance." I shout back, but Pres just chuckles and nods at Luna. Within seconds, she's jumping on my back and covering my eyes with her hands.

"Don't let go of him."

“You need to turn around.” Luna whispers against my ear, so I do as she asks and hold on to her sliding my hands up her bare thighs, wanting to go even further. It is my birthday after all.

My head turns to the side, my cheek softly resting against the softness of hers and I whisper, “I’ve always wanted to know what it feels like to have your legs wrapped around me.” I hear the sharp gasp she makes, and a smirk tugs one side of my mouth up. Bringing her long legs higher around my waist, my hips in a vice-like grip between her thighs. It feels fucking good, though. If nothing else happens for my birthday, this will be at the front of my memory. I squeeze her thighs slightly and rub my thumbs across her skin. “One day Lulu, you’ll be mine.”

“You wish.” She giggles.

“No, that’s a promise.”

An engine rumbling lowly pricks my ears up, but it’s nothing new so I take no notice, only of the girl wrapped around me, but then heightening sound of chatter gets my attention. The brothers are like women, gossiping when they get the chance. Pussies.

“Come here, kid.” I hear Pres as Luna jumps down from my back. I feel the loss of her instantly and as Luna comes around me, she nods her head. All the brothers are standing in a crowd, I high five each of them and as I push through, I see Reaper standing by a Harley. I look from Reaper to Pres.

“What’s this?”

Pres looks amused. “Well, I know you had a hard childhood, but I don’t think I need to tell you what it is.”

“You know what I mean.”

Pres slips an arm around my shoulder. “Happy birthday, kid,” he smiles, “annnd...” he says, and turns around to someone behind him. Luna pops her head through to the front, smiling excitedly. As he turns around again my gaze falls on a cut in his hands, just like the others. He then shows me the back, the brothers of Sin logo is there along with the word

Prospect. My eyes go wide, I can't seem to shift the stupid grin from my face. In the middle of my shock, I shake Pres' hand like the man I've been taught to be, but then emotion overcomes me, and I pull him against me, slapping his back in a hug. I just can't believe it.

All the brothers shake my hand and say happy birthday, congratulating me on making Prospect, then I turn back to Pres to thank him again. Promising him that I won't let him down. Reaper looks as happy as me as he comes over, the last to congratulate me, and the one brother to hug me. If I ever had a biological brother, I'd want him to be like Reaper. Before I know it, Luna is throwing herself at me. I catch her as she falls against me and flings her arms around my neck, "I'm so happy for you. Happy birthday." She squeals.

Here arms are tight around my neck, and with my lips at her ear, I make her a promise, "No one will ever hurt you while I'm around." I leave a tender kiss on her cheek. My lips linger longer than they should before she breaks our embrace. I shake off the heat of Pres's stare and turn to my bike, throwing my leg over and sitting on the seat, then slip on my cut admiring the beauty beneath me.

I HAVEN'T THOUGHT of my shithead father for months, I've tried to forget he even existed, but every now and then, that day comes back to me like a movie still. The day he had his comeuppance still gives me a flutter of satisfaction, but it's still not enough. I felt good knowing that I never have to go back there, never see his fucking face again if I don't have to or suffer at his hands again. That's something I didn't think would ever happen soon.

That day, I might have felt satisfaction at seeing him hurt from the beating the brothers gave him, but I also lost something. I lost a piece of my heart. My precious mother couldn't take anymore, and that kills me more than anything. That morsel of emotion chips away in my head. But my

brothers and Luna keep me levelheaded and that's something I can be thankful for.

NO ONE UNDERSTANDS the meaning of family until they've been through something. Walking on eggshells isn't a normal, everyday thing, hoping you don't piss them off in case you get another beating, that's not a home. Who says that it's only people that share the same blood who are family? Sometimes, blood relatives are the worst ones. My blood took away the one person from this world who was kind and loving. No, my family are the ones that chose me for who I am.

He never loved us, he hurt and abused us, and maybe one day karma will catch up with him, but patience is a virtue, or so mom used to tell me. Maybe, maybe not. But I've finally found my place. I found a new family.

My home.

My brothers.

No one will ever hurt me again.

THE END

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Right then, this isn't going to be long but just a few words to thank Francesca Wingfield for everything she does for me. I joined her Creative Writing Corner back in December/January time, since then Fran and the rest of the writing comer ladies have been such a big help, they're an amazing bunch and help to inspire me every single day.

Seriously if you're an author and reading this, and you need some positivity and guidance in your life then join the group, you'd be surprised how much it helps.

Quickly, I want to thank my team and editor for everything. They're always there ready and willing to read for me, I love you guys, thank you so much!

Lastly, you the readers.

Thank you so much for picking this series up, spreading the word and donating to such an important cause. You're a beacon of hope to those impacted by domestic violence. You make a difference.

Thank you so much for your unending support, it means so much to us all. <3

Lots of love,

Sienna xx

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Welcome to the world of Sienna Grant...

Where love isn't meant to be easy.

Sienna Grant is a British writer from the West Midlands in the UK, who decided to step into the world of writing and has since never looked back.

She started her journey with contemporary romance as she loves a happy ever after but has since sampled different genres and has pushed every boundary that she has set herself. From contemporary romance to suspense, teen and young adult but also stepping into the darker world of Mafia and women's fiction.

When she's not writing, she's a wife and mother to three grown up kids and a nanny to two gorgeous grandchildren.

Sienna loves to read most romance when she can, but always with a hint of realism.



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This is the start of a new MC series:

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BLURB

I'm Levi 'Chains' Brown, Sergeant at Arms for Brothers of Sin MC.

My problem is, I take sin to the next level.

I haven't had a normal life. It's been fraught with survival and finding an escape.

