

VERITABLE SERIES



BSC
PD LAW

BISHOP:
WONDERLAND

L. ANN MARIE



BADASS

BSC BOOK 27

Bishop: Wonderland

Law: Veritable Rising

BSC West Book 27

By

L. Ann Marie

Continuation from Zeke: Unseen BSC Book 26

Brax Bishop is another President who never dreamed of being President. Cort doesn't care and throws him into teaching law to new Flight Guard PD Brothers. Luckily, Law is a class he's got training experience in and the new Club in a Club doesn't scare our Lead Protector.

Marli Champion doesn't understand the ol' lady claiming and has no interest in marriage in any form after getting rid of her last leech.

Marli Champion-induced delusions scare Bishop because Cort may just move into his new Club if she doesn't let him claim her.

BSC SERIES Books. Best read in order.

Master's Rise

Benga's Rise

Ranger's Rise

Jack: Honor

Falcon: Respect

Mag: Loyalty

Allegory

Endue

Conform

Justice: Tenacity

Ford's Rise

Driver: Grit

Christiansen: City Boy

Nova: Cred

Blackhawk: Heat

Cooper: Gunslinger

Teller: Connect

Maverick: Insight

Spano: Foresight

Marks: Enforce

Harky: Elite

DeSeville: Vision

Knight: Heart

Michaels: Choices

Brolin: Revered

Zeke: Unseen

Bishop: Wonderland

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Bishop: Wonderland BSC Book 27

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Published by: L. Ann Marie

Cover by Lori Birkett

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Cast of Characters

Full (printable) character lists are on the Book Info Page at <https://lanmarie.com/book-info>

Phoenix Rising and Affiliates:

Cort Masters President of Phoenix Rising, President of Badass Security Council West

Raid Benga VP of Phoenix Rising

Ranger Ross SAA of Phoenix Rising

Web IT Head of BSC West Clubs

Trask McCabe President of Champion Rising

Tide VP of Champion Rising

Beacon SAA of Champion Rising

Lawson Cooper President of Elan Rising

Cayden Callahan VP of Elan Rising

Cecil SAA of Elan Rising

Zeke LaPonte-Karr Pres of Flight Guard at Elan Rising

Pablo VP of Flight Guard at Elan Rising

Falcon Beckett President of Bravo Rising

Jack Decker VP of Bravo Rising

Mag Bailey SAA of Bravo Rising

Justice LaPonte-James-Lightfoot President of the BSC Protectors with ability - BSC 2nd to Cort

Alder President of Alpha-Bits, BSC 2nd to Cort

Asa, Akai VPs of Alpha-Bits

Amal SAA of Alpha-Bits

Texas President of Rising²

Marks VP of Rising²

Jase SAA of Rising²

Axton Harky President of Elite at Rising²

Michael Brolin VP of Elite at Rising²

Spano President of Sentinel Rising

Nash VP of Sentinel Rising

Angel SAA of Sentinel Rising

Kristos Christiansen President of Honor Rising

Mase Blackhawk VP of Honor Rising

Seth Baxter-LaPonte-James SAA of Honor Rising

Jinx Solaita President of Veritable Rising

Kyler Moniz VP of Veritable Rising

Jeti Callahan SAA of Veritable Rising

Aylen Knight President of Zion Rising

Brent Walker VP of Zion Rising

Ajhil Stratton SAA of Zion Rising

Slade Nova President of Guardian Rising

Logan Michaels Axe LaPonte-James VP of Guardian Rising

Axe LaPonte-James SAA of Guardian Rising

Jinx Solaita President of Veritable Rising

Kyler Moniz VP of Veritable Rising

Jeti Callahan SAA of Veritable Rising

Brax Bishop President of Flight Guard PD Law at Veritable Rising

Ethan Tuttle VP of Flight Guard PD Law at Veritable Rising

MC Badass Colorado and Affiliates

Brekan Graywolf President of MC Badass Colorado

Chris Blackhawk VP of MC Badass Colorado

Pauly SAA of MC Badass Colorado

Jordan Driver President of Alpha Rising

Brinks Solaita VP of Alpha Rising

Tucker Brighton SAA of Alpha Rising

Maverick President of Delta Rising

Finn VP of Delta Rising

Stan SAA of Delta Rising

FBI/Badass Training Center

Hamp Ford Commander FBI

Joshua DeSeville Commander Badass

Dillon Perez IT Head Baxters

Web - Head IT for BSC West, Phoenix Rising

Notable BSC Officers

Banks - Stockbroker, invests for the Phoenix Rising and affiliates (*AR*)

Amos - Accountant, manages money for Phoenix Rising

Tats - Protector Lead, New Officer (*BR*) *Alder's Security*

Boulder - Protector Alpha-Bit Security (*BR*)

Major Christiansen - MC Colorado former President

Flight Guard PD Law Cast:

Brax Bishop President

Ethan - VP Lead, Trainer

Jarret - Officer, Trainer

Andy - Officer, Trainer

Julius - Trainer

Cyrus - Officer Lead, Trainer

Other cast members

Artemis - Ops dog

Flame - Bishop's sister
Raiden - Bishop's nephew
Stan - Bishop's Brother-in-law
Johnny - Steel's team
Reagan - Steel's team
Steel - Flight Guard PD Lead
Belinda - Steel's ol' lady
Endo - Flight Guard Lead
Chris - Endo's second
Bruno - Head of PD
Reggie - Badass PD

Ol' ladies/Old ladies

Addison Berry - Media Rep for BSC, Spano's ol' lady
Jane Meadows - Austen's mom, Cooper's ol' lady
Stella Jackson - Protector, ol'lady of Jordan and Brinks, former Prince
Hannah McCabe - IT Head, ol'lady to Trask, former Prince,
Alexia - Web's ol' lady, ex-FBI, ABSZ IT Lead, Trainer for BSC West
Seren - Cort's ol' lady, Mom to Caelan, trainer
Freedom - Ranger's ol' lady, Trainer/ Enforcer
Leya - Mag's ol' lady, Chocolatier, Ice cream shop owner
AJ - Jack's ol' lady, Mag's sister, Head of IT for Club
Faith - D'Ability house Director, Beacon's ol' lady, Dreng's mom
Carmen LJJ - Justice's old lady, Cytogenetic tech for Alder
Télia Ford - Ford's wife, the Ford brothers' sister-in-law. Saber sibling
Natalia Kensington - Kristos' ol' lady, Head of Technology
Kateri Todachine - Graphic designer, old lady to Mase Blackhawk
Mikey - Prince Lead Protector, Nova's ol' lady, daughter of Cade
Harper Greywolf - Doctor MC Badass Colorado, Brekan's ol'lady
Chenoa Knight - Teller's old Lady, BR Doctor Loyalty clinic
Ginny (Thunderhawk) Marks - Marks ol' lady, Protector, Hemy's daughter
Piper (Lane) Harky - Harky's ol' lady, Dog Trainer
Mayun - Luke Rayne's ol' lady
Aylen Walker-Knight - Walker's ol'lady

White Wave Whitewater Michaels - Michaels ol' lady, chosen shield

Copper Rose Brolin - MB's ol' lady, engineer, Dr.

Nigalia LaPonte-Karr - Veterinarian, Zeke's old lady

Marli Champion Bishop - Sheriff Deputy, Bishop's ol' lady

Kids

Dreng - Doug, adopted son of Beacon, Faith

Stephan - Tide's son

Daniel - Raid and Lorelei's son

Tyson - Mag and Leya's son

Amell & Brynn - Mag and Leya's Alpha-Bit boys

Caelan - Cort and Seren's son

Chenzo - Jack and AJ's son

Cove Blackhawk - Hannah and Trask's son

Beck Qunhôtúq - Hannah and Trask's son

Austen Meadows - Jane's daughter

Twins unnamed for Kristos and Natalia

Boy unnamed for Doc Sawbones

Wimonáya - Justice and Carmen, truth

Mihikiku - Justice and Carmen, strength

Nayawi - Chenoa and Teller, freedom

Tátupiyu - Chenoa and Teller, equal

Ayakuhsak - Kateri and Mase, stars

Bert (Bertie) Callahan-Knight - Phoenix and Billy

Ernie Callahan-Knight - Phoenix and Billy

Wápáyu - Kateri and Mase, wind

Ôkatuq - Kateri and Mase, cloud

Kisuq - Kateri and Mase, sky

Cuyler Michaels - little Archer, Michaels and White Wave adopted

Undine Michaels Benally- little wave, Michaels and White Wave, shielded

Naaki Michaels - two, cousin to Undine, Michaels and White Wave adopted

Arndt Michaels - eagle power, Michaels and White Wave adopted, brother to Jude

Jude Michaels - Michaels and White Wave adopted, saved slave sister to Arndt

Shay Michaels - Michaels and White Wave adopted, saved slave

Atseeltsoi Michaels - red tailed hawk, Michaels and White Wave adopted

Raiden – Flame and Stan’s son, Bishop’s nephew

~

Michael - Web’s twin, brother to Ford and Garren

Garren - Michael and Web’s older brother, Hamp Ford’s twin

Parker Nova - Nova’s brother (*AR*)

Doctors

Alder Ford - President of the Alpha-Bits (*BSC*)

Doc - Doctor (*PR*)

Statler - Doctor (*HR*)

Bean - PA (*AR*)

Bones - Doctor (*BR*)

Cannon - Doctor (*ER*)

Chop - Doctor (*CR*)

Patcher - EMT, PA (*PR*)

Chenoa Knight (Blackwater) - Doctor (*BR*)

Ren - Doctor (*DR*)

Jim - Doctor (*SR*)

Harper Graywolf - Doctor (*MC*)

Sawbones - Doctor (*R²*)

From BSC East Clubs

Ben Knight - President of Territories for the Brotherhood of Badass Bikers, (aka MC Badass) Princes of Prophecy and Badass Security Council (aka BSC)

Ricky Callahan - VP of Territories for the BSC, VP of Mass MC Badass and second for Badass Security Council (aka BSC)

Darren LaPonte-James - VP of Princes of Prophecy

Aaron LaPonte-James - President of MC Virginia

Kaleb Baxter - US Senator

Eliza LaPonte-James - Officer, Enforcer, Darren’s old lady, Princes of Prophecy

Elizabeth Callahan - MC Mass, Ricky’s old lady, Knight’s daughter

Jess Knight - Steve Knight’s old lady, Ben and Elizabeth’s mom

Dakota Lightfoot - Member of Princes of Prophecy, BSC, pilot, Prophet

Jessie LaPonte-James - Member of Princes of Prophecy

Aiyana Baxter - Princes of Prophecy Protector, Doctor, Shaman

Jeremy Blackhawk - MC, Princes of Prophecy and Protectors

Jacob Blackhawk - Princes of Prophecy and Protectors, BSC

Christian Blackhawk - MC, Princes of Prophecy Protector

Brantley Blackhawk - IT Head BSC, Princes of Prophecy

Taylor Blackhawk - Princes of Prophecy

Beth Blackhawk - Taylor's old lady, nurse

Jess Baxter-LaPonte-James-Lightfoot - Old lady to Jessie, Dakota, mom to Justice, Aquyà, Destiny

Sheila Jackson - Enforcer, Princes of Prophecy

Jax Jackson - Princes of Prophecy

The Stooges - Steve Knight, Danny LaPonte, Tiny Callahan, *Pres Ben James (honorary)

BSC Protector original Crew from Princes of Prophecy

Justice LaPonte-James-Lightfoot, Teller Knight, Mucimi Blackhawk -Bravo Rising

Luke Rayne DeSeville, Jetti Callahan, Tucker Brighton - BSC Training in Nevada.

Hannah Blackhawk (McCabe) - Champion Rising

Cayden Callahan, Lukas Callahan - Elan Rising.

Mase Blackhawk, Seth Baxter-LaPonte-James - Honor Rising

Stella Jackson-Driver-Solaita, Kyler Moniz, Aylen Knight, Mikey Nova, Axe LaPonte-James - Alpha Rising.

Lisa Baxter-Martel - Phoenix Rising

Chris Blackhawk - MC Badass Colorado

Ari, Adrian - Delta Rising

Nash Blackhawk, JC Blackhawk - Sentinel Rising

BSC East Protectors

Phoenix, Aquyà (FBI), Honor, Destiny, Joshua, Blake, Chance, Putam, Keesog, Riley

Virginia Badass

Andrew, Brandon, Heath, Zel, Tekah, Luna, Zeke, Oliver, Kutomá, Case

MC Mass

Harley, Colt, Mitchy, Indie, Brenna, Blaze, Sandy, Shona, Ally

Alpha-Bits: (full list on my website Book Info page)

Officers - Akai, Alta, Amal, Aris, Allen, Aaron, Alder, Asa, Anton, Brody, Brann

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Prologue

Bishop

Trask: “Team One we have a Domestic with kidnapping. Black Toyota SUV, three kids five and under. Pussy was let out of jail for good behavior. He’s in grid seventeen headed your way.”

Bishop: “We’ll pick him up once he’s past the storage lots. I got him on tracking, thanks Faber. Good behavior was a bad call, Pres. Faber, we’re skirting the edge of Oklahoma, grid nineteen has a crossroad, just past the dense trees is the welcome sign. How far from the state line is that?”

Faber: “Four point two three, Boss Bishop.”

Bishop: Four miles in. Tracking shows Team Three a couple miles behind my red dotted kidnapper. “Pres, can I get Team Three herding them to me? We’re taking the turn to Oklahoma.”

Trask: “Roger, Bishop.” The pause isn’t like Pres. “Hannah has PD and medic with the mom. The pussy beat the shit out of her.” His pissed is warranted. “I have a PD Patrol stopped at your crossroad. I’m gonna have Hannah call the OK Sheriff.”

Bishop: “Roger, we won’t need assistance but them aware is always good. Team One, ride like the wind, Brothers.” We close the gaps and ride like we’re on fire right around the PD on our way to the welcome sign. The Sheriff

isn't going to care and may just send Deputies to watch so he can see what we're up too. He loves us.

Trask: "Why are you driving him to Oklahoma? You've got a good three miles of desolate road."

Bishop: "Crossing state lines with kidnapped kids means he's not out for good behavior next year. You got him for obstruction, speeding, domestic abuse, child endangerment, battery, kidnapping and the federal felony state line charge." We're doing 125 to make it before our kidnapper.

Trask: He laughs. "The pussy turned your way, Bishop. He's a good two behind you now. Team Three is clocking 95. Send this to Cort. He's right." I hear talking in the background but can't make out Faber's words. "Sheriff has two patrols stopped on the road. No one in or out, Brother."

Bishop: I see the Deputies standing beside their cars watching us. They picked the perfect spot at the beginning of the clearing for the sign. "Roger, Pres. Team One, straight line a hundred and fifty from the patrol cars so he has no way through the dense tree line. Guns at the ready. Hit the tires and radiator. If this idiot runs, foot shot only." They all laugh. I don't care, Danny said it works and is painful. I want this fuck in pain for years.

Trask: He laughs in my earpiece. "Hannah said it really is true and causes long term issues."

Bishop: "Roger, Pres." The SUV isn't slowing. I step to the side as I hit low into the grill with three shots. The team is patient, two shots then two more have the SUV wobbling its way by us. We can hear a kid screaming. I move fast seeing

Team Three's Lead running toward me. The dick's door opens and my arm is up. "Team One and Three, I have a clear shot. Stand down." With rogers. I watch and wait. He's up and running back the way he came angling toward the trees. My eyes watch his feet.

Miley: "I got a clear shot, Boss."

Bishop: There's a thought. "On my one, hit right. One." I shoot left as I see the sole of his sneaker and everyone is laughing in my earpiece. Jesus. The dick drops like a sack of potatoes. "Team One, drag him to the road for cleanup. Nice shot, Miles. Pres, do I have transport for these kids?" No one answers so I check on the kids. Team Three is getting little ones out of the car seats. I bend by the Lead and a little girl. "How are you doing, sweetie?"

Little Girl: "Kent hit mommy bad. She said to tell him what he wants to hear so I did but I don't want to go to McDonalds or go see animals with him." Smart kid.

Lead: "Is Kent your dad?" The extreme no shake has me pissed.

Little Girl: "He lived next door but he moved. My Daddy is a policeman." She's proud of that.

Bishop: "That's a good job to have. We'll make sure you get to your dad and Kent goes to jail." She hugs me but doesn't answer. The Lead lifts her throwing chin to me.

Lead: "You're running over. I've got them."

Hannah: "Faber is sending transport. Trask is on with Cort. Clean-up is coming up behind you. Team Three will stay with the kids until transport shows. The dad is on his way to

the hospital. Transport will drop them there with his family. You're clear to come in, Bishop. Good job, Team One." They thought this was domestic. Everyone must be scrambling. They'll have more charges now. This idiot isn't going to get out anytime soon. Targeting PD throws the heat up a shit load of degrees.

Bishop: I check time. Shit. "Roger, Boss. We're flying back on the backroad. I've got a class in less than twenty."

Hannah: "Faber will clear it, Brother. I've got Security and PD shit happening. You're out of Ops."

I bet PD is salivating for this dick. I hope they have the Sheriff pick him up. "Thanks, Brother." With a salute to the OK Deputies, we ride out like we rode in.

At the backroad, the Brothers talk about their shots and I listen. They did good hitting tires with one shot so they have reason to be proud. Faber tells me we're clear to the Club and cleanup handed to the Sheriff. That's done and it was a good call.

At the portico, I throw them chin. "Miles, check in with Ops and text me. The shots were clean but it's procedure. You got a good job from Ops, Brothers. I'll see you at the Club later."

With chin, I run up to the classroom pulling my helmet and coat off. This is my favorite class so I'm glad I'm not late.

Pres is waiting when I walk out. I should have stayed in the classroom. “Are you kidding? I did Criminal Justice years ago as a Prospect, Pres.” It kept me from being a full time Prospect but it was worth it.

Pres shakes his head. “You’ve been studying Law since you finished them. You know more law than the fuckin’ lawyer.”

He’s as crazy as Cort. “I’m not a lawyer, Pres. I know what I need for the job, I’m just a Protector.”

His smile says I’m not winning this. “That’s why he wants you. Cort loves Protectors and you’ll have Jinx behind you. Club within the Club means you have the *whole* Veritable Club behind you. You’re the one that told me Veritable means truth in some ancient time.” He waves his hand like this is done. It wasn’t ancient times but I’m not correcting him. “Cort is expecting you in Phoenix so you can ride up to Veritable together. The Club is done. Tide has a replacement for your classes here and Beacon covered your shifts. There’s nothing left to do but go open your new Club. We’re proud, Brother.” He’s lost his mind.

“Shouldn’t someone ask if I want the job?”

He pushes my shoulder and starts walking so I follow, hoping that someone will remember I’m just a Protector. “You wanted more training time because of the law shit. Cort was impressed with your classes because you’re not PD and cover more than the PD training. This is your shot, Brother. Make us proud.” He just said he was proud.

With a deep breath, I nod. “This is because I helped with the suit training, isn’t it?” I should have known better

than to put the fuckin' suit on. Pablo being gone from Phoenix and now VP of Flight Guard is going to fuck with my life. I really shouldn't have put the damn suit on.

“He said you're good in it. Nova and Pablo are the Brothers he trusts and now you're in there. He wants you teaching the Flight Guard and PD law so no one does stupid shit that gets us bad juju.”

I'm shaking my head. “Juju? Really? What does the freaky say?” That sounds like a Hannah word.

He stops at the bottom of the stairs. “Justice gave him your name.” The smile means he believes this is done. “Hannah agrees. You were one of hers, then the Alpha-Bits and you're perfect for this. She likes that Jinx is your mother Club. It stops you from being dragged into Phoenix now that Cort doesn't have Pablo.”

I know Pres was proud and he felt it when Jinx was moved, but pushing this is just insane no matter how much he loves Jinx. Fuckin' Pablo and the Flight Guard. Somehow, I know this isn't going away. “He was looking at me for Phoenix?” That would make sense but that's a little more Cort crazy than I want to deal with.

“You were top of the list, covering for Pablo showed him you were good with the law. He said you answered questions the lawyer didn't know.”

“He isn't a criminal lawyer. Cort asked about criminal shit. So, this is real and if I refuse, I'm in Phoenix as Cort's Protector?”

He stops before the chopper doors. “You’d refuse? This is President of a Club within a Club with Jinx at your back. Why would you refuse? You’re teaching what you asked me for.”

Put like that, he’s fuckin’ crazy. “I’m not a President.” Asking for an extra hour of class time isn’t asking for President.

He nods with that smile in full sun. When the sun hits like that you can see the little pockmarks the blast he made it through left behind. “You are now or you could be Cort’s Protector Lead.”

I’m not getting out of this. “I’m President of Flight Guard PD at Veritable Rising.”

He laughs clapping a hand on my back. “It’s a job you’re going to love. You can still run Ops shifts when you’re needed like Zeke does. Hannah said he’s perfect for it too.”

I shouldn’t have asked what the freaky thought but I’m glad I can still run Ops. After a hug, Pres steps back and the doors close on the chopper. For some reason, it feels like this chapter is closing for me.

“Let’s hear it for the newest Rising Club President, Brothers!”

I smile hearing Jack’s voice before the military cheer, that I think they practice. Throwing chin, I make my way to the front and sit in the copilot seat. “Brother, why are you my pilot? Falcon isn’t on board.”

“He’s with Cort. I wanted to see Jinx and the new Club in a Club setup.” He talks to Phoenix Flight then smiles

my way. “This Club is all you, Brother. It’s an honor bringing you to your new home.” He’s always honored for everything.

“I’m honored you’d do it, thanks. I think I’m still in shock. Pres just told me that the Prospects moved me.”

He’s surprised. “Just now? Jesus on a stick.”

“Yeah. I came off a shift and had a class.”

He nods. “He was supposed to tell you after your shift. They decided on you because you know law. Cort asked me about crazy shit then told me the law he got from you. We don’t get many drunk drivers in Bravo but we get them. Now Security is ordered to detain them if they don’t hand their ID over. If they have to be removed, they pull them out after the second order and add a charge. If they fight, they add another. He said they aren’t playing nice with criminals and the judge can deal. Because we don’t have PD, the judge isn’t easy. They watch the body cams for everything but DUI isn’t getting dropped.”

I nod. “Begging drunks for their ID, then to get out for the tests doesn’t work for me. We assist the PD and the town cops beg for way too long. With probable cause for the stop, they shouldn’t be begging, that just gives the drunk more time to build a head of righteous steam only they understand. We have good PDs but they’re too easy with entitled bullshit. They’re getting calls for shit that isn’t PD’s job.”

He smiles, lowering at Phoenix. When he’s done talking to Flight, he turns my way. “I heard about the call Honor took for the pizza place sending cold pizza. Seth showed up and lit the box on fire with an acetylene torch. I’m surprised he didn’t just send Mase.”

I laugh. I don't know if I'd think of it, but I'm glad Seth did. When did people decide the PD was so bored, they should be involved in making the call to the pizza place for cold pizza?

"I like it. I showed the PD the statutes and they stopped with the begging. The first case, the judge threatened to charge the dipshit for PD time. He shut up and watched himself crying like a kid on three feeds, then took the DUI charge without a word." It showed the PD Brothers how to be reasonable to a point.

"That's good, people are getting crazier, Prez said to stop it before it gets out of hand. We're not moderators for adults that don't grow up. I'm glad most of our towns are Brothers, they handle more of that shit before we see it and the idiots move right back out." He turns when the doors open. "Cort, Justice and Pres are boarding."

I take a deep breath unclipping the belt. "Wish me luck, Brother."

"You don't need it," he says as I walk by his seat.

I wish that were true. I took the Officer training when Jinx was VP but never expected to be a high Officer. Being a Protector Lead for a Club was the highest I've ever thought about. With Creed at Champion, I knew it wasn't happening there, Creed isn't moving anywhere.

Hannah thinks this is good so I settle that in my head. She loves Zeke and told us he's perfect for Flight Guard, but I'd never heard his name before he was President there. Harky was a trainee at Phoenix, was sent to help clear in Elan and we all heard the stories about that. He was an Enforcer but worked

the Protector job for Cooper, Texas then Cort on Elite. From what I've seen, I'm not surprised he's President of Elite, the Brother is quiet, capable and fuckin' smart as hell. Texas was the Protector Lead in Champion, now he's a President and Marks took his FBI/Badass training and loves the VP job for Texas. I guess the jump for me isn't so unusual but it feels like it to me. President of a Club is a serious commitment.

While waiting for the Brothers to show, I look at the Phoenix Club and remember the first time I pulled in and Pres said it was a hospital. It doesn't look like a hospital to me. It looks like the headquarters of Badass right down to the flaming portico. It's the biggest Club with outbuildings matching it, making the grounds seem endless. The new training facility for Badass Clubs is a small replica of what's here and used for BSC now. That building doesn't have Ops but trainee rooms.

"Brother, are you okay?" Cort claps a hand on my shoulder drawing me out of my head.

Turning quick, I can't believe I didn't see them come up on me. "Yeah, Boss. I remember the first time I saw the Club. You've added to the grounds but it all makes this building seem massive."

He thinks about that and looks around like he doesn't see it every day. "It does. Paul did a good job."

I step back and he steps in with Falcon and Justice following his new dog Thrasos. I look but he doesn't have a Protector.

"He has Thrasos. He left the team inside. Jinx has him covered when we set down," Justice tells me.

I shake my head. The dogs are good but he's supposed to have a full team wherever he goes. I guess with Falcon, Justice, Thrason and me he's covered.

Cort ignores us and pulls my cut to the seats. "So, Trask told you about the Club. Jinx has everything ready for you. This week you get the layout, classes for training and some time with Harky, Zeke and a team he put together for you. Two are Leads. You'll have Flight Guard PD Ops, that are this side of the BSC area and a second for the training classes. The rest you pick but the training is all law." Oh, that's all.

I nod glad Ops is still in there. "Law for where?"

"This side of the country. Ben is handling the east and Hemy the south." He's crazy.

I pick my words looking at the sky Jack is eating up. "This is a lot of states, Boss."

"Flight Guard isn't called for stupid shit. This is a quick response to volatile situations. You're not out there getting cats out of trees or giving traffic tickets. Gangs taking over malls, riots, shit like that is where you're called to when legal is newsworthy."

Aylen was shot at a mall so I nod. "Why me? You've got to have a teacher somewhere that can teach law for half the country, Boss." I point out that it's half the country hoping he thinks twice about this.

Usually, I think he's funny with the picture-perfect smile, but today it scares me. "A teacher isn't running an Ops Team. I get Zeke in the north, you on the west and more teams

being trained for the smaller shit dickasses think up for the BSC Clubs' PDs. In a year, we'll move that to more Badass Clubs that take the straight Bible. We're growing, we need to keep up with the new Clubs coming in."

Jesus, Mary and Joseph. "Roger, Boss. Do I get directions on how this all works?"

Justice and Falcon laugh. I give them both a look. "I found out I'm a President as Pres walked me to the chopper."

Falcon stops pretty fuckin' quick. "There's a book. Zeke put it together from Harky's. You need time to read it."

Justice pulls two books from his bag. "He gave me yours and the Flight Guard training so you have their background. These are vetted Brothers who chose PD. They're all military. You'll be getting them and experienced PD as trainees. They're reader-approved but you have Jeti and Kyler right at Veritable if you have questions about them."

This is good. "Thanks, Boss. I needed this."

He nods. "Zeke didn't know what he was President of until Cort showed at Elan. Prez never told him it was training Brothers to fly in the suits."

I believe it. "I never should have put the suit on." Now they all laugh but I'm not kidding.

Jinx looks good and is moving better than I've seen. Champ is right with him and moves as Jinx does. I realize

they're working together to get those better, steadier movements to look completely natural. I'm happy for the Brother and respect the hell out of Cort for putting him in the position he deserves. He was the best Enforcer I had ever seen, then we turned to Protectors and Jinx got caught in the blast with Pres. I'm glad Alder was kept safe during the whole bounty on the Alpha-Bits episodes, but Pres and Jinx were hit hard keeping Alder with us. Jinx shocked everyone by getting Anton back and using his new eye shit to help round up the MERCs and stop the biggest push for the little Brothers. Jinx even solved how information was getting out so Badass-gone-bad had light shined on it and we started cleaning that shit up too. Actually, part of that was Brinks and Jordan, I think. Shaking the cobwebs out of my head, I pay attention to Justice and Jinx as Aaron and Cort are talking.

“...Teller said it's stocked. He did Flight Guard for Zeke. Zeke will be here after his classes.” Justice has me watching Jinx. Other than a hug, he's been talking to Falcon and then Justice since we got here.

“Is it me or is there something about him that draws you in? The Brother doesn't talk.” Jinx has me holding back a smile.

I was on Cort when Zeke got here and everyone asks the same question almost verbatim. Justice always smiles and agrees. He does the same today. I saw Zeke once but know more about the Brother because I had days in Phoenix as Cort's Lead Protector when Pablo moved to Flight Guard. Cort spent time there but I was the Protector on him when he got home and before he left. The Brother never stops, so those were exhaustive and informative hours I spent while he

walked from one meet to another or stopped to meet on his glasses. It has me wondering if I'll get glasses now.

Justice hits my arm and gives a small nod. Falcon is talking to Jinx again so I didn't miss anything. I might as well ask, "Do you have any advice or ideas for me?"

Justice smiles. "Follow the book for Club in a Club procedure, teach what works for you and if it feels wrong, it's wrong. Don't bring a woman to any party unless you're keeping her. Be you and ask for what you need. Kyler is close and Steel is moving up. Steel is good in the suit, with the Alpha-Bits and would make a good Lead for a second team. He's smart and will be a good trainer. He's a Protector on the list but worked Security for Falcon."

Steel? "The Drive-in Brother?" I love the Drive-in parties.

"His father but, yeah. He's good." Okay.

"What list?"

He turns from watching Falcon and Jinx back to me, looking a little uncomfortable. "Fuck, it's a list of Protectors moving in or going to be moving to the Clubs. It's from Jeremy and Christian."

I put my hand up. "Got it." Those two scare me with the future shit so I don't need anymore. Justice's dad is Dakota, another with freaky future shit I don't need adding to the crazy already in my life.

His smile tells me he knows what I'm thinking. I don't care and nod toward Cort as the biggest example. He agrees with his own nod.

Finally, we move on with Jinx, I guess now he's Pres to me, giving us a tour of the new Club. I'm glad it has a Clubhouse building with a portico like the other Clubs. I've never seen the Club in a Club compounds. "Why the huge arena?" This is my only question as we're walking by the physical training center to the Club.

"It's called the training gazebo. Flight Guard needs to fly. Classrooms are in the Club building with a few offices. Most of your classrooms are like the Phoenix meeting room Cort uses for Church, but they're smaller. You'll have just PD law for Leads and Supervisor positions. That's basically Officer status or Brothers heading that way." Jinx stops, then looks back at Justice so I do. Justice gives him a nod but no words. It must be the list thing.

Justice laughs. "It is, Bishop. Sometimes you're better off not asking. Jinx will send Steel to your first class but he has him as his first Flight Guard Team Lead. He's keeping him, Brother."

I don't know Steel well and take no offense. He must be good if Jinx has him as a Lead. We turn and continue the walk while Jinx explains the teams housed here and the trainee rooms we saw in the first building. The gazebo is for team training, maintenance and demonstration training for the trainees. Jinx is a great teacher, he should be training this.

Justice hits my back, I know it's him because I always feel the calm he has surrounding him run through me. *'He's not steady in the suit because of the skeleton.'*

I nod and keep listening to Jinx. The Club has a bigger meeting room than three smaller ones, but none are as big as

Phoenix. I'm relieved. Trainees are here for three to four weeks before they're moved to their new Clubs. We can go to Church at Veritable, stream it here, or I can hold Church myself in the bigger room or under the gazebo. I like that and think I'll see how it works first, then decide. Brothers learning Law need to get inspired by law or law references. I have so much to learn and Jinx being a good teacher will help me get everything we'll be looking for into new PD Brothers.

My Flight Guard trainers will do physical, maintenance and classroom for planning. The kitchen-dining-living room is smaller than Champion. The Officer and Trainer compound is a road of cabin homes around a natural area circle with a pool, grill and walkways. With tall trees above and mountains as the view on one side, the Veritable Club is our view on the other.

So far, I like everything about the Club and the ease of access to and from it while not being so close to Veritable. Being the northernmost BSC Club puts us in east-bum-fuck Nebraska. I have to ask Jinx. "Why'd you pick Nebraska?" There's a new Club east of Phoenix in Arizona.

His Jinx smile is natural and throws no warnings. "The closest town is Champion, population was less than 100 until we had businesses going up. A waterway runs through it that's got more moving here to open water recreation activity. A state-maintained Route 6 close and it's never 110°. We have a mini base for choppers, supplies flown or freighted in, plenty of mountain roads to ride here and long flat roads not far. Sentinel is 258 miles southwest of us but a new Club will go up halfway between us and a new Club is already built on the east. Masons are building up two bigger towns east and two

west between us and those Clubs.” He’s so fuckin’ smart and I’m glad he’s in deep with the Masons.

“Sounds perfect and thanks for avoiding the heat index daily reminders.” They come out like Rex’s word of the day every morning.

He laughs but I know he’s got to be more comfortable in the cooler climate.

I get more on what’s needed from me as a President for Jinx and Cort during dinner at the empty kitchen-dining-living room pod. It’s weirdly comfortable without the sixty trainees filling seats.

Justice, Falcon and Jack explain more and I think this President job isn’t sounding as far-fetched or crazy as it did at first, or maybe I’m just joining them in that crazy. Either way, so far, I like the new plan for me.

Chapter One

Three days

Marli

I open the door to stench and darkness after the bright sunlight and take a few seconds before I see him lounging in the camp chair with the ever-present smirk on. Holding a gun on the waste of space does nothing. “Get the hell out or I’m shooting you where you sit.” I’d like to shoot the smirk off his face.

“Go ahead, the land is mine in three years or sooner if you shoot.” The squatting asshole thinks he’s here for another three years? He hasn’t been here more than a year now, which means he’s got nine plus that I don’t think the new owners will take too kindly to.

“The land is sold and you’re out today.” I’m not arguing with the leech.

He’s up now and stalking my way, I can already see he’s going to be a bigger problem. He’s never been aggressive but his eyes are showing it today. “Stop there or I’m shooting.” It’s rubber bullets but he’ll feel it this close.

“It’s my house and you’re trespassing.” House? It’s a revoltingly reeking shed that’s falling apart.

As soon as he reaches for me, I shoot him in the knee, twice, where I know he’ll be feeling it for hours. “Now, you have an hour to leave. The entire property is sold and the new

owners take possession tomorrow at 8 am. I'll be back before that to make sure you're gone or I'll make you gone."

I walk and take a deep breath of clean air while he's pulling his phone out. The Sheriff call isn't going anywhere. They told me to handle it.

Technically, this is Wyoming but the leech thinks he can get away with shit because I'm based out of Nebraska and have no jurisdiction. The land has been in my family for generations and there's no way I'd let a squatter take what's rightfully ours away. My only job was to officially ask him to leave. I've done that six times and even got a restraining and vacate order on him.

Daddy was the county Sheriff until the day he died. He stopped the fraud of a Mason order from taking the land and I'll be damned if I let the no-good leech steal it away on a fraudulent squatting right loophole.

I have a drive and shift before I'm back here. Calling the lieutenant, I let him know what happened and yes, I had my body cam on, again. I never approach the sleazy bastard without my cam on. You'd think after making deputy so young and working without a single mark in my file, they'd know me.

Daddy said they were intimidated by me. I didn't see that as my problem while he was alive. I definitely did when he died almost a year ago. Not one complaint has been made but no one talks to me unless it's about work. Ever. They answer calls, send what I need when I ask and answer questions, but never say a word unless it's work. When Daddy

was here, they'd ask me questions, hang out at the house and some even helped with the cattle drives and branding.

I breathe deep. Marrying on a drunken Vegas trip cost me everything. The leech decided he was a cowboy and I thought he was helping, but he ran the hands off spouting shit about being the new owner. Filing for divorce right away saved my ass and land but the leech never left, the Deputies stopped talking to me and the long-forgotten town barely tolerates me.

I didn't grow up with loads of friends, they were all older than me until Daddy pulled me out and sent me to the boarding school in Washington. It was only for two school years but I blew through classes to get back home.

Once I was armed with a diploma, I went through the community college for criminal justice, then at 21, the Law Enforcement Academy for specialty courses. At seventeen, when I started college for criminal justice, Daddy was proud and enrolled me at a gym for better self-defense training that taught me everything I wouldn't learn at the Academy. The owner was an ex-FBI agent and kicked the crap out of me until I learned how to kick the crap out of him. When he saw I wasn't quitting, he put me in with the military guys so I'd learn from them. I loved it because I was home every night and on the weekends again. I learned everything about the ranch but I didn't want to run a ranch. The only ones who knew were Daddy and Hetah, the head of ranch security. When Daddy died, Hetah told the others I wasn't running a ranch so the hands were nervous, then left almost overnight.

My bringing home the leech so I could ensure a legal divorce did me in.

I smile and shake my head at the lie. I don't want to run a ranch, brand, sell, inject, or round up cattle and horses. Daddy knew it and was going to sell the majority of the land but died when that fraud of a Mason had him shot. The Mason died before he could come after me for the land.

The pain of losing my dad hits me but I tamp it down with a deep breath. Daddy would be proud. The men who took down the Mason and his human trafficking sicko shit came to me like a genie in a bottle and granted me wishes. All kinds of fraud Mason men died. They bought the land and cattle for a fair price and it will be recorded tomorrow. The last was the best, I get a Badass job and the town will always be known as Champion so our name will live on through that Badass promise. The job isn't in Champion but it's close enough for me and I know daddy would be proud.

The men who came even showed me pictures of women and kids that were saved. It was like divine intervention or something. I just knew it was right and Daddy could rest in a peace he never got alive. He knew something was very wrong with the town and Mason men but never had proof. I got it from his cam but it was too late and I was put on leave 'to get over grief', according to the new acting Sheriff.

Pulling into a gas station, I'm shaking my head again. That 'grief leave' is where I met the leech.

Bishop

“Why am I called to an Op before I have a team?” I ask Ethan as I’m boarding the chopper. I was pulled away from meeting the Brothers for that team and possibly Officers for me.

“This is the new Club land a pussy won’t vacate. He was trying to claim it by squatting but only has months in. Flight Guard will meet us there. This pussy was shot by someone and has legal docs or some shit. We’re making sure it won’t stop the lawyer from recording tomorrow.” My new second smiles, knowing how bad the dick lost already.

I almost feel sorry for the stupid bastard. Badass waits for no one. Cort isn’t delaying his new Club over a squatter and I can’t blame him. He pays fair price for the shit he does and makes sure it’s all legal. Being Badass means there are places that scrutinize every sentence, so Cort makes sure there are no issues before he starts. The lawyers he hires make sure of it. Cort is huge and scares the shit out of them, from what I’ve seen, they’re keeping him happy by making sure nothing can be bitched about.

The other side of that is we’ve had squatter issues all along. Faith got caught up in a group with the CPS shit. We learn and move on using those lessons. Everyone reports squatters now, this one, a day before we even own the land.

Looking at the map, I shake my head. “He’s in Wyoming?”

Ethan turns away from the window. “It looks like an old shed.”

I nod, going back to the laptop and scroll. The new Badass parcel is a big piece of land crossing state borders. The use lists it as a cattle ranch which would make sense.

Mucimi shows on the side of me. I grip the laptop tighter with one hand but don't move anything else.

"The seller is moving to Veritable. She's a Deputy, father was the Sheriff shot by one of Ellison's thugs. She'd make a good Sheriff but she's shunned. Jinx has her record. She's freaky kid smart with no ability. Already Protector level." He's gone as quick as he showed.

Ethan laughs. "Freaky is weird but helpful." He's ex-Green Beret and just one year into Badass so he doesn't know the half of it.

"Mucimi is the only one to pop in and out anymore. The others walk into rooms now." I smile. "I'd hope they'd pop into a chopper if the pilot goes down or something." It actually happened with Brinks on a try for Jordan, so I know they would.

The crew laughs with Ethan while I go back to the laptop. I know more about criminal law than land deeds but I read up on squatters when Faith was taken. Wyoming is ten years before a squatter can file for the land. I bet he thought he was in Utah. Utah is three years less. Other than name, there's no information on the owner, but the name strikes me. Champion is the town Jinx is building up, the Club we came from and according to the deed, for generations, the name as seller on the new Club land.

I close the laptop. Mucimi didn't show for nothing. He never shows unless it's needed so there's a warning

somewhere in what he said.

Closing my eyes, I replay his words. *'The seller is moving to Veritable. She's a Deputy, father was the Sheriff shot by one of Ellison's thugs. She'd make a good Sheriff but she's shunned. Jinx has her record. She's freaky kid smart with no ability. Already Protector level.'*

The seller comes from a long line of Champion's, she's Protector level, smart and would make a good Sheriff. Her father was shot by a thug from Ellison who was the biggest human trafficker around that was mixed up in bad-Badass, Indian and Mason shit with the CPS Masons.

I close my eyes again. She's good in a sea of bad that surrounds her. I'm glad she's moving but wonder why she'd sell land that's been in her family for generations and move to Veritable.

She's alone. I don't know how I got that but she's got to be. Good, peace officer, and smart would deescalate family squabble, unfair treatment of family and a slew of other family issues over land. There can't be other family.

We sway as we're lowering and I see the other chopper on the side of us. Flight Guard is here pulling a smile from me.

Zeke knocked on my door when everyone left my first night at Veritable. He's nothing like I expected and I'm relieved to see him now. He thinks they're all crazy too and says it, a lot. Coming from New England, I guess he's earned the right. He did get the freaky to walk in rooms again, well, all but Mucimi. He doesn't read everyone either. I love my

new Brother and felt a bond with him faster than anyone I've ever met.

Looking around, I see the shed we must be headed to, it's swaying in the chopper wind, so the ready-to-collapse look isn't just a look. The dick didn't do anything to make it a home he planned on staying in for years. He's been here for months and his name isn't Champion.

Zeke meets Ethan and me with his team and dog following. 'Brother, from what I read, he was asked to leave and served vacate papers, I don't know why we're here, any PD can remove him.'

I nod. "At a guess and from the little Mucimi said, the Deputy that sold the land to Badass has no one at her back."

He nods but doesn't say anything else. The dick we're here for limps out of the shed holding a piece of 2x4 for balance.

'He's got a story and a half starting with he's never seen the owner since he moved in. He knows she's got feeds from her gear but figures we don't know. She shot him and he'll play that up. She used rubber bullets.' Zeke does read when he thinks he needs to. So, the dick saw her today.

"Thanks. With months in here, he's got no rights to the land, Wyoming and Nebraska are ten-year squatter rights with no owner contact. He had a Vegas address until last year."

Zeke stops and touches my arm so I stop. 'He slipped something in her drink and married her. She was a mark. Moving here so she could get the divorce final, she let him stay with her men but he ran them off. He was set on getting

the land. A judge saw it and gave him no marital assets since she filed days after the marriage.'

I nod and he starts walking again.

The dick doesn't acknowledge us but jumps right in. "Are you the cops? I'm filing a restraining order. The bitch can't shoot me because she's a cop." His indignation pisses me off.

I shoot his foot with a real bullet and Ethan laughs. "She's a Deputy Sheriff. You drugged her, married her, ignored trespassing and vacate orders, know she's got proof and that she sold the land. We're not cops, we're Badass, we're also known as the new owners. Leave now." I'm telling him all we already know so he'll get that we're not playing games.

When he's done rolling around on the ground crying, he glares at me. "I'll sue you." We all watch as he struggles with his 2x4 to stand while Zeke's dog, Ajax, growls at the dick.

I nod. "You can try that." I look at Ethan. "Will you be his witness?"

The big smile he shows and snickers I hear behind me have me fighting to keep a straight face. "No, Pres. I was hoping for a shot."

Everyone calls shots but Zeke puts his hand up. 'I got him but you can fly him off the land close to a town, but not too close.' He looks at the finally standing dick and everything on the dude stops as he crumbles to the ground on his 2x4.

Zeke nods to one of his Brothers. ‘He’ll be disoriented for a few days. Drop him in the woods somewhere.’

“Roger, Pres.” The Flight Guard team all grab a piece of the catatonic dick and rise.

I smile at Ethan. “They’re impressive.”

Zeke smiles. ‘We have our moments.’

“Did he really drug her?” Cort asks in my ear. He hasn’t said anything to me so I’m surprised he’s on without clicks and an announcement.

Zeke answers with what he read from the dick. I should have done more than shot his foot but remember Danny saying it hurts, since he’ll have to walk, it’s good to know that’s a walk of pain.

I walk to the shed with Ethan following. The smell of wet ground leads to garbage about halfway in, then the smell of urine and shit take over. With the garbage piled and smell from that, I was already holding my breath for the end where no trash is visible. The dick is disgusting.

Moving fast, I’m by Ethan and out quick. Puking all over myself isn’t Badass. I wipe my burning eyes on the way back to Zeke. “It’s like an outhouse without the hole.”

He watches the door then the shed erupts in fire. I look from the fire to Zeke. He’s just looking at it. Okay. Noise has me looking back as the roof falls and not two minutes later, the fire goes out. Smoke is above us but there is nothing above the burnt wood and tin from the old shed.

I look at Zeke. “You’re another scary Brother. I’m not asking and don’t need details. I’m just sayin’.” Ajax agrees

with me with a chuff.

He smiles and claps my shoulder. 'His car is gone too.' He points so I nod at the smoke above the trees about fifty feet away from us.

Cort asks him more questions so I sit on the chopper deck and listen. The Champion woman has a good record and moves tomorrow. Zeke wants her but Jinx comes on shutting him down. She's a new member of Veritable and the town is named after her family, so she's helping him bring back their history. I smile. That's a good way to keep the name alive and tells me she's really alone.

The Flight Guard gets back pulling helmets off and showing off their smiles. I wait for it but Ethan asks, "Where'd you leave him?"