Brothers of Sin were my salvation.

They took me in, fed me, clothed me, and taught me how to be a man. Something my own father should have done, but he used me as a punch bag.

It was when I found shelter that I met Luna Scott. She was my savior and the President's daughter but also my best friend.

The girl I'd die for.

She rescued me in more ways than one. Until one night changed everything.

Now I need to find my way back.

SNEAK PEEK

Saving chains

Prologue

MY HARLEY stops at the curb outside the house I used to call home. Only it's never really been a home, it was a place of torture. It was only a home when my mom was here and alive. When she was here to protect me, to love me like a mother should. Only he beat her too, tortured her even more than me.

Broke her body and her spirit, until she had no other choice but to leave me and this world.

Death was a better option.

I kick the stand down, and my foot hits the tarmac. I spend a few minutes just staring at the dirty, darkened front window. My hand dips into my cut to take out a smoke, and I lodge it between my lips and light it up, inhaling a long drag into my lungs then puff the smoke from my lips in a heavy breath. The grass on the front is long I notice; the porch swing hangs broken at one end and the screen door also stands lopsided. All I'm waiting for is some movement to let me know he's still in there, still breathing his sad, pathetic, and useless drug and alcohol induced, fucking life. I've thought about this for the past three years. From the day I escaped this shithole until now, I've thought about coming here and taking his last breath from him. Watching as life drains from him.

Watch him suffer the way he made my mom and me suffer.

Lifting my hand to my face I find moisture, but I'm not crying for what I'm about to do, no, my emotions are for the woman that gave me so much. Right up to the moment that she couldn't anymore. I don't blame her for taking her own life. I blame him.

I swipe my hand across my face, I take a moment of weakness to remember a woman that stood in front of a fist to protect me. For a life I was never allowed to have, all because of that cunt. As a shaky breath leaves my lips, I suck in some more nicotine as the toe of my boot taps the ground. My nerves are shot. I take in another long drag as the smoke billows from my nose, and curling the tip of my finger, I flick the butt to the grass. I drag my other leg from my bike and walk the path, climbing the few steps onto the porch. The screen door creaks from rusty broken hinges as I pull it open and try the handle of the front door. It turns and soon opens. Glancing behind me I look out for people that could be around but it's past midnight. As I push the door, a shit ton of unopened mail scatters the floor. I wonder to myself if he is alive or even here. Still, I go on and reach the living room, it's empty other than dirty, yet ripped furniture. In fact, it's the same furniture that was here before I left. Swallowing hard at the memory of Mom being here, I push it back down as quickly as it came and walk around the furniture. I try to quieten my heavy boots on the floor, but it's no good. My body is heavy, like I'm walking to my fate. It's then I see the TV on, and some old western plays out on the screen. The nicotine-stained armchair is situated in front of it and with a few more steps, I'm standing alongside it. Peering around the piece of furniture, I find him. His eyes are closed with one hand shoved under the waistband of his pants. I pull my gun from the back of my trousers and aim it at his head.

“Well, well, well. if it isn't my beloved son?” I wondered when you'd eventually show your fucking face.” His eyes open and fall on me, but I don't waiver. I'm not scared of this piece of shit anymore and if I must, I'll blow a hole in his fucking face.

My breaths heave in quick succession as I tighten my fingers around the handle, my finger strategically placed

loosely over the trigger, ready to squeeze it and blow his fucking brains out the back of his head, and onto the dirty cushion behind it.

“Do it,” he taunts. “You ain’t got the fucking balls to pull that trigger, or is it because you ride a Harley now, and that fucking motorcycle club that you think your Billy big balls?”

“If you want to stay alive, you’ll do well not to taunt me.”

“You’ll never be big enough.” I cock my gun ready to fire as a sneer curls his top lip. “If you kill me, you’ll go to prison. Do you think you can handle prison?”

“Prison will be a walk in the fucking park after living with you, you sadistic fuck.” He reaches forward and pulls a smoke from the packet, then drops the box back down with a smirk. He thinks I won’t do it. Lighting it up he casually takes a drag, and stares at me. I push my hand forward until the barrel of my gun is resting softly against his forehead.

“Do you think I fucking care about dying? Do it. His head thrusts forward now, with the barrel pressing hard against it. “Go back to your fucking little club. I was fucking glad the day you left, you did me a favor, you and your mother were weak.”

My pulse races as my temper begins to get the better of me. Swiftly shoving my gun back into my pants, my hand balls into a fist, and before I can stop myself, it’s hammering into his face and connecting with his nose. I don’t give a fuck anymore. I hit him and hit him as hard as I can. His nose bursts as it breaks, his eye begins to bloom with color just as his mouth fills with red, and that’s only just breaking the surface of what I want to do to the cunt. I want to break him like he did my mom. I want to make him cry and shake with fear as he curls into a ball to shield the hits, and then I want to pull the trigger and watch the life leave his sadistic body.

I’m so lost in the moment with my fingers around his throat that I don’t realize the cigarette he was holding has dropped from his fingers, not until the smell of burning hits my nostrils. I look down the side of the chair to see the cigarette burning away into the carpet, and a thought crosses

my mind. While he's knocked out, I grab my lighter from my pocket and add a flame to the now smoking carpet until it spreads to the armchair. The side of the chair goes up and as much as I want to stay here and watch it happen, I need to get out of here. There's no way he'll get out of this. As I stand, flames multiply and begin to spread, and when they put out the fire, the fire department will see it was started from a cigarette. Accident.

“Burn in fucking hell, you piece of fucking shit.” I hesitate for a second with my words and look around me. “Even this is too good for you.”

His cries have already started before I've reached the door, and I smile.

Nothing tastes as sweet as karma. Die, you son of a bitch!

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