The team looks at the Lead. "A dumpster at a waste place. It keeps him out of the weather, a couple of miles from a town and far enough away from here so getting back won't be easy."

Shaking my head, I have to smile at that. Flight Guard is showing a value I never thought of, *as the crow flies* opens options not available without cleanup following Brothers for every issue. "Works for me."

Me: "Boss, this wasn't an Op but we're done here. He won't be back anytime soon."

Cort: "Flight Plans are set. Ranger is picking you up. You have a drop for explanation to the Sheriff, Bishop. Flight Guard, your flight plan is set for home."

Zeke: 'A tag along with Bishop sounds like fun, Boss.'

Cort: There's a pause before he answers. "Teller gave me your team as readied. Am I staying on with you?"

Zeke: 'You'll need a new Sheriff at some point, but I'm not clear if that's today.'

Cort: "Flight plans are set with Ranger. I'll get on the new Sheriff and watch the feeds. I'm needed on a Protector Op but I'm in the room."

Zeke: 'Roger, Cort.' He nods at me as we're getting the Ranger switchover. 'To the temp Sheriff. Ranger, I'm sending the chopper back, Imperial isn't far from Veritable, we can drop Bishop off.' He knows the town the Sheriff is located. The Brother knows more than I did.

Ranger: "Roger, Zeke. Flight plans changed." Ranger doesn't do excess words either, I guess. I'm never on Ops Control, but he's Flight and I'm not, so I'm not sure how he works.

'I like the eyes on us without the Control.' Zeke sums it up.

I throw chin and we board his chopper. Ethan tells his old trainee class buddies about the new Club. I'm glad he's excited about it and his new position, then listen to him explain about the ranch flowing into Wyoming, Utah and Nebraska then the law so they get why the dick was on this land. He knows his law being from this area. I watch them all laugh at the dumbass dick not knowing he wasn't in Utah.

This has me thinking, Alder had a Bit set an app up for us to pull law for every BSC West state. It will be a help for the crazy I'm sure we'll be sent into.

'How are you settling in?' Zeke has had enough of the team talk, I guess.

"I'm settled. The trainees are good in the suits so the classes are my focus. It's been easy and the Law app given to them has us moving faster than I expected. They're all geared to legal procedures so it could be just this class, but they'll be out early." It's been just a few days but I'm impressed.

He nods. 'It's the same with Flight Guard. Our classes are moving fast but we're still working on the list of vetted military.' That's a good point, we'll have trained coming in for a while.

We lower in the Sheriff parking lot causing a commotion of Deputies coming out to gawk. Zeke elbows my arm at the door. 'The acting Sheriff.'

"He doesn't look happy to see us."

'He's not.'

The team and Ethan jump out, then make a line for us to the temp Sheriff.

"Choppers ain't allowed to park here. Once the election is done, there's changes coming for you people."

I smile at the asshole. "There will be. Let me guess, you're an old Mason that didn't get named or killed with Ellison?"

A younger Deputy takes a step forward shrugging the arm of the Deputy beside him off. “He says he’s a Mason and will be elected permanently.”

I nod. “Cort Masters from Phoenix Rising is asking the real Masons about a Sheriff for here. If he’s real, that may be, if he’s not, wherever he goes may be permanent.” I leave the threat vague.

The Deputy nods. “Thank you.”

“Now wait just a dawg-gone minute. Who the hell are you?” The Sheriff is pissed but I see concern in his eyes.

Zeke’s head tilts back fast. ‘Zeke LaPonte-Karr, President of Badass Flight Guard at Elan Rising and Brax Bishop, President of Flight Guard PD Law at Veritable Rising. I’m a reader among other things and know you’re not only *not* a Mason but the shooter that killed the last Sheriff.’

Guns show pointing at the fake Sheriff and surprisingly, some Deputies. I swear in a blink, everyone’s hands are empty and the Sheriff is cuffed. I shake my head.

‘Flight Guard, take him to the chopper and restrain him.’ Zeke looks at me. ‘Proof is in his email. Folder is labeled Mason.’

I nod, getting the idea he wants me to get on with this. “Ethan, take the young Deputy to his office and open the Mason folder in his email. It shows proof. When he sees it, take the computer so it goes with the Sheriff. I’ll get the warrant.”

“Roger, Pres.” Ethan pulls the Deputy that spoke up.

Another stands in front of me but waits until I'm done texting. "You have questions?"

"You can't touch his computer without the warrant." A few agree with the snotty bastard.

"You'll have it before Ethan shuts it off." Everyone freezes when two from Flight Guard rise and move the fake Sheriff to the chopper about two feet off the ground.

I hit Zeke's arm. "I'm impressed with your team. Since the dick didn't say anything about their missing guns, I'm guessing he's another fake?"

He smiles. 'Four are. They came with the Sheriff.'

I scan across them. "Go now, or you can go with the fake Sheriff and take a permanent position wherever he lands."

A moron reaches for his empty holster.

"You missed the gun disappearing from your hand?" I look at the other Deputies. "And you couldn't tell they weren't real Deputies?"

"They have certifications from the Law Enforcement Academy." One Deputy doesn't sound like he believes it.

"Call the attorney general to look into that. Who is the highest ranking Deputy?"

Zeke points at a Deputy. 'He's just under this fake pussy.'

The deputy on the side of him doesn't like that. "You're not even talking." I'm guessing this is another fake moron.

“I heard him and you obviously did. When he says among other things, he means it. He can roll wind or something that has you dazed for days or fire in you that has you dead. Don’t piss him off. The paperwork for missing persons is killer.”

The real Deputies hide laughs but not their smiles. I like them. I keep my eyes on the new acting Sheriff. “So you’re in charge at the moment. The reason we even showed was to let you know we evacuated the squatter from the new Badass land so your Deputy isn’t needed to revisit the Wyoming parcel.”

He nods. “It’s out of our jurisdiction but I’ll let her know. We weren’t allowed to interact with her since he got here. We’ve got kids and family counting on us, dropping pay grades for any length of time isn’t possible.”

Zeke puts his hand up. ‘I got it and their,’ he points to the four getting into personal vehicles, ‘parts here. They have monitoring equipment everywhere. Get some wands through the building, patrol cars and your personal vehicles. I’m glad your Deputy is moving to Badass, she’d never be left standing alone, Brothers at her back is a given with us. Not being a bad Deputy doesn’t mean you’re anywhere close to a good Brother. I’ve never been a Deputy but know I’d never turn my back on a Brother.’ The acting Sheriff looks down embarrassed.

“Yes, sir.” A young Deputy salutes and runs back in. I guess he’s had enough of the dicks too.

“That little girl didn’t deserve what she came home to. Did the Sheriff really kill her dad?” The acting Sheriff finds

his voice and loses the embarrassment. Maybe they aren't like Brothers. Little girl? This guy is older than the others but not by much.

'He did. She got the body cam but he confiscated it before she got back from the forced leave. The whole feed is on his computer. He isn't a very good criminal. His trophies are evidence now.' Zeke knows more details than what he said and delivers it monotone. He's not impressed with the Sheriff's office either. There doesn't seem to be a bond here, but he's right, the proof is a relief and will go a long way for probable cause with the judge.

The acting Sheriff shakes his head. "It's tough removing a Sheriff, but what better place to keep evidence?" That's true, who'd hack the Sheriff?

We watch Deputies move to trucks with the young guys.

"Badass and real Masons are working to fix that in the west here. If you're not the next Sheriff, I can guarantee whoever shows is a good one."

"I'm not a Champion. I don't know law and the history like them but I'm not turning it down."

Zeke looks my way. 'You'll have the time, teach them what they need. It will make your job easier.'

I don't want to but nod. "I'm doing classes on Law for Flight Guard PD, that's the flying Brothers. Veritable has law classes that will work too. Get Ethan's card and he can set you up." I'm not sold on this Sheriff but they need training on law if I'm working with them regularly.

He's surprised but nods. "I'll let Deputy Champion know she's clear of her ex. Thanks for this and who do I call for the changes here?"

"I got the judge on his way there with the warrant paperwork and to swear him in or some shit." Cort helps at the best of times.

I pass it on. "A judge is on his way and he has the warrant in paper form."

He looks relieved. "Set down anywhere."

I smile. "They will."

He walks to the closest truck and says something to the Deputies, then inside before Zeke says anything. 'He's the new Sheriff. I'd think he's a coward but they were stopped every time they'd try to stand together. With the bugs and feeds everywhere, their hands were tied.' His tone says he feels like I do.

"I can't say I like him but I can see that stopping them. Handwritten is still a form of communication. They could have found a way to get help, explain, or get the AG involved in this day and age." Trask did it and was fired then jumped to Badass. The new Sheriffs started replacing the shit ones that weren't working for their counties.

We turn for the chopper when Ethan and what looks like a maintenance man walk out with a pushcart of computers. "This one is us, the others are going to the Nebraska AG." He points to the tower in front.

"Good job. The Lead Deputy isn't wasting time, which is good."

“He’s not. He called the new Badass Deputy while he was walking in. They’re taking her to dinner then will escort her to the Club with the moving truck.”

They’re jumping right back into her life which is good to hear, I guess. I don’t get Deputy shit, PD are a sort of Brotherhood, I’d think Sheriff and Deputies are the same but they didn’t do much to fix what they knew was wrong.

Ethan explains the job today while I watch reactions and listen to comments. Jarrett, a west criminal use of force/de-escalation class trainer, knows the law, while Andy a defensive strategy class trainer, looks on the app for the two states. Andy is from the east, so I’m glad she looked. I looked it up a couple of years ago when squatters were found close to the Champion Club just so I’d know if it came up on a call again.

Julius watches without comment until Ethan gets to the Sheriff. “You cuffed a Sheriff without cause?”

I shake my head. “Zeke read him and told us where to find proof. The paper warrant came with the judge, but the new Sheriff had it in an email before Ethan was done collecting the evidence. The four others have warrants out on them for impersonating law enforcement and whatever else the Sheriff charges.”

“Read him?” Julius is a stickler for procedure, making me wonder why he’s on the list for possible Officer for me.

I roll my eyes. “We’re Badass. I get the importance of the warrant when it comes to the Sheriff, but the judge was on a chopper with it and it was sent digitally. If I had said the others were impersonating officers, Cort would have them all in Phoenix. I picked the battle I knew I could win and the new Sheriff got the judge to issue the warrants after he was sworn in. We have no information from the AG on obviously doctored certificates. With the warrants, they’ll be held, the AG can get the proof and deal. It’s their job.”

“But we...”

I put my hand up. “I was brought in to make sure the land transfer happened without a squatter problem. I did that job. The Sheriff showed bad to Zeke and had an attitude with Badass. He killed the old Sheriff, he was detained and we have proof. Getting a killer off the street and out of office wasn’t the job for me. That was a bonus that will have the new *honest* Sheriff working easier with the Clubs surrounding his county. There’s nothing illegal that happened today other than I shot a whiny bastard’s foot who drugged his mark and married her. You can try to take me in, but I’ll shoot you before you stand and lose your body in a way it’s never seen as a body again.” The recycle plant will ensure even the ashes are incorporated into something new.

Ethan and Andy laugh. “He isn’t kidding, Brother. Badass is a way of life for him. He’s making sure it’s legal and no one’s rights are trampled on, including Badass.”

I throw chin to Ethan but my eyes are back on Julius quick. He nods with wide eyes and a pale face understanding

the threat is real. “I’m learning. Reading is used for everything and you trust it?”

I nod understanding his question better. He is new. “Before Champion, I didn’t know anything about reading. Now, I trust it because I trust Badass. I’m not lying to my Brothers and trust they won’t lie to me. The Princes and most Brothers brought up Badass have no reason to lie, so in return, we have reason for that trust and show respect and honor to each other.”

“Brotherhood. Here, here, Pres.” Jarrett makes me smile. “The thing is, Julius, we don’t take shit and make sure we have proof for everything. Pres Zeke wouldn’t say it if there was no proof. He’s a BSC Badass President. BSC West territory is run by Cort so you know those Presidents are following the Bible to a T. Cort would blow their Clubs up if they don’t.”

I throw chin agreeing.

“So, where’s the Deputy?” Julius asks.

I shrug. “We never met her. The job was getting the squatter off Badass land.”

Ethan jumps in, “The Deputies are escorting her with the moving truck to the Veritable Club tonight. They planned on a dinner for her last day. Get this, they weren’t allowed to talk to her because of the old Sheriff pussy.”

I tune them out and watch Julius and Jarrett talk about the law app. It’s going to be a short night for me. Rehashing the day is usually done alone with a fire and night sky. Hannah

and the spirit parties are, surprising to me, a loss I never thought I'd feel.

Marli

Hugging the Lieutenant, which he initiated, feels wrong. He's never hugged me before. I step back and give the other Deputies a smile. They're being weirder than weird tonight, so them leaving is a relief.

Closing the door to my new little Adobe house, I take in the room thinking it's perfect. A reminder of who I am is on the walls in picture form but a whole lot less of it makes this move feel right. The shelves in the living room have a few of Dad's keepsakes mixed in with my own, but it's not shrine-like, it feels like an honor more than an altar. The little kitchen works for me since they serve meals in the kitchen pod on the compound and at the Club. I'm more of a minimalist than hoarder. I like the balance. My room has more pictures of me and Daddy along with us with some of the hands on the ranch. Nowhere are there pictures of the Deputies.

This last year showed me they aren't the family I thought they were. I heard every word, or excuse, they spouted tonight, but seriously, they could have told me when I got home from the disastrous 'grief leave'. Seeing the wives and girlfriends around town pisses me off now more than when I did. They couldn't have told me? That's not how families treat each other.

I shake my head smiling. The Brotherhood means I'm never alone again. That beats the hell out of a 'family' that so easily left me to deal alone with the leech, land and sale of the entire Champion legacy without a word of advice or encouragement. They were the only family I had left after Daddy died and the ranch hands moved on.

It's done and over. I even got dinner and didn't really move anything in, they did. I guess that's something but it doesn't mean I'm jumping into the kid parties and backyard barbecues because they emptied boxes for me and bought me dinner.

The last year and leech taught me lessons I'll never forget.

The phone on the counter beeps a tone I don't know. Taking it off the new tablet, I smile. Debra is inviting me to the fire pit in the middle of the compound. A picture shows of a woman younger than me and Debra holding wineglasses.

Dropping my old phone on the tablet, I stuff the new into my utility pocket and walkout. It's time to start my new life. "I'll make you proud, Daddy." My normal whispered promise as I close the door has me smiling. I know he's already proud. The Lieutenant, who's the new acting Sheriff, said Badass dealt with the fraud that shot him. I can't believe I worked for the schmuck all this time and hope dealt means he's now missing. Justice feels like the perfect way to start this new life.

Chapter Two

One week

Marli

I hand the glasses to Kyler smiling. The weeklong VP versus Kyler debate is forgotten in my excitement. I'm done early! Still making you proud, daddy, I think proudly.

"You did good, Marli. Lead is where you belong, you earned it. This is your last class with me. Next week you're on whatever Debra and Jeti set you up with for IT and Trainer."

I'm ready to do cartwheels but hold still and just nod like my body isn't ready to explode in a full out cheer that would make the Green Bay Packer Cheerleaders proud.

He laughs and my eyes close tight. I forgot again. "The reading thing is annoying."

"You remind me of Mikey. She's Nova's old lady and a Prince. Get lunch and I'll let Pres know how you did." He forgot my shift.

"I'm on a Training shift."

His head is shaking no. "You're a Lead. Those rides are for trainees. I put a trainee in your place this morning." VP isn't wasting the space on me.

I'm stunned for a second. "What do I do after lunch?"

He points to the window. "Go for a ride, check the work in town out, take a nap. You're off until Church on

Sunday.” He turns to leave but looks back. “I need to get to a lunch meet with Pres about the businesses.”

I thought Pres did business, Jeti said he’s another Midas. Whatever. A whole weekend alone again. This sucks.

“Boss Marli! I ride to town to you?” Aaron almost runs into me as I’m walking out of the classroom. The little guys are so smart, which goes with their angelic little faces well.

“Am I needed in town?”

“Boss Debra say press and mill done.” Is he conning me?

“You were on that, weren’t you?” He asked me for the storage keys and got Prospects to move the pictures, books and furniture, then clean up buildings and machines. They were dusty but pretty clean when I took Debra and Jinx through them. Daddy had them renovated a couple of years before he died. We never had so much as a rodent break into anything in town. Daddy even had the hands spray for bugs regularly. It was like walking through a time warp every time I went into the buildings. One minute you’re here, the next you’re in 1800-1950 depending on what building you walk into.

His little head bob without looking me in the eye has me bending lower. “Boss Debra say I ride to you to mill.” He didn’t answer but I’m smiling.

“You’re getting me to town because the two buildings are finished?”

He looks shocked. “I no tell you. I tell you Boss Debra say finished and ask I ride to you.” So he’s making sure I get

to town. The little guy is cute.

“Then let’s get to town to see the mill and newspaper buildings.” I give him my hand figuring he’s got a job to do. I’ve ridden for years but can’t say I want to for work, so I’m glad Aaron is with me today. Although this bike isn’t as big as Daddy’s, I still don’t want to ride for work. I think Pres was let down by that after him and Debra rode the trike beside me on my new bike to town last Sunday. He mentioned that I can ride like it surprised him. Mostly I rode dirt bikes on the ranch. Daddy’s bike was too heavy and I could see me with road rash from head to toe trying to ride that monster on the winding driveway, let alone a road. Pres gave me this new bike for Daddy’s. I think it was a good trade because this one is a Ducati.

The ride has me thinking about Daddy and town. Other than the pictures we had up at the house, there can’t be much changed. They were cleaned and painted during the renovations. Daddy wanted to preserve them for the national historical registry or something and Pres promised he’d turn them into museums with the old livery building split to a gift shop. There’s not much to see in that one so it made sense to me. They even have the old brothel’s second floor being outfitted as a B&B. That will be a sight. 1800 on the first floor and Alexa controlled rooms on the second and third ought to be interesting, but they’re doing everything to keep the history alive. I can’t complain, it’s more than Dad imagined it could be. I hope this makes him proud too.

Turning onto the main road has me in shock. “Holy Moses.”

Aaron's little giggle gets me paying attention as we pull in front of the old newspaper building. It's good because I would have wiped out trying to see everything at once. Bikes and trucks are lining the angled parking spaces. I've never seen so many people in town and wonder what it must have looked like with horses and carriages when the town was flourishing.

Looking up I smile. "Oh, my Lord. The Marshal's office is open?"

"The Brothel still has crews in it but everything else is done. The soda fountain from the fifties opened today."

Pres makes me jump answering, but I follow his hand and smile. "I never saw inside, we had a few pictures but Champions didn't own it."

"A Brother bought it for taxes owed and the Club did the renovations so it stays within the theme of the town." His long arm moves to the left. "Same with the other businesses on that side. The dress-maker front is old but new shit is lining the walls behind the glass partition. For the Champion side, the Marshal is a PD substation, the mercantile is a working home improvement store with the old partitioned in the front. The press building is a museum, the mill is a museum and the livery is the gift shop behind the glass."

"It put all new plumbing and electric at the back of every building, so the front stays authentic. They got new electric but it's not seen," VP adds. This was the business meeting. They're too much.

"Thank you. My dad would love it. I love it." Badass is helping me make daddy's dreams come true. I hope he sees

it.

Pres turns back holding onto his big dog. “I do too. The Club I grew up in was on the historic register but changes fucked it up. It’s back on the register now and has all the behind the scene updates. Jordan has Alpha a technological wonderland while the Club is built with pegs and shit. It’s crazy but impresses the hell out of everyone walking through the doors.”

Debra moves closer with Aaron. “The Brothel is like that. It should be finished Monday or Tuesday Danny said.”

“The Badass architect?” Danny talked to me about the old pictures I had of the town at the house. He’s not from around here but worked on renovating historic homes in New England. That’s way older than here so I sent him the whole file Daddy had me put together a couple of years ago. I thought he was making up work for me in between school and the Academy but it turns out he’s just always been smarter than me.

“He’s been here all week. He was a Premier builder but likes the old shit. He did the Alpha Club and got it back on the register,” Pres says taking Debra’s hand and crossing the street.

Danny has the pictures, furniture and background history of all dates and owners of buildings with all the crap in storage tagged from whatever buildings they came out of. Danny said I could have made a fortune on eBay with that file. Touching everything again will never happen so I gladly gave Aaron the keys to the storage boxes. The Prospects must have loved that job. I swear my family saved everything from

chamber pots to old printing press empty chemical tin containers. They all must have been in on the museum display plan like Daddy. Apparently, I'm too young to catch that particular bug.

Pres, his dog and Debra turn into the old mill. I follow with VP and Aaron, still not believing that two weeks has this ghost town transformed into a working town. The genies granting wishes aren't done obviously. Today I feel like Alice in Wonderland.

Bishop

“When did they start all this?” Jinx said less than a hundred for population just weeks ago.

VP smiles. “A couple of weeks ago with the press, mill, ice cream and clothes store. The PD, Brothel and restaurant started last week. The Champion family side was set up and wired, but didn’t have the plumbing, the crews started on them Monday.” And they’re done. He’s got a right to that smile.

“Badass doesn’t do slow. The girl must be happy.”

He stops in the doorway to the ice cream place. “She’s a Brother patched in. She’s the PD Head.”

“She’s already patched in? No one has said. I had my first Church on Sunday.”

He nods and keeps going. “I forget you run a Club. The Club within the Club is new to me.” He throws me chin.

“Isn’t Protectors a Club within a Club?”

He stops and points to swivel stools at the long counter. It’s an old-fashioned ice cream shop like in Bravo but looks a lot older. “It is and isn’t. At Princes, we worked the Prince Club because our crew was all Princes. Here, we have jobs at different Clubs but stay connected as Protectors through Justice and Teller at the Protector compound. We’re not a separate Club but have a Pres and VP that guide our department.”

Looking around, I think about that. “That’s why Justice says Head of?”

“Exactly. He’s President and Teller VP but they don’t run a Club. Luke Rayne doesn’t either, he’s POT of FBI Ops for Badass. It’s like a Head of but needs the President distinction as the Lead for the Badass side of all the FBI Ops Centers. Justice is the Lead for all ability Protectors nationwide.”

That clears up a lot. “Everything looks complicated when you don’t ask. I’m glad I asked. So, having a Club means I’m not privy to all that happens in Veritable but I’m on the Veritable Club land. My job doesn’t interfere or even connect me to your Club. The weekly meets for me start next week so that may change. I’ll at least get updates and Brother gossip once the Brothers start going to the Club, that’s your Club, we share it.”

He laughs like I knew he would, he’s a laid-back Brother. “Being your first Church means you’re not streaming Pres. I wouldn’t either. They needed to hear you.”

I’m glad he saw that. It felt important to me too. “The new Brother is the PD Head. She was a Deputy for her dad, a Sheriff, so the law is in her. What do you need from me?” I wasn’t summoned here for nothing.

“Your new law app and the suit training. Cort wants her fast tracked in and said you can get her flying. She’s done with the Bible, is ranked high as a Protector and knows the job. The new Sheriff doesn’t have manpower to protect our new towns and has no problem with a Badass PD. This town went from less than a hundred to just over eight thousand before we were even open. We have two others that log more than twenty thousand new and all we’ve done is build

neighborhoods so far. They're bringing in businesses left and right."

Where the fuck are they all coming from? "She's going to need a huge PD force."

He shakes his head. "We have the PD teams already in place, we needed one Brother to tie them all together and that's Marli Champion. She's like Nova's old lady, Mikey, who is a Protector without ability and grew up with nothing holding her down."

I don't know Mikey well but know she got some program to work to build Clubs with Brothers that mesh well and spread Badass. I smile, like this one, Jinx has been drawing people in before he's been officially open and the Club runs as if he's been here for years.

"She's in my next class?"

He smiles. "Pres said she starts Monday. Get her up on the suit and app. You've got her for a week."

"You got her suit ready?" I'd be surprised if it's not.

"It's done tomorrow. Did you pick Officers?"

I guess we're done with the PD Head.

"Yeah, Ethan is my second at VP. Jarret is physical and maintenance, Andy is planning and new or specialty laws."

"Julius?"

"I'm not set on him. I'm leaning more toward Cyrus, he's rough but knows his shit and has been in Badass since he retired from the service. I think he was an Army Ranger."

He nods. “He was. Cort liked him too. What’s up with Julius?”

I shrug. “He’s a little too nit-picky and is just learning the Club. He may work out in time but I need Officers that know the law and Badass now.”

“I see your point. Let’s get lunch. Cort and Justice will show when they show.”

“I’m all for that but I have a class in two hours.” I follow him out wondering where we’re eating.

“We’ll have you back before that. Cort doesn’t do long meets.”

He’s right so I relax and follow to the building that says, ‘Boarding House Eatery’ and have to ask. “This isn’t the other B&B?”

“No, Brother. The boarding houses and hotels in the west separated from the eateries early on according to what I read. We still have Hojo’s or Howard Johnson’s that have the restaurants attached in New England. I guess it was different out here.”

“Boarding houses had a dining room but it was small like the detached kitchens. Fire and heat were the reasons for detachment, but some were closer to crudely run water supplies that were brought in later. The ice houses delivered by carriage so the kitchen needed to be accessible. I read it was well known to travelers that saloons gave food for free as long as they bought two drinks. It was always salty foods so they’d need more drink.” I smile thinking it was a good racket. It’s not like anyone was handing bottled waters out.

He laughs. “I read that too and laughed at the salted local game, salted peanuts and green pork. I think Dr. Seuss must have heard the stories of the old west from someone. Green eggs and ham were real, Brother.”

I sit in the old-fashioned room and nod at the Brothers I see. The food must be good since it isn't empty in here. “How many restaurants are here?”

“Four to-go places, two restaurants and a diner. The to-go are Lebanese, sub shop, Mexican and Chinese. There's a Dunkin' and pizza place opening just outside of town. The new backroad that Brothers will use from the Club, will eventually have neighborhoods, but the utility and town maintenance are already there. With the new road, they'll be able to make it into town even in the winter.”

I shake my head and throw chin to the Prospect for the menu. “It's no wonder the people left. Plows that can't make the town aren't much help.” Nebraska isn't Alaska but they get snow and long periods of seclusion, possible hunger and pent-up anger can't be easy, especially if you've got kids. Wait, there couldn't have been a school. Less than a hundred in population doesn't include money for a teacher's salary.

The menu has regular food. I like this place and think the meatloaf sandwich delivered across from us looks good.

Marli

Jeti is younger than me and is SAA for the Club. I still can't believe she's a fighter pilot, in a freakin' jet and a high Officer in the Club. The girl is like eighteen. I don't think I'd ever throw out, *'I fly choppers too, but fight in a jet.'* That's all. Holy shit, these people are all a little much to take. Being one of the youngest in school, college and Deputy doesn't mean much around here. The job is the job.

“You're saying I'm Head of PD for three Badass towns?”

She rolls her eyes. “I just said that. Did you tell Debra about the Mill? You're off the schedule we made for next week.”

I'm off the schedule because I'm training with a law PD Flight Guard guy that will teach me to fly in a special suit and train me on a law app that gives law from my new tablet or phone. All a little too much but no big deal to the Badass rabbit hole inhabitants I fell in with. “Yeah, I sent her the old brochures and history. If I'm Head of PD for three towns, what does the Sheriff do?” The new PDs were already working well and lowered our calls as it was. I follow her right past the Mill and into the little square. It's a cute little walking park from the 1800s.

She doesn't say anything until she sits and waves for me to, on a newly refinished bench. “The population has exploded in the area. Pres said quite a few will move right back out but more will move in. Masons relocating to true Mason Clubs are a big part of that influx. The Sheriff will be

picking up from PD and do his Sheriff stuff. I'm not PD or Sheriff and have never been in a Club until this one. I'm a Protector from Princes." That's more of a rabbit hole than this one, from what I'm told, the Princes are the reader and freaky magicians according to Debra.

Jeti laughs drawing my attention away from the newly renovated and landscaped square. "What? Oh shit, you're a reader too?" Damn, I forgot again.

"Yep, but I'm not a magician. We have abilities..."

I put my hand up. "VP explained. I'm using Debra's word for it. Who teaches me the new job? I thought I was going to be PD." That's a job I can do in my sleep.

"With your training, you're more than a PD Officer. Cort doesn't care about age and gender. If you've got the training, you've got the job. I wanted to be a trainer so I'm a trainer." And SAA for the new and according to everyone, rapidly growing Club. She nods. "Bishop will teach you the suit and app, ask him your questions. He was brought up Badass and is a Protector. His Club is training law for Flight Guard PD. He wouldn't have the job..."

I nod. "If he couldn't do it. I get it. I'll ask. It sounds like the Sheriff job and I know that one." I helped Daddy with paperwork when he got busy.

"Good. So tonight is an old lady meet, tomorrow you're riding with Freedom on a shift, then an assessment, Sunday you get recognized as the PD Head and Monday you're in training at the Flight Guard PD Club."

I nod like I understood all that. She smiles. “You will and I’m hungry. The Lebanese bakery is killing me. We had one in Mass.” She pulls me up and over to a small shop that I’ve never seen occupied, as a matter of fact, I’ve never seen even an old flaky painted name on it. It does smell good in here.

“Lebanese pies are a great snack back home.” She points, “two spinach pies.” Spinach pie? The rabbit hole is getting weirder.

One bite in and I think I like the rabbit hole. It’s less than two bucks of heaven.

She laughed when I dragged her back in for a meat pie and spinach flat bread but I took it and found a new love for less than five bucks.

Getting back to my new house, I finally sit and rehash the night. Old lady meets are in another rabbit hole I love. Freedom doesn’t take shit and is so blunt, I loved her immediately. She reminds me of Dad. I never saw him as crotchety, he was intelligent, wise, determined, capable and said what needed to be said. I loved that about him too.

Seren is funny and knew my questions before I asked. Hannah said she was the first old lady at Phoenix so she’s good at welcoming new women in. I pointed out that I’m not an old lady and was corrected to ol’ without the ‘d’ but never answered for the no ol’ man.

Attiquin said she's not either so it felt okay to be in this particular rabbit hole. Attiquin is ex-FBI from a Providence Ops office making our connection feel normal. She knows the job on a federal level and had the same training I did.

There were so many different boards in the meeting room, it was hard to keep up with names and Clubs but I took notes while they were talking and think I got them all. The most notable to me were Attiquin and Freedom for the common job similarities, Faith and Hannah from Champion - a name I obviously connect with, White Wave, Kateri and Maiyun - something about them felt comfortable like we've known each other before but it's the first time I've met them.

The weird didn't end there. Jetti said White Wave was Ellison's daughter while Kateri and Maiyun were family to her from the Mason-Indian that Dad once told me about. It's a small world and the rabbit hole makes it feel smaller. Debra said Crow is the Indian that Cort grew up with in the MC Badass Club and is where Pres and his twin Brother were raised. I felt dizzy when she went on to say that was *by Crow, Cort's dad when Crow died, then Cort when his dad was killed*. Cort is who took out Ellison, then the fraud of a Sheriff who shot my dad.

It all leads to Badass being the genie that flipped my world around and handed me a new place as the Head of a PD, with flying officers and more of a connection to Badass than I ever thought was possible. My dad rode with the Mason-Indian, Crow, and a bootlegger then black-market dealer before he moved to New Mexico. My dad hated the desert and left New Mexico then Colorado to come back to the ranch and

make something of himself in the law field. At least that's the story I got, but I bet there was a whole lot more to it.

It's definitely a strange small world but no one is connected to me personally. I wonder why that is and think about growing up on the ranch. My mom died when I was born but she wasn't married to Daddy. He was older and hired a woman to take care of me until I was three when I switched to a series of Indian nannies because I was in pre-school. The nannies all moved on with the hands but I don't remember them.

I drag myself to bed thinking life is complicated but I don't really know what makes me feel that tonight.

Chapter Three

Two days

Bishop

The Security meet is the same as it was at Champion. They have another Veritable Flight Guard team already that will be in the Law classes for training. I sent their Lead, Steel, the app so they have valid questions when they show. Other than that, I'm a consultant and trouble shooter for Veritable PD and BSC Ops. I can live with that.

Originally, I thought we'd be doing Ops for Veritable Rising, but it turns out we'll be Ops for BSC weird or 'legally compromising situation' and I can live with that too. For the local Ops, I don't need more than me and a partner, which so far has been Ethan. We have an on-call schedule for calls clarifying legal shit that the Officers will man with me. It all works out so I'm not the only Brother answering questions.

Inner Circle isn't a meet I was ever in. Planning for a Club I'm not really part of had me quiet. I had nothing to add to their business and tourist plans. Pres walks out with me.

"The Inner Circle meet doesn't give you much input. It's in Zeke's book so I added you here. We'll be getting more trainees for PD here but they're not all in the suits." Jinx doesn't hedge.

"Is this my way out?"

His smile relaxes me. “No. You teach law to the PD Leads and Officers. I wouldn’t be surprised if you’re teaching it to regular PD as time goes on.”

I nod. “We did classes at Champion so it’s needed. You’re doing classes for BSC West?”

He nods. “We are but it’s for regular PD.”

I can see the need for more law training there. Civilians would shit a brick if they knew anyone with a GED and no felonies can be a cop as long as they pass the physical test. PDs try to certify their officers but money and lack of training means it’s hit and miss. “We can set up classes here as part of your training. I have the trainers but not the room to house regular PD.”

He stops and Champ leans on his leg. “That will work. I’ll get Kyler the plan for when Cort springs it on me.”

I throw chin and laugh walking through the door.

“Bishop.”

Turning, I wonder if I should have said bye or something.

“I’m glad you’re here. I wasn’t sure about how this would work but you’re easy to work with. Let me know if you need anything.”

I smile, he’s easy to work with, making it easy for me. “I will, Boss. Right now, I’m listening, learning and pushing forward. I haven’t found anything to ask about yet.”

“I’m Jinx. You’re a President same as me. I’m learning and don’t mind being Jinx to my Brothers.”

I throw him chin. “I feel it too, Jinx. A break from the Pres shit means I can relax. I miss being one of the Brothers when everyone pussyfoots around me.”

“Good. I’ll need an ear at some point and will find you.” He throws chin letting the door go.

“I don’t pussyfoot around you, Pres.”

I roll my eyes at my new VP. “You don’t know how to mind your business either. The other Brothers do. No offense, but I’m not into reliving Ops and calls or football.” The Brother is all about the job or ball.

“You are boring to hang with but I don’t hold it against you. You always get the women’s attention drawing them to us at the Club.”

I hit his shoulder getting a laugh out of him. “Did you get what you need from Debra?”

“Yeah, everything goes on Lorelei’s app. It has a drop down for us as a BSC charge. The payments for our Ops, training and on-call time get taken from the schedule time app and will pay the bills.”

I wait for him to swing his leg over. “That’s what the book said.”

“I needed the how, Boss.” He’s taking the job seriously and I don’t see how that can hurt, but the fuckin’ book breaks everything down so questions are nil or kept to a minimum.

“Good job.” I have no idea what to say so that fits.

“The Deputy was on the mat with Freedom. She was holding her own when I went in.” Mucimi said she’s Protector level.

“She’s due at the Club for the flight training class before lunch. I have a class in twenty minutes. Get her the suit video when she shows. Her suit is in locker seven and it’s keyed so her thumb will open it. Andy should show with the trainees just before the new Brother is due to meet me at the gazebo if she has questions.”

“Roger, Pres.”

I roll my eyes at being Pres and not Bishop.

Marli

Freedom said seeing men flying is normal now. I saw it on the news but never in person...until now. The genies that popped up at the ranch didn't fly around, they just appeared and disappeared which also wasn't normal. Freedom told me this is normal for Protectors like Mucimi, who I've come to liken to that genie because he grants wishes. The other man gave information and showed me in a Badass job, but Mucimi bought the land and all but the guest ranch house affording me the easy transition to make those new job pictures my reality. Today, that reality is slapping me in the face. I'm going to learn how to fly.

Freedom followed me to change, then here to the 'gazebo' that looks like it's on steroids. "Do you fly?"

Her smile makes her beautiful, she should smile more. "No, and I'm not going to. I'm also not Head of three PDs so I don't need it."

"Great."

She hits my shoulder. "Bishop helped train Cort. You'll be fine. We have a shift in the morning, be ready."

"I will. I'm glad it's not flying."

"Nope, riding. You were fine today and didn't let the bitch rattle you. I'd have shot her with the laser. For the assessment, tomorrow is martial arts, be ready so I'm not late for the boy's art show." She told me they're excited but didn't tell me anything else about her triplets. It's a sign of compartmentalizing in people. Work is work.

“I won’t be late.”

“Good to hear it won’t be a problem for me, but you’re a trained Deputy so I didn’t expect it. Hey, Brother. Heard you were here. Thanks for showing and give the boys a bump from me.” The deep voice has me turning. It’s like a nighttime meditative voice, soothing and shit. Weird.

“Bishop. I need to go. I’ll send today’s part of the assessment on the chopper. This Club fits you. Any new law shit I need?” Freedom said she knew the President here but this shows she knows him well.

Bishop, the President, smiles. “In Nebraska: no burping in church or parents can get arrested, barber can’t eat onions between 7am and 7pm and a man can’t run around with a shaved chest. If you’re into munchkins, you can’t legally buy them in Leigh.”

I laugh, it’s all true and pretty much overlooked by everyone. “He’s right.”

Freedom nods taking a step back. “He always is. They come in handy when you need a reason to get time for more reason. I’ve got to go.”

I turn back to the President.

“She’s a smart Brother. So, you’re Champion. It’s the name of the last Club I was in and felt surreal seeing the town name and then on the land parcel.” What the hell?

“Why would you look at the deed?” They checked up on me at Veritable but this isn’t Veritable Rising. VP said it’s a different Club *under* Veritable Rising.

He nods. “Valid question. I was called to the squatter removal. He called in a shooting and said he had legal papers. All we found was a vacate order and you shot him with rubber. Flight Guard showed with us and removed him for Badass.”

All these names get confusing. “You’re the Flight Guard PD training Club not Flight Guard?”

His smile has me looking away. Good looks got me a year of hell. I am not falling for that again.

“Right, sort of. We teach more Law here for higher ranking PD that are Flight Guard. I didn’t have a team put together yet and Flight Guard was called to the scene, I was keeping it legal, well, somewhat. I shot his foot with a real bullet so he’d stop whining. He was removed and last I heard, a shelter shipped him back to Vegas so he’d stop whining to them.” He’s got me smiling as I look from the flying trainees to him.

“He is a whiner. I’m learning how to do that with this uniform that doesn’t feel like more than the regular gear I was issued.” I point at the trainees.

“Yeah. You’re not in the suit unless you want it, but Jinx said you need to know what your Officers can and cannot do.”

“I need it. I can’t command three departments without knowing the job they’re supposed to be doing. I’m certified in everything the Academy offered so I could move up in the Sheriff’s Department but flying is not a training they offer. I’m not sure anyone but Badass is offering it.” I never heard of any police that fly.

He nods and reaches to the angled folded section of my coat, that I didn't zip all the way up. I'm surprised but stop the slap to his hand when he flips the fold and pinches an indented section just at the edge. "On and off. I saw your training and no flight was listed. The FBI-Badass Training Centers are just getting set up to train in the suits. Flight Guard is new and Cort has the training Club up and running. We're training only the PD part of that in Law. Let's start. Hands on my forearms. You're giving a little push up. I'll keep us close to the ground, you don't let my arms go." He pinches his button then puts his arms out.

Great, I've got to touch the big guy with the dark hair, a goatee, deep silky voice and sparkling blue eyes. I do and give a little bounce then tighten my hands on his arms.

"The suit has sensors that respond to your movements. We'll go higher and hover then lower and you try it alone." His deep voice doesn't fit his face.

I pay attention when we're moving higher. "Pointing my toes gets me higher?"

"It's sensors on your legs. The straight leg look is covered by pockets but the bands of material cup your calf so the muscles you use moving your feet is what the suit responds to. You don't need to point your toes. Keep still for a minute." He lets me go and moves. "Watch my legs. Even a slight jerk like a quick jump up, down, forward or backward will move you. That movement is a must to master to keep from being shot or hit in the air." Holy Moses.

The explanation and movements make sense but I've never flown in a suit. "Am I going down before I try those

moves?”

He stops in front of me and puts his arms out. “Yeah, don’t exaggerate movements and you’ll move slower. We’ll practice with obstacles when you have the basics down.”

“Do you train everyone to fly?” The trainees on the other side of the gazebo move like they were born with a suit.

“Nope. I learned from Maverick with Cort and trained with him so he’d get all possible defensive movements down. While he was at Elan, I’d practice with the Alpha-Bits and they’re great teachers.” He’s never taught anyone how to do this? Great.

“Where did all these men learn?” We lower slowly so I must be catching on quick.

“Good. They’re Supervisor and Officer level for PDs and were trained with the suits by Zeke’s Club at Elan. It’s the Club in a Club for specialty training. Zeke does Flight Guard and I’m PD Flight Guard Law. The reason I got was Supervisors and Officers need the Laws for their area. I’m the teacher for BSC West.” He shrugs like that’s all. He did say Flight Guard but all the names jumble together in my head.

Another rabbit hole. “BSC West is half the country.” I learned that just last week in Badass boot camp.

“Yeah, but the population isn’t as congested as eastern US. Go up and try side to side.” He isn’t worried about so many different state laws, I guess.

I rise up looking at how close I get from the roof.

“Good. Try the side to side.” He scares the hell out of me and catches my arm before I lower past him.

“Shit!”

“Relax. I wouldn’t send you up without a safety net.”
His smile has me shaking my head.

“Thanks. Do you have actual nets?” I move side to side easily then try it faster.

He laughs staying close as I move. “No. I’m it. I have two Brothers that will be working with you once you get basic movements down. I don’t know them well enough to trust they’d be that net.”

Oh geesh. “Thanks for that too.” I bounce up, then down and turn fast from one side, then the other. This isn’t so hard.

“You learn fast. That will be a help.” He puts an arm out toward me while looking at the men on the other side. “Andy, Steel, she’s ready for the figure eight.”

A man and woman bounce up from the side. “That’s quick, Boss,” the woman from the locker room says.

“She’s got the basics down shakily but she’s got it. Hover about fifteen feet apart. I’ll be below. Champion, you’re making a figure eight around them. If you fall, I’ll catch you. Start slow then move faster. Tell them about your job once you get the figure eight down. Talking while moving will show us how fast we can push you to the next step.” He’s smart but scary.

“Roger, Pres.” I turn toward the man and woman.

“Boss or Bishop. You’re a Head of like me, sort of.”

I turn back fast, surprised I didn't fall when I spin a little farther than I should have. "You're a President. The trainer said Boss or Pres."

He nods. "It's right but Head of and Presidents say Boss or a name. I call Jinx, Jinx and Cort, Boss. For you, I guess Jinx would be Boss."

"Badass has a lot of rules. Thanks, I didn't hear that rule."

He waves his hand. "Go on, we can talk about rules when training is done." *He's* the one who stopped *me*.

"Roger, Bishop."

I hear his deep chuckle from lower but don't look back as I make my figure eight. On the third one, I move faster and give procedures from my new PD Head book.

As I'm whizzing around, a ball comes out of nowhere causing my figure eight to wobble.

The woman laughs. "Keep moving but don't let the ball hit you, Champion."

"Is this the obstacles he talked about and what's your name?" I told them mine on the first figure eight.

"Balls and boxes are the first obstacles. I'm Andy, a trainer for Flight Guard PD Law." The woman doesn't explain boxes. I'll find out soon enough.

"I'm Steel. I'm Lead for a Flight Guard PD team for Veritable Rising. I was the Security Head of Bravo Rising." So he's a supervisor Lead.

Security is different from the PD according to what I learned last week. All the training they have is better than the Sheriff and PD. I've picked up from Badass PD and know they're trained more like I was with the military group because most of those guys are Badass.

Instead of procedures, I ask my questions while dodging the ball. Steel was a Prospect right out of high school, knows a lot about Badass and the way the Clubs work. Andy is from the east, was a sergeant in Springfield Mass and knows her law. She learned Badass at Phoenix two months ago and liked Freedom's classes too.

I'm not really doing much up here but I'm glad when Pre-Bishop calls us down.

"Lower, Champion. It's lunch then you're in Andy's class. Steel has classes then you're both back with me at three. Drop the suits for charging, we'll be moving over longer distances at different heights. You did good today and are ready to move on. Maverick had us training basics for hours our first day. I'm not into the repetition if it's not needed. That's what practice time is for." Thank God for that. Hours sounds like overkill.

I nod, genuinely grateful.

"I'll show her the charging room and get her to lunch, Boss." Andy stops my next questions.

"She sits at our table while she's here. Cort has her fast tracked for the week. She's the night training I told you about."

Andy gives him her undivided attention. It's a sign of respect I note. "Roger. I have the classes ready in virtual for her. Is she here at dinner?"

"Yeah, she's in VIP on our compound." Bishop nods at us and walks away with Steel.

"He does a lot of definitive nodding," I say softly when they're away from the gazebo.

"It's called throwing chin. They all do it. It's like hi, bye, agreement or sorry to see you go - RIP."

I laugh. "Why would you do that for an RIP statement?"

"Respect for life, or maybe sorry for your family? I didn't ask. The way it was said was *'bye before your last breath.'*" She didn't ask?

"They have a lot of rules. I learned most last week but know there are a million more I need to know. There's got to be a whole professional courtesy section I haven't heard a word about." The name or Boss to a President if you're President or Head of is just one of them.

She smiles holding the locker room door open. "I don't know them all but will help with whatever comes up. You're in my class after lunch. We need to step it up. I do weird or what they call specialty law and Flight Guard planning." She moves fast to the first locker while getting her coat off.

I try to keep up with her changing and ask, "Weird law?"

She pulls a different coat on. It's got the emblem they call colors embossed on the back so it's only readable in good lighting. My coat has colors that are a patch in actual colors.

"I do three classes, one is Defensive strategy with what the law allows. Planning is with laws for the areas that's kind of dry. My favorite is the weird law, it's different laws to initially hold a suspect in order to find out what the hell is going on. The charge can be dropped and another put in place or you can drop it and let the suspect walk." This is what Freedom said about the crazy laws still on the books in Nebraska.

"I never thought about using them as a Deputy. It would have come in handy on a few occasions without me putting effort into searching cases. I'm definitely using it."

She smiles lifting the hanger with the suit on it. "We got four minutes."

Shit! I stuff my boots on my feet and stand, grabbing my hanger. "Where is the charging room?"

"On the way to the front door." She's not wrong. Turning right coming out of the locker room, it's a door away. Men are waiting in line but move letting Andy get in first. "Follow me, Champion. I'll get the racks, Brothers. Give me a second."

When the men and women part, I see the half door open on the top. "Sorry, Boss." The Prospect looks embarrassed.

"Get the other racks." She pulls the first out."

“Roger, Boss.” The Prospect opens the bottom part of the door and rolls a clothing bar cart toward Andy.

“Champion, push it to the left so the Brothers can get to class or lunch.”

I hang my suit and pull the cart to the wall at the left. She moves a second cart to the right.

“Yours goes on the other side.” Steel takes my suit off the bar and walks it to the other cart with me following. “They’re labeled but Prospects run the charging stations. Easy is better for them. They’re new too.” Steel is an empathetic guy.

“Thanks. It’s always good to have the little insights.”

Andy laughs pulling the arm of my coat. “Professional courtesy isn’t something she got in Badass training so she needs all that insight, Steel. I was going to ask Belinda at dinner.”

Steel nods. “She knows. She helped Mag with the Prospect training.”

I have to ask. “Who is Belinda?”

“My ol’ lady. She’s a Prospect trainer.” Steel surprises me.

“I didn’t meet her at the ol’ lady meeting.”

He opens the door to a huge dining room and living room combination. Another steroid induced room in this rabbit hole. “She was at Little Brothers while the ol’ ladies met. Debra sends it to her so she doesn’t miss anything.” He points to a table over to the side.

“She’s at the Veritable Club or here?”

Andy moves me forward. “She’s at the big Club. We’re over there, Steel sits with his team.”

I turn my head seeing Steel pull his chair. “Thanks, Steel.”

The President isn’t at the table. I have questions but I guess anyone can answer them.

“Where’s Pres?” Andy isn’t shy with her own questions.

The guy to my left answers. “Ops call. Ethan is with him so it’s a BSC Op he’s a consultant for.”

“This is the trainer’s table. That’s Julius, a lawyer, Jarret is ex Lieutenant for Minnesota Sheriff and Cyrus ex-Ranger brought up in the Club. This is Champion, ex-Deputy and from the town here. Her dad was the Sheriff.” Andy points out the men.

“Shit. Ellison was a piece of work. I was on the Protector Ops collecting slaves. Sorry about your dad, Brother.” Cyrus has me nodding.

“Thanks. We didn’t like him but didn’t have proof of anything until I got dad’s last body cam feeds. I was put on grief leave before I got to watch the whole thing.”

He shakes his head. I’d have seen the fraudulent acting Sheriff if I watched it before the fake Lieutenant told me I was on leave and they’d handle the case. I drop it. It happened and I’m here.

“So you’re the wonder girl. How do you like Badass?”
I look at Julius not sure I like the reference.

“Wonder Girl?”

“You trained for everything.” Julius eats as if he doesn’t really care about the answer.

I shrug. “I finished school young and had to wait to get into the Sheriff’s.”

“Twenty-one. That was smart.” Jarret is cool.

“Thanks. Do you all call women Brother?”

“Yes. Everyone is a Brother no matter the gender. It keeps women equal.” Andy looks like she believes that.

I’m going to Head three PDs so it must be. I nod and order a sandwich hoping for quick. This day and night training will be jam packed.

Bishop

Bishop: "Ethan, give me a push!" He turns and gets what I'm doing, then links his fingers together just before my boot lands on them. I hurdle through the cramped shaft that cannot be an old elevator and stop on the next floor. "I'm in but you aren't making the shaft."

Ethan: "I'll meet you up there, Pres."

Cort: "Dicktwat is three from the top. That was tight, Brother."

Bishop: I don't say a word until the asshole takes two steps on the landing. One stride through the door has me and my gun in front of him. I shoot. "It was tight but I got through." I smile at Ethan pounding up the stairs. "Zeke told Cort the machines, plates and computer are up here. Cuff and restrain him so he's not able to move. Boss, has anyone contacted the Secret Service?"

Cort: "I can get Luke Rayne on this."

Bishop: "You could, Boss, but he's going to get the Secret Service here to pick up the plates, offset printers and whatever else he's using to do the documents. This is major money, Boss. Any missing tools are money makers."

Cort: "Roger. Raid is on while I get what you need. Endo, don't let those state troopers in the building."

Endo: "Roger, Boss." He talks to his Flight Guard team.

Bishop: "Raid, who is IT for me?"

Raid: "Akai is on with me from the ABSZ."

Bishop: “Thanks, Boss. Akai, I’m going to pan over whatever they have up here with my cam and phone. Let me know if I block anything. They’ll need solid proof. Holy fuck. This is a fuckin’ counterfeit factory, Boss.”

Raid: He whistles softly. “Endo, keep that door covered. I’ll send Flight Crew to help. Send your second up to help Bishop record the equipment. Is that a glass blowing station?”

Endo: “Roger, Boss. Two, go help with pictures of equipment. Second floor.”

Bishop: “More than likely, rare coins.” I move closer. “Yeah, look at the tray. There’s got to be a safe, or vault, or both here. Is Zeke still on with us?” I pass what looks like an old press. It’s three separate presses with different denominations. “Ten-dollar bills? The twenty and hundred I get, wouldn’t fifty be better than a ten?”

Raid: “Zeke is on the board but zoned out. His IT said Zeke called to Ben Knight. Something with Badass is on that second floor. I’m calling Teller or Mucimi. Justice is on an Op.”

Bishop: “Roger, Boss.” Something Badass? That’s not money. “Ethan, drag the dick in here and help me look through the docs over there.” Printers, cameras and lighting aren’t there for nothing. The file cabinet and load of drawers are holding something.

Raid: “Bishop, get the machines recorded. Someone will show from the Protectors.”

Bishop: “Roger, Boss, that would be faster. Whatever it is, it’s probably in a safe.” Raid doesn’t answer. “Ethan, get head on, under, behind and over every machine or tool you see. Start from the back.”

Ethan: “Roger, Boss. The pussy is wire tied across the stair posts. He’s duct taped, cuffed and hanging from the outside.” We hear someone laugh on the stairs.

Bishop: I smile. “Good job.”

Ethan: “Chris, everything is recorded from every angle with phone and body cam. You want him to start on the right, Pres?”

Bishop: I throw chin and bend to show the bottom of the presses then fall on my ass. “Fuck. A little warning next time, Brother.”

Christian: “I’m at Princes. There’s only so much freaky we can tone down. Zeke told me to find you. I need you to be my hands.”

Raid: “I wish I was there. He’s in Rhode Island and Arizona. I love the Protectors.”

Bishop: I shake my head. “Raid, I’m muting you if all I’m getting is commentary.” Christian laughs when the piece is silent. “Where do you need me?”

Christian: “Jeremy, find a way in the vault. The safe is in the closet in the office.”

Bishop: Following whatever the hell Christian’s form is called, I turn and scan the big room for Jeremy. I don’t see him and don’t ask. It’s going to be a long day.

I hand the accordion binder to Joshua from the FBI training Center. “This is what Christian gave me from the safe. Teller and Alder came for whatever was in the vault.” I leave that vague. Teller took the boxes directly to Cort.

He throws chin. “You took a shot of everything before it went in the boxes and folder. I had to leave in the middle of it to get here.”

I nod. “I was just a pair of hands.”

He smiles. “Good, Brother, it’s not talked about. The feeds are down. I’ve got to go, Nash is meeting me at the Training Center. He’s flying up to Princes with this one.” He hands me the empty accordion binder he carried in. “Leave that with office supplies.”

I nod getting his time crunch. “Go, Brother.”

He turns before walking out to the landing. “The cameras and audio were fried.”

I don’t ask and watch him leave.

Ethan takes the binder and pitches it onto the desk. “Secret Service and FBI is almost done. That guy was the head of the FBI Center?”

I move around the desk and put the binder up on the shelf in the closet. “FBI-Badass Training Center. He’s the Badass Commander. Ford is the FBI Commander. FBI will hold the equipment in Nevada until it’s transported. I heard

Alpha may be freighting it with agents on board.” I don’t say a word about what isn’t being transported with agents.

The flight gear with no Club name, Badass ID’s, Bible, Phoenix and Mass Club stationary were obvious enough. The 6 usb drives Christian had me plug in was different. I didn’t see the files he was able to pull up and transfer to the drives. Alder came in and did whatever. All he said was ‘*no trace*,’ so I guess there’s no trace. Teller plugged three drives into his laptop and sent them to Akai. I didn’t need to ask why but knew enough not to ask what was on them.

Since the only thing I touched was obviously stolen from Badass, I don’t see it as theft, it’s recovery as far as I’m concerned. “Let’s get to the chopper. I missed my class but have Champion’s training at three.”

Cort has my head shaking before he finishes his first word. “Pablo is headed to your Club to cover you. You’re at Phoenix before heading home.”

“Roger, Boss.” That long day is getting longer.

We land at Veritable with Jinx, Champ and Kyler waiting under the portico. “Did you eat at Phoenix?” Jinx asks.

“Yeah, Cort dragged us to dinner at his compound. It was Italian night and Raid was at Little Brothers covering for Amos.”

He laughs. "Raid's going to be pissed."

I shrug. "Lorelei made him and Daniel a plate. He always bitches but gets the food."

"He does. Cort rags on him about the leftovers he gets."

As long as I've known them, it's always been, so I see it as normal Brother shit. I can see Ethan telling me how boring I am in ten years.

"Cort is impressed with you. He was just going to ship the computers and printers to the Secret Service." That wouldn't have been good. I turn to see Kyler and Ethan walking behind us.

"Every station they had set up has the potential to produce millions. Some of those coins and documents were millions alone."

"That's what Ben said. The extensive recording was a good call. Akai had a log sent and separated the log and feeds by truck as a bill of lading. He got them moving everything too." Jinx is as impressed with the Alpha-Bits as I am.

"That's good. The agents are responsible for everything now."

He points to the bikes. "We're going to the Club. Your Club is there."

As we were setting down, I told Ethan I'm riding to blow the day away. His smirk has me flipping him the bird.

I ride beside Jinx and Champ thinking the Club won't be a bad stop.

Of course, it's loud before we make it inside. This is just not my day. I've got nothing against my Brothers and love the parties and get together as much as the next Brother, but I'm not thrilled with nonstop days without a minute to breathe in between.

"Most Protectors are the same, for the most part, we like our down-time quiet," Kyler says holding the door as I walk by.

"Without reading everyone would help this then."

He smiles, hits my back and walks in behind us. "I'm still reeling. I'll work on that."

I spot Justice, Mase and Teller and know Mucimi is here somewhere. Turning, I take Kyler's forearm. "I don't know why they're all gathered but walk when you can, Brother."

He smiles. "I will. It's hard when they're in the middle of a Club."

I nod. "Hannah told me it's like the volume goes up."

He throws chin and walks to Justice. Hannah said Justice and Teller help shield. I don't get any of it and never asked. She always reads everyone even when they're close. She isn't one to let it out often though and I always appreciated that.

Jinx pulls my cut to Falcon and Jack a few steps away from the Protector Officers. They call them The Three. With Justice, Teller and Mase or Justice, Teller and Mucimi. It surprises me that no one ever tells them that's four. Since it isn't mentioned, I keep it to myself figuring they'd read it.

A hit to my back has me turning before I can do more than throw chin to the Bravo Officers. “Mase. Glad you’re not on fire tonight.”

Falcon laughs. Mase has his Blackhawk smile on. “Nope. You made us laugh. No one has ever asked about the four of us being the three.”

I put a hand up. “It’s been a day for me and I normally don’t question ability shit.”

He nods stopping me. “I’ll find you. It’s an easy explanation.” He’s another easy Brother.

“Thanks, Brother.”

He steps back leaving Falcon and Jack smiling at me.

I shrug. “It’s a valid question.”

Falcon nods while Jinx laughs. “Lead, Teach and Enforce, leader, guardian and Prophet.” Falcon doesn’t say anymore so I think about his list.

“Badass and Indian. I get it.”

He nods.

“The lessons?” Jack asks.

I smile at Falcon. He isn’t going to answer. Mag moves from behind Falcon so I see his head shaking. I don’t answer because Falcon gets a kick out of his clueless brilliant VP so I leave it alone.

“Pres, we watched the cam feed for class. You did a great job in the suit and keeping it legal. They never would be able to convict without all the video and pictures.” Julius is all about the law.

I nod. “FBI moving it, everything logged and recorded will cost close to a lifetime sentence. It was counterfeiting but fraud, intent, distribution and international, with those books they had, is going to cost.” Federal means it’s sticking.

He’s proud. I guess he’s not such a bad Brother when he’s not nit-picking my jobs apart.

Jinx, Jack and Falcon talk about the job today. I was there so I look at the trainees who look like they’re waiting for me. Taking a step has the new Brothers moving closer. Ethan answers questions so I throw chin and hold forearms when they’re held out. The trainees are excited about details not being missed, lasers and knowing the law for different states. I don’t know why that mattered, it was all federal so the state didn’t play in there but I don’t ask. If I do, someone looks stupid and trainees are still learning. I’ll make a point in class tomorrow to correct that without an audience.

“The fed...” Julius stops talking and glares at Ethan.

I jump in, stopping that with a smile at my VP. “We’ll go over details in class tomorrow. Have a drink for the job that was done, Brothers making it back and the Flight Guard making life easy.”

The Brothers cheer that one Hooyah word almost together. I shake my head, then step back to the BSC Officers and shrug.

The female laugh has me turning. “Andy, Champion. I just got back and here. I hope Pablo gave you new movements and ideas to practice on.” My eyes go from one to the other. Andy knows the suit but it never hurts to learn new.

They both nod. “He did. We went to the Club and back at different altitudes. That’s what he called it but we weren’t that high.” Champion is cute and long winded. “After seeing the video, I see why you teach law. Catching is the easy part. Making it matter isn’t always easy and PD needs to handle it right from the beginning. You showed that in spades today. I won’t forget it and plan on all PD seeing it. You’re methodical in procedure and it’s not for nothing.” Jesus.

“Thanks. Jinx is from the Champion Club too. Trask was a SEAL then a Lieutenant in the Sheriff’s Department. He trained us on collecting at the scene. I’ll make sure he knows it’s working and making a difference.”

She smiles and I feel that. Fuck. I turn toward Andy. Her hands go up. “I’m using your worksheets so it’s going out with every class, Pres.”

“Good job.”

I’m pulled from behind so I throw chin and turn. Mag points so I pay attention to Justice and Teller who tell us about a meet for what was on the computers without saying what was on the computers.

I don’t know why I’d be in that. I ask Jinx, “Am I in that meet? I didn’t do anything but plug the drives in. I never saw the screen to know what was going on them.”

Justice gives a small shake of his head to Jinx. I relax. “It’s BSC and you’re a new BSC President. Cort will get with Prez for who should be at the meet. I would think Zeke because some Ops will come out of it and he has some leads but you’re more about the law.”

I smile. "I am not offended to be excluded. If it's not part of my job, I do have classes to train."

They smile and some chuckle but meets that aren't helping my job are taking away from my job. Teller touches my forearm. "Christian hates meets because of that. Cort is like that too." He isn't wrong. Cort hates wasting time on shit that doesn't concern him or any decisions he has to make.

I nod. "We all are. Meets are for info to enhance our jobs. If it's wasted time, it isn't helping anyone."

He nods seriously and tells the others the same thing I just said. I look for a way out. That ride will be nice.

Mase pulls me to an open seat at the bar and calls for a beer. "You should have gotten one when you walked in."

I nod and take the beer from the Prospect that gets a lesson on Presidents getting VIP treatment.

I roll my eyes and hear a little laugh to my right. Champion smiles up at me. "Professional courtesy has its moments but the guy must be new too."

"Prospect and Brothers. We don't have guys. He's new and will learn. I hate to say it will be in the middle of a crowd but most likely it always will."

Her smile and oddly vibrant hazel eyes catch my attention and put a hitch in my heart. "Prospects get training too. I hope they have good trainers and it lasts more than a week."

I laugh and we get to talking about training and the Badass rules not many trainers touch on. My night is looking up.

Mase slaps my back with his Blackhawk smile on and walks away. “My job here is done, later, Brothers.” Oh fuck.

I hear the laughing and know its readers but I don't look back or ask. I definitely don't want to know, but know I'm going to know. They fuckin' laugh again. Shit.

Chapter Four

Three days

Bishop

The attraction to my trainee is getting to be a problem. Keeping my hands off her is a bigger problem. She is not just a woman to be had for a night or week, she's Marli Champion. Even her name feels like a gift to me. I'm really fuckin' crazy. We've talked for three nights about Badass, the good, bad and ugly. She agrees with the philosophy and me. For some reason, this makes me want to peel her clothes off and ram my dick so far into her we're one human form. I'm fuckin' crazy. No woman has ever caused delusional thoughts of wanting to climb in her and I don't know why the thoughts, while delusional, feel right. I've never wanted a woman like this and Marli agreeing with Badass principles seems like justification for the extreme reaction I have to her. We've ridden to the Club, the town and I've heard more about her dad and the connection to Crow than I want to know. That's not true, I want to know everything about Marli Champion with the beautiful hazel eyes that start dark at the top and lighten at the bottom and her smile that stops my heart but bringing that connection to Cort will have him parked here and I don't need that. I'm obviously already crazy. I don't need more pressure than what I'm dealing with.

I have no idea how to tell her about the ol' lady connection and claiming thing. I'm not Indian but feel the pull to her. Since she spends her down-time chatting me, looking for me or hanging out with me, she feels it too. The thought that she feels it too has me hard and searching for anything to keep the lunacy at bay.

Standing, I figure today I need to say something before all this blows up. Cort is here for the BSC meet with Ben Knight and whoever else shows up, so Prince Protectors are going to read it. It's better coming from me than dealing with a pissed Cort because I didn't tell him. Crow is a soft spot for Cort. I don't know if he misses him or he's mad he didn't know him very well, but the Brother is always on alert when Crow is mentioned.

Walking out of my office, I step right into Jinx and get a growl from Champ. "Brother. I didn't know you were here."

"We rode the trike over. Knight has a PD Brother that asked about your training book. I jumped at the chance to come get you."

I smile. "I bet freaky is still out of control up there so now here."

He shakes his head. "It's not just the freaky. The Officers up there are so in tune it's hard to remember who is freaky and who isn't. Jessie pointed me out when Ben was going to send someone over here."

We get to the bikes but I stop. "They can text or call. Jessie is a sniper so he sees all kinds of movements other Brothers miss."

“That’s what Brinks said. It’s not normal or shouldn’t be.” We have so many military, maybe it’s the training that shows different to Brothers. Jinx is more business than he ever was a trainer.

The ride is quick but I ask, “Champion’s dad rode with Crow and a bootlegger, is this something Cort needs right away?”

“Crow and Major? That’s fucking weird. Cort will want to know. Her dad was a Sheriff. That goes with the Law name all over the Indian kids that were hidden. Was he a Mason?”

“He hated them and was trying to shut them down but never had the evidence. There’s more. Her mom died in childbirth. Nannies took care of her until she was three or four, then babysitters took care of her. The pictures she had of two were Natives. She doesn’t remember them well. I didn’t know enough to tell her anything but she’s older than the kids at Guardian.”

He doesn’t get off the trike as he looks my way but isn’t looking at me. “It fits more with Addison’s age. Cort will want that. Did she say Crow and Major by name?”

“Crow and a bootlegger. I didn’t know Major was a bootlegger. It’s an old term from prohibition but used by some today for illegal movies, books and music.”

He nods. “After prohibition Major dealt in black market with some help from Crow and his family. Major’s family was gangster all the way. Crow brought him into Badass to work him out of the black market without losing his family and their money. It worked.”

Jesus, the mansion and businesses all over Colorado were a front. Major got drugs out of Colorado Badass and worked clean businesses dropping the drugs and gun running. I guess he dropped a lot more than gun running. “Now I see why Crow’s name gets the alert status. He was cleaning Mason, Indian and gangster shit up way before our time.”

He smiles. “He was and he took us in. Not one of us knew what the fuck he was doing. All we saw was Badass and the reservation.”

It is odd but Beacon said Reed was like that too. “The stories tell us the shit he was into, but maybe to him, it was like bandaids all over the place. He was just keeping ahead of it all then ran out of time. My old Club was like that until it imploded. That’s how I got to Champion.”

He nods slowly. “I can see that. He talked in riddles that make sense now but not then. Brothers thought he was crazy but he was smart enough to keep everything he was into working together and growing bigger and better. His hand was in every pot and he had all the pots working to help each other without ever meeting.”

That’s a hell of a way to look at it but the stories confirm just that. “Yeah. So, I tell Cort right away?”

His head spins fast and eye swirls like a scope zooming on me. I feel pinned by that look and don’t move. “You need to. She was drawn here, the land, Ellison, Masons, Indian, her dad knowing Crow and Major. The only way we fight what’s coming next is by knowing all the players and pieces.”

Not wanting to move, I barely motion a nod. His head turns and I breathe. He was the top Enforcer at Champion. I think I just saw that Enforcer again and this time his sight was literally set on me. His skeleton and gear make him deadly so my brain moved right to defense and never once has that thought crossed my mind before with Jinx. I won't ever forget it.

Cort has a theme of young, fair and deadly Presidents. Falcon, Nova, Jordan are obvious but I saw it in Maverick, Trask and Cooper who are more laid back and quiet, but their minds don't stop and their deadly shows a nonchalance in the process of killing as if to say, *Badass rules were broken, I fixed it and we move forward*. The Prince Protectors are just like that. Hannah doesn't blink an eye saying, *'Thoughts of rape get you dead.'* It's just a fact. Deal and move on.

“Bishop?”

I shake my head and swing my leg over. “Yeah. Just thinking of the common traits of Badass Presidents.”

He hits my back like we're best friends and him pinning me with that eye was nothing. I guess it was nothing but my head just realizing who he is. Deal and move on.

“We're crazy, but we Lead, Teach and Enforce what needs to be led, taught and enforced. I'll get Cort into my meeting room.”

“For what?” Fuckin' Cort and his flying suit.

We turn fast.

Jinx tilts my way so I use a shoulder to brace him. His Jinx smile shows. “You and the suit, Boss. The new PD Head

has a tie to Crow and Major. Mom died when she was a baby. She had Native nannies and sitters with no memory but a couple of pictures of them.” Jinx has no problem saying shit.

Cort’s eyes snap to mine. It’s his normal intense look. “She’s yours?”

“Fuck no, Boss. She’s learning the suit and we train and practice distance like you and me did. We talk about the job then shit to keep us busy. She mentioned Crow but I don’t know all Jinx does so I asked him if it’s shit you need.” I plate that up for him but he’s not stupid.

“I want everything she said and get her here with the pictures. Don’t take forever, Bishop. With Ellison so close to this and that land that was in the trust, she had to be next on the fake Mason Sheriff dicktwat’s list.” Trust?

“The land has been in her family for generations and she just got free of her ex.” I take the chance of correcting him.

“No. They owned in Nebraska, the trust was added to, incorporating the Utah and Wyoming pieces.” He walks by us and I notice the emblem on his coat. Its Phoenix embedded like Flight Guard. God help us if he starts going on Ops again. I would think he’s too busy for that. Maybe I just hope that’s the case.

I stop short when he turns back quick. “Don’t drag this out. Ben isn’t here for nothing. Whenever he shows, shit is going down and you know it. In depth conversation about her family means she trusts you. Get on it quick.”

I stand and watch him walk. Jinx laughs. “Ethan is finding Champion. You better get to the meeting room they took over and give him what you know.”

Saying I don't know more than what I told him isn't going to help. I find them in the big meeting room. Cort is on with a lawyer I've seen him talking to at Phoenix so I sit and wait for the hologram to drop and his glasses come off.

I spill all I know and he stops me at bootlegger and questions the no mention of Major by name. Not knowing more than I gave him, we go on without interruption. When I'm done, he calls for Justice.

This is going to take a while so I cover my classes hoping to get back for dinner, knowing Cort and how this shit works, I'm not counting on it.

Marli

Getting called out of class has never happened before, ever. Standing, I drop the laptop in my bag and turn toward Jarrett. “Sir, where do I go?”

He smiles like it’s a funny question. “Someone will be in the hall to tell you.”

Nodding like this is normal, I walk out the door and sure enough, Ethan is in the hall. “You have nanny pictures Cort asked to see and he needs to talk to you at the big Club. Steel will ride over with you and find what room you’re meeting Cort and Pres in.” He turns and walks away.

This particular rabbit hole is not pleasant or informative. I know just how Alice felt.

Steel is at the bottom of the stairs looking serious and determined. “I’m riding with you to your house then the Club to meet Cort and Bishop.”

I nod following him to the lot. “Do you know why?”

“Just that you need Security. I didn’t get why or details. I got an order to get you to your house, then the Club for a meet.”

“That’s about what I got minus the security need. I’m glad I got the detective procedures before all this. The pictures are at my Veritable house.”

He nods and waits for me to get on my bike. “You’re back there tomorrow.”

I am if I finish my classes today and the assessment tomorrow. I don’t mention that because this rabbit hole is full

of questions.

With the pictures of sitters or a nanny and sitter, we jet over to the Club.

Steel never says a word until we're inside and the word he says isn't to me. "Cort."

The Prospect doesn't hesitate. "The big meeting room."

The chin thing happens and we're headed upstairs. When he opens the door, he doesn't let me pass. "Am I waiting, Boss?"

"No, get back to your class. Bishop can bring her back. Thanks, Steel."

The door opens and I'm not prepared for the infamous Cort. The dude is massive.

"Marli Champion, this is Cort Masters, President of Phoenix and BSC West. You know Jinx." Bishop's deep voice surprises me.

Tearing my eyes away from the larger-than-life Paul Bunyan, I notice Bishop across the table and nod. "I've seen the picture but wasn't prepared for just how big he is." He's bigger than Pres who I thought was a giant.

Pres, Bishop and Cort laugh. "Your eyes are bugging out. Relax and have a seat." That mesmerizing nighttime voice cuts through my shock and has me sitting.

I slide the pictures over. "Right. You wanted to see these?"

The huge man sits and is still massive, towering over the table. “Yeah, but first I’ll tell you why. Justice or Mucimi will show and help us out.”

I nod thinking all this day needs is the genies. I’ve never seen them and not had questions.

Cort tops genies with his Ellison-slave trade, Mason-Indian hidden kids, CPS-Mason-Badass war and finally Crow’s connection to every bit of his story. The man was prepared and showed people, maps and the trust that Crow used to do this whole seemingly fabled feat. The last map catches my attention.

“That’s Champion land. That can’t be part of Crow’s Trust. It’s JWC Trust. That’s my dad’s initials.” Holy shit. Am I a hidden-from-the slave-traders kid?

“The trust added Utah and Wyoming in the seventies. The same land where Addison lived. She lived there less than ten years ago. Badass bought the land from you but the trust was one of nine that Crow gave to family members. The original Champion family land wasn’t part of that trust until now.” The Nebraska land. Oh, my, God.

Air isn’t coming in right. I lean over the table and breathe. “Holy shit, I *am* a hidden-from-the-slave-traders kid.” The whisper is all I hear causing me to gulp my air looking at Bishop. “This is real?”

His eyes are soft and comforting. “I’ve seen and helped with some of this but Cort wouldn’t say it, wouldn’t put the proof out here, if you didn’t need it.” Whoa.

My eyes snap to Cort while I try for a deep breath. “The security need?” Great, I just got the job I’ve dreamed of, well similar to being a Sheriff and I’m the one that needs to be protected?

“I need the freaky for that answer. Crow didn’t do anything for nothing. If you were hidden, we need to know why so we know how to protect you. Have you ever heard of Reed?” How to protect me isn’t cutting me from the job.

I nod wondering why I was protected. My dad was a good man and loved me like a dad. He didn’t look like me with his light-streaked hair and emerald eyes but I figure I’m a mamma’s girl in the looks and bone structure department. Oh shit. I shake my head to clear it. “I didn’t take after my dad for anything. Reed Law was a friend of my dad. He told stories about them camping and fishing. They hunted but I got the feeling it wasn’t a fun time for either. I was little so I could be wrong but he always sounded weird saying it like it was bad, or hurt or something. I never asked for hunting stories. He never hunted with me either. We fished and camped but never went hunting.”

“Reed Masters is my father. He was part of a sect of Masons that Crow ran, the sect carried the name Law.”

I nod. “We had visitors that called my dad *Ketuwah* Law. I asked and he said it was a nickname from years ago.”

“Kituwa the ancient mother town, literal meaning is ‘*the right way*’. It was a slang word later with *Ketuwah* as father also *the right way*, encouraging a path of wholeness.” Wow, the genies know how to make an entrance. The older

man who spoke smiles while Justice LaPonte-James-Lightfoot laughs.

“Good to see you again, Justice.”

He bows his head with a quick practiced jerk. “Cort said to just show here. This is Co, a Prophet for the Delta mixed tribe. He was also the Shaman for the Rhode Island Mohegan tribe.”

I’m not sure I want to know so I don’t ask the obvious questions that brings up.

Cort makes it easy. “Do you recognize these? The Champion name and how it’s tied to Crow?” He slides the pictures to the Prophet.

I look down fast. The Co man has surprise all over his face.

“He’s learning to get it all out so he’s not sitting here forever. Just answer what you can.” Justice makes sense to me, I don’t want to be here forever either. He smiles at me.

It’s true so I shrug. I look at Bishop. He leans over to see the picture Co is tapping on. “A caretaker from Nevada.” He looks at Justice. “They were learning?”

Justice freezes then nods. “Training, yeah.”

My head shakes and smile is automatic when Mucimi shows next to him.

“Champion was a first stop and had three at a time. Crow picked who to pair from whatever Champion said. It doesn’t matter who they are. Axe made me this age progression with her hair loose.” A picture of me appears but

my hair is out of the braid and looks fluffy, darker, closer to black.

“Chenoa?” Bishop sits up leaning over the table for a closer look.

“Who is, oh, the Marine doctor?” I ask not believing I look like an Indian they know. Chenoa is an Indian name.

Mucimi nods with glassy eyes. “Teller’s old lady is almost a twin to you except the eyes, yours are a mix of green and tan, hers are tan.” My eyes are green at the top and light amber at the bottom but I don’t correct him because he’s right, sort of.

“Here’s Chenoa with the boys.” Justice shows me Carmen and another woman both holding twins on his phone.

“That does look like me. My eyes show light in some pictures. The babies look like my baby picture. Is she my family? Was my dad my family?” Her hair isn’t as curly as mine or her curls are bigger.

“A cousin. The resemblance is uncanny but you are cousins,” Mucimi answers, then disappears like getting family members is part of everyone’s daily lives.

More questions without answers. I don’t like this rabbit hole at all. A cousin. “Do I have other family members?”

“More cousins. Kateri, Maiyun, and Chenoa has the twins,” Justice says softly.

How weird. I thought Kateri and Maiyun felt like I knew them before. “White Wave?”

Justice looks at Cort and gets a nod. “She is the guardian of another young cousin.”

“What’s her name?”

“His name, Arndt.”

“Arndt, Chenoa, Maiyun and Kateri. Who is my mother? Am I Indian? My dad said I’m polish.”

“The medical tests you went through included DNA. We know you’re related to the four and Crow is in there. Maiyun is looking for information in her mom’s books but she remembers everything and doesn’t have your Native name. Crow’s lineage has ties to multiple tribes and members of Badass. Without *his* DNA we can’t get direct lineage, we have his Brother’s daughter, great-grandson and his granddaughter but nothing closer.” Justice’s hands go up.

I nod. “Cousins are still my family in all of that.”

Cort stands. “They are, with that, you get me. We don’t know how Crow fits, but I’m an uncle, cousin or extended something to Kateri and Ayakuhsak. Rex, my uncle, is Ayakuhsak’s great-grandfather and Kateri is Ayakuhsak’s aunt. Her twin died a slave.”

Oh, my, God. Tears burn my eyes and that has me blinking. “Were the others slaves?”

“Arndt and Ayakuhsak were part of the Badass Ops that recovered slaves. Kateri was hidden by Masons after she got away from the cop that bought her. Chenoa was guarded by her grandparents in a tribe and Maiyun was guarded by her mom and family.” Cort’s voice dropped with his cousin Ayakuhsak.

I breathe looking at my hands on the table. “Thank you. I’d like to meet them at some point. Was my dad my dad?”

Silence tells me he isn’t, until Justice answers. “We’d need his DNA. Co doesn’t recognize him and the *Ketuwah* name is Cherokee, not from any tribes around here.”

The soothing deep voice has me looking up. “He loved you and gave you the world and life you wanted. He’ll always be your dad, Marli.” Bishop is perfect and understands how hard this all is without me saying the words, *‘I love my dad and know he loved me.’*

“Thank you. He always felt like my dad and made my world perfect.”

“Does she have a threat?” Cort keeps this moving before I can ask another question.

Justice sits straighter. “Bad Masons are still out there.”

That isn’t an answer but Cort gives a couple of seconds for more, then nods. “She needs a partner off the compounds and I’ll get Harky on a dog for her. That’s a straight Ops dog. I’m not fucking around with this.” His strangely hard eyes land on Bishop then Pres. I’m glad I didn’t get that look but I get a dog. I saw them on the news clearing a school and thought I’d love a K-9 assignment but it didn’t fit in with my plan of moving up to Sheriff. They both do the chin thing.

“That’s settled. Welcome to the family. Co can tell you about the tribes, Justice can tell you about freaky and the

Blackhawks then Bishop can tell you about Badass and claiming. That happens when everyone gets here later.” Cort puts a smile on that looks posed and perfect. No more hard looks here. “The towns and Sheriff are next. Make it quick, Jinx.”

Bishop

We pull into the compound instead of the Club. There is no way I'm explaining claiming to her in the middle of trainees. Fuckin' Cort threw it in as if it was on a checklist. "How are you holding up?"

She shakes her head as soon as the helmet is off. "I don't know. Since I got here, I think of all the weird shit as rabbit holes akin to Alice in Wonderland."

I laugh because sometimes that fits. "I can relate. The biggest takeaways of the day are your new family."

Her smile lights those hazel eyes. "Yeah. Besides my dad, I've never had a *real* family, the hands and Deputies were it." The Deputies didn't stand up for her so they don't count to me. She told me one hand was close, the rest sounded more like workers and left because of her ex.

I nod and guide her into my house.

"This is bigger than mine."

I nod glad she has a smile while saying it. "I'm big. They tailor them to the Brothers. This is a replica of my house at Champion. I loved it so I guess Jinx thought it would be comfortable to me."

"He's a smart man."

I nod. "Brother. Everyone you meet are Brothers. You'll never be alone again, we have thousands of Brothers just in the Clubs closest to us right now."

She nods with a little smirk on. "Brothers whether they're men or women."

“Yes. I have told you about Badass and will answer whenever you have questions. Jeti explained about freaky and you know Mucimi, he’s a Blackhawk and you’ll hear more about them tonight. I’m not Indian so you need Co or your new family to explain that shit.”

She nods with the smirk still in place. “That leaves claiming. What’s that?”

Here we go. “Badass calls it claiming, the Indians call it a union or something like that.”

Her smirk is gone. “The one handed by spirits?”

“Yeah, but I don’t know more than that. Hannah said it to someone and I was her Protector. I did my best to stay away from her conversations.”

“Admirable. I’ve heard it from a hand. He found his one and we all heard the great spirit blessing around a fire at a cattle drive.”

This is good. “So, you know more than me about that. For Badass, we claim our one for life. Badass is linked to Native at every turn but we call it *all in*. It gets complicated because Brothers claim women without being *all in*. *All in* has rules. There is no leaving, Brothers work for their women and family. There is no divorce or option to fail. I guess there’s no option but working together every day for us. I’ve never been *all in* and never claimed a woman. To me, claiming without *all in* is a lie right off the bat.”

She nods. “I would think that too. Why does Cort want you to explain this now?”

She's not running out the door. It's a good sign that I push. "When you smile, my heart stops. It's like an invisible string that pulls me closer. I've never felt it before and get why Beacon says Faith is his air. Today, I knew I'd have to tell Cort what you said about Crow. Anything Crow puts him into red alert. I knew he'd jump on the chance to get another President hooked up. He sees shit I'd never tell a Brother out loud."

She laughs stopping my lame assed explanation. "Cort is a matchmaker? Before you answer, I feel like your voice has one of those strings attached to me. It's weird." Again, she's still here and admits a draw to me.

Leaning forward, I take her hand in mine. "It's a draw that we both feel. Cort has it with Seren. I guess it makes it easy for him to see but the freaky usually tell him of visions so that could be it."

She drops my hand and stands. I'm up and waiting to stop her from making the door. She paces so I relax. "I'm not getting married. The leech made sure I'd never make that mistake again."

I shake my head. "He drugged you in Vegas. I'm not drugging you, no one is pressuring you, I'm just explaining *all in* and claiming. Some women want the name change and marriage, some don't. I can't say I give a shit about what name you choose, it's your choice. With kids, I'd want my name in there somewhere."

She laughs and steps closer. "I don't get the *all in* and claiming, if it is, or isn't an issue, but I'm glad you leave me choices. It tells me more about Brax Bishop the man than anything else you ever said."

My breath catches so I kiss her head trying for an explanation that won't get her running. "Cort will dog me and may park his ass here until I claim you."

She shrugs. "He seems nice enough and he'll have to go home at some point. He's got Clubs and a family to work for."

I can do nothing but nod. "You won't let me claim you? No paper?" I get a look. Luckily it isn't a Jinx or Cort look.

"After a week? No, but I'm not shutting it down. You know more law than I do and we kind of fit like yin and yang." Her shy has me hooked. Fuck.

Kissing her head has her leaning on me. "Okay. Let's go meet the new family." This is going to go over with Cort like a lead balloon.

I listen to Mase and Teller go on about claiming points and the lists we all get. I get the lists and have heard the stories and explanations forever.

It's one of those times that I miss my dad and his advice. I was a teen when he died but he never hid claiming or Badass logic from me and my sister. Flame is claimed by a VP in Kentucky and happy with her life, Badass, the VP and her little boy. I love the Brother so I can say she chose well. My mom doesn't talk to either of us. We grew up in the Club with

Dad because she had a baby that was very obviously not Dad's. We were raised in Badass where everyone is equal but the mixed baby was darker than my mom must have expected and the nine-month lie and guilt had her leaving the hospital with our new brother without looking back. Dad never went after her but he always said she was his *all in* and Badass isn't a belief you drop because life gets hard. I respected the hell out of him for that. Showing Badass while he had to be devastated by the lie and betrayal was a lesson I'll never forget. At your worst, Badass and our Brothers will step in and give you direction, purpose and the hands to make it through. Brothers all had hands out for, not just him, but all of us.

A hit to my arm has me checking back in. "Yeah, Mase."

"So, you know." He doesn't say more until I raise an eyebrow. "Your dad didn't walk from your mom."

"No. Older, I heard he had a woman but it wasn't serious. He stressed *all in* means there's never another."

He nods. "He was right."

Hannah moves Mase out of her way and sits in the open seat beside me. "She's not going for claiming. She *is* hoping to sleep at your place tonight. Hold her off until she agrees to *all in* and the claiming."

Mase laughs. I shake my head but think I can use that. I may lose my mind but all Presidents here are crazy. She smiles. "We'll work the other side, keep her at arm's length and you may get an old lady out of it. Debra is all for this. She'll keep the pressure up." She doesn't wait for me to agree or even nod.

Mase is laughing again. I look at Teller. “Are Blackhawks insane or smart.”

He smiles. “Wicked smart and totally insane but they always do what’s needed for their Brothers and Clubs.”

“Fuckin’ great. That feels like a warning.” I mumble while scanning the women’s table. “Fuck. Mucimi is doing shit?” That could help, maybe.

Teller looks quick. “Probably throwing pictures of you two. He does it all the time.” His eyes bounce over my head. “Boss.”

I don’t even turn. Cort hits my shoulder and sits where Hannah just left. “Seren said she needs convincing.”

I nod. “Hannah said to keep her at arm’s length.”

He laughs with Mase this time. “Whatever it takes. Blackhawks are fucking crazy but effective.”

“I’ve seen it and heard, Boss. Teller said totally insane.”

Mase hits Teller but Cort nods. “They are but I’ve never seen truer Badass Brothers in my life.”

“You fit in there, Boss. Every Officer you’ve put in front of me fits in there.” Jinx said he never sees the good shit he does.

He throws chin and I know it’s for the respect but he won’t own it. “Seren and Freedom will work on her through the meets and get her new family pushing her to be claimed.”

Mase stands. “I’ll get Kateri on it.”

I shake my head.

“She’s already on it but coming from Mase may help that.” Cort is as crazy as the Blackhawks. He’s mounting a whole campaign on my poor girl.

I stand and throw him chin and walk to the bar to get away from the crazy bastard. Ordering a beer and four glasses of wine, I bring Marli a fresh drink and drop the extras for the ol’ ladies. Hannah smiles, giving me a nod.

I roll my eyes trying to think of anything that doesn’t strike me as delusional justification for taking the woman on the table right now.

Hannah laughs with a chorus behind her so I walk away leaving the beer at the bar. Fuckin’ Brothers.

Chapter Five

Three days

Marli

“Swearing at someone over the phone is punishable by a \$100 fine.” The man is infuriating with his law distraction techniques.

“Virginia,” I growl and roll off the side of the bed knowing he isn’t touching me. I could swear over the phone at him but it wouldn’t matter. The man is hard and from the tent I woke up to, he’s more than ready to put the impressive part I want into play. But he won’t. He says he’s all in but won’t be all in *me* until I’m sure it’s forever.

Stomping my way to the bathroom, I slam the door. At first, I thought it was endearing and unbelievably chivalrous. Today, I’m ready to pull my gun and take what I want.

Shit! That’s rape in every state. He’s driving me to commit multiple offenses. I need to get a grip. Kateri and Maiyun come to mind before I dismiss Kateri. She sent me videos and the dance virtual classes. I’ve been in a perpetual ready state for two days.

Washing my face, I block out anything and everything that has to do with sex and the sensual voice that continually haunts me. The man is too good looking to be so torturous.

“I got an Ops call, Marli. I’m at Elan tonight. I’ll meet you here or see you tomorrow.”

What? I race to pull the door open. “Elan?”

He nods. “Zeke invited me over for a Club thing. You have a dinner tonight.”

Damn! “I can cancel.”

He takes a deep breath expanding his chest to one I want to be leaning on. “Straight up, it’s a claiming party. I’m not pressuring you and don’t want anyone else to. Zeke isn’t much for crowds either, we’ll end up riding for most of the night.”

I can’t bring myself to beg him so I nod. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He kisses my head and walks out in his suit that fits like a glove. Damn! Walking back into the bathroom, I stop short. Is he tired of waiting for me? No, he’s all about his word being trustworthy and respected. The man reminds me of my dad. It’s infuriating.

Remembering the job I’ve worked so hard to get, I move quicker so I can get to it. Brax Bishop is going to have to wait. I may think that but my body clenches tight just picturing that goatee below his blue eyes. Shit.

Steel objected to taking the ride in my new truck saying Badass is a biker Club. I can’t argue the point but ride the Ducati begrudgingly to our biggest PD.

The Brothers know me and knew my dad for the short time they dealt with him. Their Club was in northern Wyoming but had them manning the town just after Ellison was shut down. This last year we've gotten more calls for pickups from them. None of it was for anything in the trafficking field. Until Pres told me, I never put it together, but Badass handled anything Ellison may have been involved in.

We pull in to smiling Brothers in full gear. "It's about time a Champion showed. Glad you took Badass and are still working to clean up the streets, Brother." Reggie's dad is one in my group of trainers but I first met Reggie right here.

I pull my helmet off with the smile still in place. "Thanks, Reggie. I'm honored to wear the colors and work for the good of more than the streets. People shouldn't be scared of their own neighborhoods."

He does the chin thing. I never noticed it before. I've picked up from him twice so maybe he didn't do it to Deputies. He did say his dad told him about me and he was glad I showed for the pickup.

"This is Steel from Bravo but a Lead for Flight Guard at Veritable Rising. He's my partner while I'm off the compound."

Steel puts his arm out and they do the same Badass hold Bishop does to everyone. I refrain from rolling my eyes but head for the door. Rolling my eyes, or not, like Bishop does too often, isn't stopping the Bishop thoughts.

"Brother."

I stop looking two steps up. “Hey, Bruno, I didn’t see you out here.”

“I just walked out. You were looking down, is everything okay?”

I was? Shit, I was. I shake my head. “It’s a personal thing but I should know better than to let my guard down.”

He nods, pulling me up the step and into a hug. “You’re always on. What’s got you distracted?”

Bruno is dad-like and has always treated me professionally. Maybe he has some advice I can use. My uncle, who was the Chief here for years, trusted him as a second. Now he’s running it.

I shake my head. “Not here.” The humiliation of the leech is already known to too many.

His eyes show concern and comfort. Freakin’ Bishop-like. “Let’s have breakfast in my office. The meet is in an hour.”

“Thanks, Bruno.” I turn back but Bruno is on it.

“Reggie, take Steel to breakfast and get the flying shit out of your system. We meet at nine.”

“Roger, Boss.” Reggie is only too happy to get flying over breakfast.

I nod to Steel. “I’m eating in Bruno’s office.”

He doesn’t look happy. “I’m calling Harky when we get back. You need the dog.”

I smile right out. “That means I’m in my truck, you’ll have to ride behind us.”

He still doesn't smile. "I'm good with that, Boss."

I throw him chin getting a laugh from PD Brothers but Steel isn't laughing with the others. I'm not fixing this here and I need dad advice, sort of.

I walk with Bruno to his office. Before I finish explaining the leech, my humiliation, the Deputies ignoring me and selling the land to Badass, our food shows. We set it on the table making this easier to spill my guts to him.

He pours me coffee and sits. Finally, he says, "They should have challenged a no contact order. Your ex was probably set up by the asswipe Sheriff. Drugged isn't on you, darlin', that was on your ex."

"I didn't know about the drug until Badass showed up."

He nods. "It doesn't matter. Through all that, it doesn't explain why I saw you not taking in anything around you." He's so like a dad.

"Bishop wants to claim me. Cort is matchmaking and the women have me in a frenzy over all of it." They're always at dinners and even chatting me about claiming and their favorite sex positions on my new phone all day long. I don't tell him about the chat-text lesson I got.

He laughs putting the plate he filled in front of me. Just like Bishop does. The man haunts me when he's not anywhere close. "That, I understand. Bishop from Champion?"

"You know him?"

“Of him.” He sets his plate down. “When I heard he took the PD law job I asked around. He’s known because of his training classes. Champion is a training Club so we get Brothers he’s trained. Reggie went through that training and still talks about Bishop and Beacon.”

I take a couple of bites figuring he’ll keep going but he eats. “I just got rid of the leech. I don’t want anything that looks like a marriage.”

He puts his fork down. “Did he say *all in* or claiming?”

“*All in* and I got the details from everyone including Bishop. He won’t touch me if I’m not sure of *all in*.”

He laughs hysterically. “He’s got more control than half the Brothers I’ve met, Marli. Don’t lose him.”

I eat thinking about that. He does have amazing control since I slept in his bed three times now without him touching me.

“Tell me about Bishop.”

While he eats, I tell him about my new family and Bishop saying my dad will always be my dad. He nods so I tell him about going to the Club, the nightly parties with my new family when Bishop was watching me every time I looked his way, the food and getting my plate. His training with the suit, law and scene collection procedures.

He puts his fork down smiling. “You love him.”

I can’t help smiling. “I’m getting there.”

“You love him. Cort sees more than he’ll ever say but he knows shit that isn’t obvious to anyone else. He wants this knowing it’s right. Were freaky around when you met Cort?”

“They came in but I knew them from the ranch. They showed to buy the land.”

He nods. “The trust was always meant to go back to Badass.”

This shocks me. “How do you know that?” I didn’t know until Cort told me.

“Your uncle was the chief here until he died, did you forget I’ve been here right along? Badass okayed the job for me and while it wasn’t a Badass PD, it was always headed here. Your uncle knew and told me years ago.” Holy shit.

My brain isn’t firing on all cylinders. He has been here long before it became Badass PD. “My dad was my dad?”

He shrugs. “If he wasn’t, he adopted you and became your dad so his family was yours. I don’t know what’s in your blood but you had one of the best family’s around.”

That’s the same thing Bishop said. “I did. What do I do about Bishop? I learned because of the leech. I can’t go through that humiliation again.”

He stops moving with his coffee cup just below his lips. “Bishop drugging you?”

I shake my head. “Never.”

“He put work into getting to know the real you?” The cup is still below his lips.

I nod. Any more getting to know me and I'll hit the Security button so I have backup to take what I want at gunpoint.

"He's showing you *all in* and he hasn't touched you. Now would be the time you'd see control slipping and how that looks. Have you seen that?"

"No, he isn't taking me to Elan tonight because he doesn't want anyone pressuring me to be claimed."

"You love him and he loves you no matter how much that's hurting him right now. Don't lose him and send me an invite to the claiming. Take his name too."

Take his name? "I like Champion."

He gives me a look. "You think anyone around Champion or the outer communities will forget you're a Champion? Use the fucking dash if it means that much. Like your dad, you'll always be a Champion."

I smile and move his hand up. "Drink your coffee already."

"Put my Brother out of his misery." He has to get the last word in.

I let him and clean up thinking about all he said. He doesn't push for more. Just like Bishop.

I smile and surprise him with a kiss on his cheek. "Thanks, Bruno."

He makes a man noise and walks out. "We're in roll call."

It's all repetitive to what I said in the other two PDs but they get the new technology procedures, supervisor apps and a sign up for more Law training at Veritable Rising. The detectives get new testing equipment and procedures that have newer technology addressed in them.

It's been a few hours and I'm glad to be heading back to the Club. "Everyone is happy or at least happy I'm leaving."

Steel smiles. "They love you, Boss. You don't talk down to them and you're a good trainer. Every question gets answered in a way they understand. You know the new technology and show them how to use it while it's in their hands. Not all Clubs have that kind of training."

"Thanks. I only know about the BSC Clubs. They train for the others, right?"

"Only for Security and Enforcer. Training Clubs that aren't using a clean Bible doesn't happen from BSC. Cort doesn't play with that. He helps to a point. If they show effort, he does but he won't go further until they adopt the new Bible. This Club had to work to get rid of illegal and the old Pres. My old Pres, Falcon, said they have a good Club now.

"That limit on training is smart and good Club is a relief. We've picked up from them for a while now. I'm glad they're on the up and up."

He nods. "Cort has never been called stupid."

I can't imagine anyone thinking it let alone saying it to the giant of a man.

Maiyun sits slowly and her dog lays at her feet. “I can’t find a name for you in any of my mom’s books. I never got the lists of kids so it isn’t a surprise but I’m bummed. Did I say that right?”

I smile at the woman without slang vocabulary. “You did, bummed or bumming. Thanks for checking but I’m okay being Marli Champion.”

“Marli Champion is a good name.” She squeezes my hand and tears burn my eyes. “What’s wrong? I can ask Cort for the kid lists.”

I wave my hand and wipe under my eyes. “No. I don’t care about the name. I’ve never had family and this feels so good.”

She leans closer and hugs me. “You’ll learn we’re all family. Some by blood most by Badass and Badass is good with family.”

I don’t want to hurt her so I loosely put an arm around her back. “I’m learning. Today I talked to a Brother that’s in the city PD. He knew my dad and uncle and gave advice like he’s an uncle too. He said to send him an invite to the claiming.”

She giggles leaning back. “So you’re getting claimed?”

I shrug. “I want to but the leech keeps popping in my head. That was so bad and I spent almost a year alone. Work

was so hard, the hands leaving and Hetah left after the herds were sold. I don't ever want to live through that shit again."

Her head is shaking. "You just said you have family in the PD. You have blood family here and Badass is never alone so you're stuck with like a million family members because Badass is international now."

I have to laugh. "I learned that in the boot camp."

She shakes her head. "Did they tell you they'll straighten Brothers out for mistreating their women?"

"No. I know they don't allow it."

"Hold on. The Princes know this stuff." She taps on her phone then a hologram shows.

The technology they use so effortlessly always amazes me. They've had this forever and I saw it for the first time here - a couple of weeks ago.

"Stella, Aylen, Jetti must be busy. I was looking for Prince women to explain to Marli what happens if a Brother treats his ol' lady bad."

Stella laughs. "My mom threatened to shoot their dicks off. I told her I'd have them tied and ready for her."

Aylen laughs looking like her dad, Ben, who I met just two days ago. "That about sums it up but the Brothers would step in and "talk" to the Brother before anyone is shot. Sheila is scary and shoots first. I've never seen a Brother talked to or heard of anyone getting schooled. Just about everyone I know is *all in* and they know enough not to fuck with fate. Some are Indian but even non-Indian Badass Brothers live by that weird code they grew up with."

Stella and Maiyun nod. “We’re like princesses. Even when we fight for stupid shit like shaving ourselves or getting our own food, it’s ignored and they take over. They’re fuckin’ weird. My mom said to just go with it. Is Bishop giving you a hard time? I’ll come up there and straighten his ass out.”

“Spirit in the sky, no, stay there, Stella. It’s just a question. You all know better than I do so I’m asking you. She knows Brothers will straighten them out.”

Aylen leans closer. “It’s true. GS still treats GJ like a Princess, Uncle Danny and Pres too, Kate said it’s been like that since they met.”

“Wow. Bishop makes me food and does everything so I’m not put out but what’s the shaving?”

Stella laughs. “Just let him shave you. The fight isn’t worth it and it’s hot as hell.”

Just what I need, more hot as hell shit. I nod. “We’re not there yet.”

“What?” Stella has both Maiyun and me jumping.

“Spirit in the sky! You scared the crap out of me.” Maiyun has me laughing. I love when she says that.

“You haven’t slept together?” Aylen stops that.

I nod. “We sleep together but he won’t touch me until I’m sure about *all in*.”

Stella laughs, tipping right close to the camera. Aylen shakes her head. “Don’t make him wait. The only one you’re fighting right now is you and fate. You’re going to lose and be miserable the whole time. Let whatever is holding you back go

and look at the Brother and his determination to keep to that weird code. He isn't a Brother that will throw you away over a missed meal or dirty laundry. He'd cook and start the washer."

Maiyun nods. "They all do that."

"I see it in his control and what he already does. He said he'd work for us."

Stella rolls her eyes. "They all say the same thing. I swear it's bred into them. I've got a go. I'm testing the robot that grows in light." Her side of the hologram goes black and Aylen's side goes wide over it. How weird but convenient.

Aylen laughs at me. I forgot again. I shrug. "Thanks, Aylen. You gave me more than anyone I've talked to yet."

She smiles. "Walker wouldn't touch me unless he could claim me. I know exactly how you're feeling right now. I found a way and you will too. Your head is fucked up by the moron that drugged you. Bishop isn't a moron and you know enough about him to see it. I've got shit to do but call if you need me. I can be there for dinner. I'm cleared to fly again."

"No. Everyone is already here for dinner every night. Bishop is going to Elan so he's not even going to be here."

She smiles. "Walker is going to Elan. I'll be there."

The hologram disappears so I look at Maiyun and her shaking head. "Princes are a little crazy."

I nod knowing the surprise I feel is the same as what's showing on her face. "They are. At least I know more about day to day working for us." It's not much and I've seen it's true but I knew some of it from Bishop's weird list.

“Let’s get lunch. Piper is coming with your dog Artemis. She’s an Op dog like Perses.”

I stand and put a hand out for her. She giggles. “Perses does that too. She puts a hand on him and he stands with her. “Too much in training today. I’m a little tired.”

She points up as the chopper lowers. “Piper.”

Okay. Piper. I don’t ask how she knows. Everyone here is a little crazy, hence, all the rabbit holes.

Bishop

Walker sits by Zeke and me. “Brothers. Aylene sent me here while she’s at your Club, Bishop.”

Fuck. “I didn’t bring her here so she wouldn’t get pressured.”

‘The old ladies know how to handle old lady shit. Let them deal. Every Prince but Stella reads and they’re all fuckin’ smart.’ He’s right.

“I will. It’s not me she’s afraid of.”

“The ghosts? Aylene didn’t explain.” Walker asks.

‘Drugged, married and no one close for a year plays different for her. She always had work and her ranch hands then it was gone. Her only connection was gone just before that all hit. She didn’t let it stop her but it left a deep scar. The old ladies will help heal that scar. Aylene knows and got it to the others.’ Zeke has me looking past him.

She does have those scars. It’s stopping her from taking what she wants. Getting family now must cause that loss to feel like a crater. I shake my head and vow to keep a tight leash on my control and those delusional thoughts. This has to be her decision. I smile. She needs the control.

Zeke chuckles. ‘She does. She’s strong so it won’t be long but it’s hers to decide so you’re not dealing with doubt from the beginning.’

That’s how it was for Justice. I nod. He waited months for Carmen and now they’re perfect together with their boys and family. “I’ve got the time and she’s worth it.”

He smiles. Walker laughs. “They’re all worth it. They test us while proving it so we’re almost drooling by the time they decide.”

We all laugh at that, drawing Brothers closer. I take a quick look at Zeke. He nods for me. They just noticed we’re here. It happens to him everywhere. Walker is a quiet Brother too, maybe his juju shit covers us too.

He laughs again. ‘We all don’t talk much.’ He’s right again so I throw him chin. He talks more than I do and answers the Brothers about the Op today. Pablo comes over and Zeke throws him chin so he’s not answering more. I watch and listen until the Brothers start to fall away.

Pablo sits. “How is the new Club, Brother?”

“Good. We’ll be moving classes out fast.”

He nods. “Jinx has me set up to ship the vetted to him and he’ll get them trained in tandem with your classes.”

Jinx is already working it. “Yeah, he can house them. I only have the sixty rooms.”

“Once the vetted military are trained, we have the supervisor positions coming in. Not all the trainees we get will be Leads.”

I nod. “I won’t see those or they’ll be dropped from me and stay with Veritable trainees for regular PD.”

“I like how that works.” He’s a smart Brother but I don’t think many see behind the Protector shield he’s known for.

Zeke throws me chin. He saw it, obviously, Pablo is his VP.

“What do you think of the lawyer?” Raid sits with a plate and beer. I scan around seeing Lorelei and Daniel talking to the Oakley trainer that Zeke’s other trainer claimed.

“Which one?” I ask.

“Julius.”

I shrug. “He’s a lawyer that trains law.”

“He was my pick. Cort picked Cyrus.” He throws it out but I want why.

Is this to fuck with me? “I took Cyrus as an Officer and Lead for Ops. Julius is more of a teacher.”

He nods. “With the jobs getting more complicated, you need a teacher. He’s particular about wording and shit.”

I nod. Nit-picky is how I see it. “He is that.”

He stops and holds my eyes. “You don’t like him?”

“He’s great for a classroom but questions everything. He doesn’t get Badass either. That’s changing but I needed Officers and a full team right away, then Cort wanted two teams, so I did that. He may fill a spot but I don’t see him working on a team and he’d never make Lead. He’s a teacher and probably the most well-versed lawyer I have.”

He nods happy with the answer enough to go back to eating.

Zeke smiles at me. ‘The name Julius bothers you?’

Raid looks up fast. “Stay the fuck out of my head.”

Zeke nods. ‘The question sent a spike of angry energy out. I looked for why.’ Raid nods like that explanation is a good reason. The Brother is daft.

I give my thoughts. “Julius is a name I associated with the Champion Club’s Mason issues. He sold intel to the MERCs that hit Jinx and Trask on an Alder try. The last week showed me the Brother Julius I know is a lawyer that was JAG so he’s learning Badass and civilian law. He’s good too.” I smile and Raid nods.

“He is. I thought military law would show somewhere and we’ll need that. He’s a smart Brother but I didn’t know he didn’t train with military. I thought they all did the training every day like us. Every other military Brother did.”

I get why he’s so interested. “He’s training in the suit and with the regular physical class now.”

“He’ll do good. He didn’t know his dad but he was a Michigan higher Officer.” Was means he died.

Wait a minute. “Ranger’s dad?”

He shrugs. “One of them, Ranger was left with them, but he’s not one of theirs. Julius didn’t know until his mom had cancer. She gave him a picture and the Club address. The new Club sent him to Ranger.”

I smile. “And Jack got him in training for Badass.”

Raid smiles pushing his plate away. “He had Mucimi read him and they put him in the pool for class. Cort pulled him as a possible use of the JAG but liked Cyrus. I liked the lawyer. He kept up for three weeks and isn’t known for bitching. Even I bitch at training.”

I laugh. “You do, Boss. Hearing that I’m glad I kept him. I’ll get him Beacon’s virtual Bible class so he understands the why if Badass. He knows Mason shit too, but I learned shit from his Bible class and I was brought up in the Club.”

“Beacon is so fucking good at everything. He still says the weird phrases like Adeline.”

We’re all laughing again. “He does, Boss. Now you’re done, you want to ride? I’m marking time here.”

Raid is up quick. “Yeah, don’t get into crazy shit I’m gonna have to explain and I only got one extra clip on me.”

Walker laughs. “Cort isn’t going, Brother.”

Marli

Walking didn't work so I stay where I am drinking the water Kyler brought us and listen to Chenoa talk about Teller not touching her, even when she was naked on top of him. As soon as she said she got it and agreed, he was up and flying her to the shower to check out the number one sex position.

"I want that, he won't touch me," I pout.

Aylen laughs moving the water closer to me. "Get to where you believe as much as he does. You know your dad loved you. Did he show you?"

"Of course, in a million little ways, he did."

She nods.

"Is Bishop showing you?" Chenoa asks.

His face with that smiling goatee blasts through my head like I don't know the answer. "Yeeees. Geeeesh. He's already always in my head."

Everyone looks at Aylen, so I do. She shakes her wobbly head. "It wasn't me. She's always thinking about him and his voice." They don't lie Bishop said.

"Damn, my brain fell into the Bishop rabbit hole."

They all laugh and I see men behind their women. When did they get here?

"It's late, my little Champion. Are you and your new dog ready?" That deep, silky voice has my whole body shivering. He laughs and lifts me right up. That sounds nice too.

“I drank too much but Artemis is watching out for me.”

The kiss to my head reminds me why I’m in the Bishop rabbit hole. He loves me.

“I’ll watch out for you so she can take a break.” That feels good and sounds like a bedtime story.

I close my eyes and hold on to the man that will protect me while my new dog takes a break. It’s sweet but I can’t say it. Aylen said sweet is bad. Bishop isn’t bad. My mushy brain gives way to sweet Bishop dreams.

Bishop

She's adorable.

"She's out, Brother."

I nod at Kyler but he walks toward my house with me.
"I'm surprised she's here."

"It's home to her. Give her time. She knows you love her." He hits my back and turns back toward the pool.

She knows I love her, she doubts herself not me. That's good information to know but I don't like it.

Mucimi shows at my door just as I make the two steps in front of it. "She was drugged to get married, but once the drugs wore off she never let him touch her. He lived with the ranch hands." His glassy eyes register before he's gone.

Fuck. If he married her he wouldn't have thought twice about raping her. I'm going to kill him.

"Don't go there, Brother. I'll get her changed. Get a drink and calm down. You aren't finding him tonight."

I turn quick almost hitting Marli's head on the door jamb. "Aylen." Kyler is gone. I'm going to kill him but that doesn't have to be tonight.

"I'd fly you over but he's in Vegas." She follows me into the bedroom.

"I can get there." I lay Marli on the bed and open the dresser with her shit in it. Pulling training shorts out, I get one of my shirts and throw them on the bed. "You need help?"

"No. I'll suspend her."

However that happens works for me. I walk out and right to the kitchen for a drink. Why I didn't think about the bastard before crosses my mind but I don't care. He's a member of the walking dead right now.

"She'll sleep it off. I'm out." She doesn't stop.

"Thanks, Aylene."

The door closes and I drink the shot, thinking too much sounds good right now, but I have an early job I need to plan. Starting with a call to Zeke for location first, I figure Cort is my second call.

Chapter Six

Two days

Marli

Balls may not be thrown within city limits.

I laugh and text back:

Montana

He must be finished with his class. Piper just left so I'm walking into my office for a check on the PD's training progress.

"Boss Champion, there's a town drunk asking for you." The Prospect isn't one I know.

A town drunk? "Where?"

"The Marshal station." In Champion. There weren't many left in Champion and I never got a call from there before. I wouldn't have because it wasn't my sector but I never heard of a call from Champion.

I look for Steel on tracking. He's there. "Artemis, we got a call."

She's up and running ahead of me. I know she'll be waiting at the truck so I send a text to Steel that I'm on my way. They call it chat but it's a text. I asked why and got a whole story about satellites and apps. I never say text so I don't have to hear it again. I think it though.

I smile at my dog and open the door. She jumps in, excited over the 'call' word. Piper had her trained with keywords for my job before I even met her. That's a rabbit hole I don't need to go into right now. It takes minutes for us to be pulling in front of the Marshal's office. "Attention."

Piper explained their lists and using just the label so I do. I haven't met Harky but he's some kind of dog genius. We walk in and Steel shakes his head.

"I hit Security and have Artemis, your tracking shows here."

He nods. "Security should have been with you."

I shake my head. "Pres said to Champion they'd follow in surveillance. I hit the button for it." I smile at his surprise.

"I didn't get that."

"It was at the meet this morning. Why am I here?" I nod to the PD watching us with smiles on.

Steel finally smiles. "Drunk says he has a deal with you." He points toward the back so I start walking with him.

"I don't know a town drunk." Or anyone living here. My sector was the west.

He shrugs. "I don't either but he asked for you by name."

Before he opens the door to holding, I turn to Artemis. "Protect."

Steel nods and lets me pass. Holy shit. I can smell the drunk from here, it's not all alcohol. They need the spray

deodorizers here. I make a note for it as I pass the first cell getting cat calls that has me stopping. I know that voice and it isn't silky and mesmerizing.

"You'd do me? We worked together." This idiot needs a lobotomy.

"Valley got picked up. He can't stop any of us. I'll find a way out and finally get my hands on you."

I look at my dog. "Alert, Protect, keep me safe from that ass."

She sits growling at the demented ex-Deputy. Steel laughs. "I love your dog, Boss."

The ex-Deputy moves and Artemis is up on the bars and barking. "Me too. Is this my drunk?"

The next cell shows the bars holding this guy up. "Who are you? I need Champion."

"That would be me."

"You're not Champion, we went to school together."

My body braces. "That's my dad and he died a year ago. What did you need." I got that out without tears.

"I had a deal with him. I sleep it off. All these people don't belong here."

I shake my head. "You don't have a deal with me. If you want detox, I'll make a deal and have you driven over, otherwise you're on with the judge and he'll have you detoxing his way."

"Listen! I have a deal!"

“Not with me.” I turn and walk to the ex-Deputy laughing about finally getting his shot at me and the drunk calling me a bitch. This isn’t a good outing so far. “Artemis, let’s get a spinach pie.”

Steel laughs closing the door. “Belinda eats those. I like the meat pies.”

I nod. “Artemis might like that better.”

“Mike, the drunk is on with the judge. The fake Deputy threatened the Boss with sexual assault. Add it with the feed.” Steel is good.

“I’m getting lunch then heading back,” I tell the PD Brothers.

“I’m with you, Boss. They got two of the fake Deputies. Two are still out there.” Steel makes a good point but I have Artemis.

I could argue but I want a spinach pie. “Whatever floats your boat, Steel.”

Sitting on the bench I finish my pie and give Artemis the last of hers. “Where’d they pick up the ex-Deputy?”

“My Team was called when he ran into the woods. I sent the Team back when we were in holding. This one is the second of the four with warrants that we’ve picked up.”

“Here in Champion?” Shit.

“Just before the town, PD caught his tag.”

Shit, they’re getting closer and Bruno’s words come back to remind me I’m never completely safe. “I’ll wait for Security if you’re out.”

He nods. "Pres couldn't know about this dick so he'll add more Security now."

I get it and stand wiping my hands. "Thanks, Steel."

More Security is back to what I had. I don't have a problem with it as long as I can work. I think, I'll make you proud, Daddy.

Bishop

Slowing to lower, I stop in front of the Club door, then jog up the steps and in. “Smooth, Bishop.” Kyler has me throwing chin.

“Jinx called me here.” We take the stairs at a jog.

“His meeting room. There was an issue at the Marshal’s office today.” He opens the door but doesn’t walk in.

“I added Security on Champion once I heard, Brother.”

I turn to let Jinx by me but he stops. “Why? I haven’t heard anything.”

He looks at Kyler so I do.

“The threats from the ex...”

“Bishop just dealt with the ex.” Jinx has Kyler wincing.

Jesus. I close my eyes. “Maybe in the meeting room, Boss.”

“Fuck. Yeah.” He takes the two steps in and stops with a hand on Champ’s head. “Champion.”

“Fuckin’ great,” I mumble walking in.

“The threats from the ex-Deputy at holding in the Marshal’s office,” Kyler says fast.

I breathe and nod but know that Marli isn’t buying it.

Jinx jumps in. “I added a team for you and take back the pass to the Champion town.”

My girl nods. “I knew and told Steel I’d wait for Security next time. He said you’d have it done.” She’s got no problem with Security on her as long as she can work.

“Your dog working for you?”

Marli nods again but this time with a smile. “She is, Pres. She held the ex-Deputy back with Protect so she won’t hold back next time she sees him.”

I love the dog. Jinx nods. “Good. Kyler, get the pictures to Artemis of the two we’re missing.”

Kyler opens his tablet and types. “Roger, Pres. Done.”

Marli laughs. “Thanks, VP. I use the straight Protect order. Piper said it would work for any threat, so if she doesn’t recognize them, she’d still go after them?”

Jinx looks at Kyler but I answer, “Yeah, Dreng uses Protect in crowds and when he’s off the compound. The line covers the kill line in Ops dogs if you’re threatened in any way. You say hold or no kill for her to know it’s just a hold order.”

“That’s good. I don’t know the lines they use but know Harky’s dogs haven’t lost a single Brother or K-9 since they’ve been working.” Jinx has me relieved. Dreng has never been threatened but I know the Protect command will work.

Marli nods. “I’ll keep using it. She doesn’t have many new members outside the Club so I should be safe.”

“She’d hold new members by the throat if she thinks they’re threatening you but she won’t kill them.” I make sure she knows it’s a possibility.

“Piper said that. She was shot by a laser and Loki held the Brother until Harky was called and cuffed the guy.” She knows.

Jinx is up. “That’s all I had and to make you aware of the two that haven’t been picked up. Cort has it on his Op board for scheduling.”

He walks out with Champ and Kyler. I stay and watch for what’s next.

“Artemis will keep me safe.”

I nod cautiously.

“I need to get back to work. I’ll see you at dinner. I can ride from here to the PD Law Club with just Artemis.”

I lean over and kiss her head. “Yeah. I’ll see you at home. I have a class in a few so I’ll be out early if I’m not called away again.” I love to see the little shiver and get out before I’m asked about her ex.

Jinx is outside when I walk out the front doors. “Did she ask?”

I shake my head.

“I’ll get Debra to meet with her. Ol’ ladies aren’t asking shit like that. Sorry, Brother, I didn’t know she was in there. I asked for you.” Kyler must have thought she needed it.

I have to agree with Kyler on this one. She needs to see she's not alone with those threats and took Security without a problem. "I'll deal when I need to, but as of right now, I don't need to. I have a class I need to get to."

He throws chin and I jump aiming for high and speed, glad I had the suit on, but I'll never admit it out loud.

Marli

It took everything in me to act like a grown up, but in my office, I fall into my desk chair and hold my head with my elbows on the desk. Bishop dealt with the leech? This rabbit hole is scary. I know Badass isn't the Sheriff's Department but I'm not sure I want to know how the leech was dealt with. He drugged me to marry him.

As much as I avoid thinking about it, I figure that drug he fed me afforded him opportunity to do more than marry me. I thought I got drunk and slept with him. It's never happened before but I was drinking and he sat by me throwing out pick up lines. He isn't my type so he would have lost that bet... until I woke up with him the next afternoon. I knew for sure we had slept together and he said we had to so the marriage would be legal. I could have shot him for marrying me while I was drunk. I don't remember the marriage but he had a video showing I did indeed marry the retched leech. He held me up and I signed my name then nodded for the guy in the chapel.

As soon as my brain cleared, all I could think was he's not leaving my sight until we're divorced and I can officially kick him to the curb. I did that too.

Now, Bishop dealt with him and that had to be recently. Pres said, 'just dealt'.

What do I say? How do I ask? Do I even want to know? Badass doesn't deal with drugs or hurting women and kids well. They've been the same for years and it's based on philosophy I wholeheartedly agree with. I've done enough pickups to know they aren't killing everyone, as a matter of

fact, more than a few that I picked up should have been rendered missing from the community and I wouldn't complain a bit.

I sit up and think. Why do I think I should care about the leech? He drugged, married then had sex with me and Bruno thinks the fraud of a Sheriff put him up to it. He called me a mark, right to my face, after the divorce. There is nothing in me that feels the need to check on the pitiful excuse of a man.

Karma is a bitch or Bishop. I giggle. Badass karma suits the leech.

My head whips toward the door at the knock.

"Hey, I've got half an hour and need a snack." Jeti pokes her head in.

I'm up and ready. "Meat today."

She wrinkles her nose. "I asked if they'd get Portuguese chorico last week but they didn't have it a couple of days ago."

"That's a different rabbit hole. Today I'm in the Badass karma hole."

She laughs pulling me out. "Debra's meeting us in the lot."

"Artemis." I hold the door for my dog.

"What did you do?" Jeti isn't letting me go.

"Nothing. I'm walking right with you. Let my arm go." I smile when Artemis growls.

Jeti drops my arm taking the stairs quick. “What did you do to earn Badass karma?”

“I didn’t do a thing. I’ll tell you in the truck.” I hit the fob and Debra jumps in the front.

“Being the youngest sucks.” Jeti has me smiling. I’m not the youngest here and it’s my truck.

On the way, I tell them what I heard then thought of the leech and him deserving Badass karma.

“Hannah killed a Brother her first day in the Club. She said thoughts of rape is a kill order.” Debra seems so strait laced but she’s got Badass in her.

Jeti agrees. “It’s drilled into us. We grew up free of bias. Everyone is just equal.”

That’s all. “It’s not the world I grew up in but my life wasn’t bad. My dad never stopped me from doing anything I was interested in. We did have hands he told me to stay away from and made sure I knew how to hurt a man when I was young.”

“We trained from young too. People outside the Clubs are crazy and my dad is VP of Mass Badass.”

“He’s President. Everyone always says VP but Marli is new and may not know he runs the Club and is second to Ben Knight in BSC.”

“I thought Christian was second in BSC? My training was faulty.”

Jeti laughs. “Christian is second to Prez but it’s an Indian thing. Like here with Justice, Teller, Mucimi and

Mase.”

Not again. “Don’t. Stella gave me the lecture-lesson. I get it. You were taught so you wouldn’t be kidnapped?”

“Yeah, we all were. They gave us everything they were taught and anything new they came up with. We came up with more and Christian taught us all how to use the abilities we have to help keep us safe. Every kid, even now, holds a high security threat. Money and hurting Badass Officers is always a threat. I feel bad for the kids now but they have more room to move around the Clubs,” Jeti says all this like it’s no big deal.

“I wish I learned the way you guys did. I didn’t have TV or a computer until I was in high school. Everything outside Amish crap was hidden.” Debra’s voice holds longing.

It scares the hell out of me but I see the logic in there. I was taught everything my dad thought I’d need including the Sheriff job. It wasn’t so different from Badass I guess.

I pull right in front of the Lebanese place and order spinach for Artemis and a flat bread for me. “I was here for lunch. I love this place.”

Jeti hits my arm. “Why didn’t you say? We could have gone to the Italian place, they have the square pizza slices.”

I shiver at the thought. “I did say I love this place and bread with tomato paste and powdered cheese isn’t pizza.”

She laughs at me. “It’s like an appetizer. I brought a box to the Protector dinner and it was gone before dinner was on the table.”

I think about the weird Mexican food I've seen and think, to each his own. That's not mine to own. We had Johnny cakes and cowboy food the Deputies bitched about on drives. It's easy to carry and I grew up eating it.

Jeti nods sitting on the bench. "I wish we had a fish place here. We grew up on that."

"Stop reading me."

Debra bumps Jeti's shoulder. "I thought you stopped that already."

Jeti's eyes get huge. "I did but Kyler told me to make sure she's settled."

That gets my attention. "You can just ask like a normal person. Why wouldn't I be settled?"

She shrugs. "I was running in the hall and passed him saying we're coming here. He said to make sure you're settled."

That settles me. "I think it's about the leech. I'm settled."

They both nod. "You are. Brothers always think women Brothers are weak. We're just like them."

I have to agree but don't say it out loud.

Bishop

“She’s fine, Brother.” Jinx walks away.

I nod bringing the plate over to my girl. Bending, I kiss her head. “Someday soon we’ll get to eat alone.”

She looks up and laughs with the whole fuckin’ women’s table. I wink. “We’re acquainted and not in...”

Those hazel eyes shine. “Ottumwa Iowa is a long way from here, but I’d let it slide cause you’re cute.”

I smile, proud that she got that one. “You prove that Champion name is earned every time. Good job, my little Champion.” I love when that shine hits her eyes and kiss her head again before going back for my own plate.

“Did she agree?” Cort and the questions.

“She will. I’d call and let you know, Boss.”

He shakes his head at me. “It’s been more than a fucking week.”

I nod. “The world hasn’t ended, Badass hasn’t fallen apart and I’m still standing, Boss. The time has gotten her comfortable in her job, with me and today, our biggest hurdle, comfortable with Badass gray.”

“Yeah?”

I nod and eat.

“Justice calls it murky.”

I look up at Raid. “Why are you here? You don’t normally hit the party line like Cort.” I think he was chained to the compound after Cooper.

He shrugs. “The Brothers at the Club are mostly trainees or Brothers I see every day, Lorelei likes seeing the ol’ ladies and you always have food I never get.” He holds a piece of flat bread with shit on it up.

I nod. “Good answer.”

Zeke bumps my shoulder sitting beside me. ‘Nagíla wanted to come tonight.’ He’d show for his ol’ lady.

I would to and nod.

“How is Champion on the job?” Cort asks but he’s looking at Jinx so I eat and listen.

When I’ve heard enough and see my girl’s pretty eyes on me, I stand.

“Where are you going?”

I almost roll my eyes but hold that because Cort isn’t the Brother to fuck with. “A ride, walk, table alone with my girl so she gets closer to being my ol’ lady, Boss. It’s not happening with her there and me here.”

“Huh. Go, don’t drag it out.”

The Brothers laugh.

My girl is up and doesn’t care when the women laugh. “They’re all a little nuts.”

“They are. I don’t think they understand that showing and dividing our attention actually stops what they want to accomplish.”

She stops before the gate so I pull her to a seat and lift her onto my lap. Her smile at the move shows she’s

comfortable with it. “They want me to agree so they keep showing?”

“Yeah. I told you Cort will keep dogging me until you’re claimed.”

“Then claim me so they stop this. We can’t even drive for a quick Whopper out of a drive thru with everyone here.”

I laugh and kiss her head. “I need a better reason than a Whopper, little Champion. This is forever. A life isn’t built on Whopper attainability.” I love the little giggle that gets.

“You’re right. It’s about love, compatibility, the way we work to resolve problems, and belief in each other. The weird list we did, showing how much we agree on, should have been enough, but I wouldn’t have learned about you and how much I’ve come to believe in you as the man I want to spend the rest of my life with. That is, as long as I’m not tested on old laws just from the Midwest.”

My breath lets loose and lips devour hers with all the hunger of a Brother that’s been denied for too fuckin’ long with delusional thoughts floating through my head at every other thought. A hit to my chest stuns my brain enough to start thinking again. “Little Champion, Jesus. I think you released a tidal wave. Are you okay?” I don’t tell her the wave of delusional thoughts or she’d never let me claim her.

Her smirk and red lips have me wanting more. One taste and I know she’s it. I knew before and the readers confirmed it, but today she’s agreeing.

The smirk turns into a smile. “I’m fine but I’m never getting a Whopper if you don’t claim me.”

The words throw more than a sandwich to my brain so I breathe with my chin on her head. “You’re going to kill me with the innuendos.”

She moves so I look down at the smile that caught my heart the day I met her. “I have experienced the killing me softly for a week. Badass means you deal and don’t look back. Deal.”

I stand getting a yelp out of her. “Brothers, I claim Marli Champion Bishop as my ol’ lady!” I get a second kiss out of her before we’re mauled by Brothers and ol’ ladies dividing us up again.

Badass really is crazy.

“You sing?” I take the mic and smile.

“Not like you, Brother. Eric Clapton, *‘It’s in the way that you use it.’* Just the keyboard and drums.”

He smiles. “Oldie but goody.”

I nod, turning toward the Brothers. “I grew up in the Club and learned more lessons than I’ll ever remember. Luckily, I met Jinx when I fell into the Phoenix Clubs and he wrote them down.” I wait for it to quiet while throwing chin to Jinx. “My dad was my hero. He taught me Badass in many different ways. He said honor, respect and loyalty were all rolled into this song. All are lessons I live by making it a

personal anthem, and tonight a tribute to my new ol' lady who committed to face the rest together with me and my Brothers."

Jack starts to a never alone cheer from the ol' ladies. How the fuck do they say it all together?

I smile at my girl and love anything she does or wants to do tonight. It's hers. The drums get a cheer and I think they aren't listening to me or the words when everyone moves and starts dancing. I watch my girl who doesn't take her eyes off me and sing to her. She swats Debra away making me smile. I wink and finish to a loud cheer.

She runs and jumps making Jack laugh. "That deep voice worked fuckin' sweet with that song, Brother."

I throw him chin and walk away to another cheer that has me shaking my head. I sang that and more for my dad and Brothers from thirteen on. They're the only crazy Brothers that want to sing at every Club. I was an Enforcer, now Protector. Shit, President.

"Let me walk, Bishop." Marli gets a kiss and set down.

"I was thinking about my dad."

Cort claps a hand on my back. "Perfect, Bishop. You've got a good voice."

Marli squeezes my hand and points to the ol' ladies doing a line dance. I nod and bend. "I like getting an actual kiss now."

My eyes close with could be's and Cort pulls my cut. My life is still not my own. It will be soon.

“Why was that a Badass lesson?”

I roll my eyes at Raid.

“Don’t brag, don’t lie, don’t abuse your power and don’t let go. Do that over there.” Cort turns him toward the women. “She owes you a dance.”

I just laugh. It’s never happening. To stop any other crazy shit, I line dance with my ol’ lady.

“Shower?” Her hopeful sound has me looking up.

“Later.”

“It’s number one.”

I shake my head. “There’s only so much control a Brother has.”

“I liked your song.”

My hands stop sliding her panties down and I look up. In my delusional head, panties sliding off are erotic as hell. No, that would be in every Brothers head but her eyes show turmoil. I missed something somewhere. I’m up and sit her naked ass on my lap trying to forget the naked part. I recognize that as truly delusional. “What’s happening here?” She was just trying to rip my clothes off.

“You claimed me and we’ve never been naked with each other.”

I smile knowing she’s not shy about sex. “Yeah.”

“It’s a lot of pressure.” She blows her breath out to make the point.

I kiss her head. “No, there’s no pressure at all, the way I see it. We’re forever, if it doesn’t work, we fix it. I had the guarantee before I touched you, knowing I love who you are and how you love me back. There’s no audition, babe.”

Her eyes settle on me then shine in happiness. “What are you waiting for?”

She’s on her back with me on her front before she can ask anything else. Starting from her mouth I have a map in my head to follow down to my final destination. Seeing those panties slide plays through my head as I mark all my new territories.

“Bishop.” The moan, her shiver and hand pulling my hair has me out of that fantasy and into my next.

Gathering her up, I stay on my knees but slide back. “Anything, little Champion.” I hold my breath feeling her heat as she slides down on me with another guttural moan.

“You’re like velvet. Fuck. Don’t move.” I stop her bounce up, not wanting to lose the feel of her on me. “Just like the song, no one gets lucky ‘til luck comes along.” Buried in her until we’re one human form plays in my head but I want this too much to stop.

“Please, twice is lucky.” My girl has her own wants and isn’t afraid to ask for them.

I shake the crazy thoughts that brings out of my head and move her, knowing when she’s close by her nails on my shoulders and pussy gripping as if she controls right when to

do that. She's going to send me over. I get my mouth on her neck and get her there feeling every bit of it myself so I hold her down and breathe for control. Spinning her, I get to my favorite position and lean her out with my hands on her tits. "One more, little Champion. Three is always better," I growl pounding into her.

Listening to her, feeling her, holding her just like this, rolls altogether in my head. The release pulls a growl out of me as if I'm a caveman marking my territory, my woman. I shake my head wondering where the fuck all that came from. It's lunacy brought on by my ol' lady agreeing.

I pull her back against me, holding with my arms crossed over her front. Marking my territory was a good analogy, I guess. Jesus, I'm really fuckin' crazy.

"Love you, my little Champion."

She grunts.

Chapter Seven

Two days

Bishop

Kangaroos are not allowed in a barber shop. I type out before we set down and smile wondering if she knows it.

“Champion?” Ethan asks.

“Yeah, I test her on weird laws still on the books. She knows them but it keeps us connected during the day.”

I get a look but jump out before he can explain it or confirm the delusional state of mind means I’m another crazy President. “This is a mayor refusing to leave. He called in the news before taking his hostages and shooting a security guard.”

“Is this state or federal?” Ethan is good with the law but doesn’t realize he can change the outcome.

“I had Cort get the PD to call in FBI. It’s hostages in a city government building so it could go state but the number of hostages and mass shooting threat gives cause for better negotiators and a strike team. Locals don’t have the money FBI does and always shies away from using it. It makes the federal call a reasonable solution to a volatile situation that the local PD isn’t equipped for.” That’s the words I hope Cort repeated.

“That’s smart with all these cameras.”

I'm glad he agrees and sees our purpose. We walk right under the tape and to the PD car with officers around it. "Is FBI here?"

Luke Rayne: "Pulling in now. They got the call right after you did, Bishop."

Bishop: "Roger."

PD: "He shot a guard. This is why they booted him. No one is letting him stay with a show like this." What I'm assuming is the chief pushes officers out of his way on his mission to bring his rant directly to us.

Bishop: "FBI is pulling in. Their negotiator will talk him down and Ops team will take him out."

PD: "They said we step back. We never had FBI waltz in. It sounds sketchy to me."

Bishop: I smile at the older cop that has no problem with Badass waltzing in. "They're open to help with any case and have the manpower with experience so it's not on your budget. The local offices train law enforcement too so you're not left out here on your own. Besides, they're with us." Luke Rayne laughs in my piece causing my jaw to clench so I'm not laughing with him.

Carlson: "Pres, I'm Carlson, the negotiator." He's in MC Badass gear. This should be sketchy to our cop in charge but I don't point it out.

Bishop: I take his forearm and see amusement in his eyes. "Brekan sent you?" His nod is all I get before he's turning toward the PD Chief. I stand back and listen. The dick has the second floor barricaded. Ten minutes in and I'm tired

of the setup. A sniper has him moving too fast for a shot. I give a look to Ethan getting an eye roll.

Luke Rayne: “Bishop, Cort said to do what you can to end this. The news is playing PD interviews.”

Bishop: I turn fast, scanning the perimeter of yellow tape. Fuckin’ country bumpkin PD has the news crowded around. I shake my head. “Luke Rayne, what windows is he at. We’re in flight suits and can hit him from outside.”

Luke Rayne: “North side, second floor corner. I haven’t run Flight Guard Ops. Tell me what you need.” I can hear amusement in his normal even keeled voice.

Bishop: “I need you to stop your snipers and strike team from shooting us.”

Luke Rayne: “AzOp team one, stand down. Done, Bishop, show us how the suits work.”

Bishop: “Roger, Boss. Ethan, north corner second floor. Whichever distracts the other shoots.”

Ethan: “On it, Pres.” Carlson laughs.

Bishop: I shake my head and aim for speed and height.

Luke Rayne: “Right, second window, Bishop.”

Bishop: “Ethan, come up right under me shooting.”

Ethan: “Fuck, Boss. He’s got real bull...”

Bishop: Kicking the window in has me sailing into the room feet first and blue light flashing. “Bullets.” I finish for him and hold my gun on the dick. As soon as Ethan is in, I turn toward the screaming. Jesus, a baby is crying on top of

the women's noises. "We're clear, Boss." I just notice my piece is oddly silent.

Luke Rayne: The line clicks in and I hear background laughing and talking. "AzOp One move in. That was crazy, Brother. I'm glad you showed. FBI will take the pussy into custody."

Bishop: "Roger, Boss." I throw chin to Ethan as he cuffs the dick. FBI comes in guns first. I shake my head and help a woman off the floor. "Where are the men?"

Luke Rayne: "Bishop, Cort said don't draw attention leaving."

Bishop: I can't interrupt this woman. She's not letting my hand go so I click for him. It's a sign every control knows.

Woman: "We're all in different rooms. He was going to shoot us all and go back to the rooms for the others before the police shot him. He's crazy. It was a mass murder suicide plan." An agent takes the woman and baby out.

Bishop: I throw chin to the agent walking in and catch Ethan's eye. "Walk out."

Ethan: He jogs through the agents and hostages. "Are we taking our coats off, Pres?"

Bishop: "No. the chopper isn't far. Let's go to the roof." On the roof I put an arm out. "High and fast." He clasps my forearm and pushes hard.

Cort: He laughs loud in my ear. At the chopper he finally has words. "Good job, Bishop, Ethan. You're clear to the Club."

I repeat it for Ethan as we float into the chopper.

Marli

We pull up to the big Club and head to the back. Piper isn't here yet so I check messages. Bishop has me giggling as I type back.

Alaska

Why they'd need laws for kangaroos in Alaska ranks right up there with the giraffe and elephant laws I want to question.

Piper and Sampson catch my eye jogging around the corner. "Marli. I'm glad you're here. I was watching the news and saw the Flight Guard in action. They did good but it showed the local PD as incompetent. The chief was giving an interview and did a double take they played a couple of times when Bishop flew up and kicked in the window with his guy following then the blue light was flashing. It was so fast." She shakes her head but Bishop is really good in the suit. "They saved the hostages with no casualties. The guy had a mass murder suicide plan that hostages weren't shy about telling anyone that would listen."

Holy shit. "How many hostages?"

"Over twenty. They're still bringing them out. The perp called the news before PD knew what was going on. They had cameras on the building and got the two blurs flying up and in like a shot. It was crazy. Hannah is slowing it down to show the how. She's how I knew it was Bishop."

I shake my head. "I'm glad the hostages are out and safe. Why is Hannah sending you Flight Guard Ops?" I guess that would be Flight Guard Law Ops.

“Harky and Zeus are training in the suit. Attention.”
She points and Sampson sits by Artemis.”

Okay. I have no idea what to say so I nod. The rabbit holes are getting easier to navigate through and even understand but they’re still weird.

“Yeah, let’s get this done.”

Forty minutes of K-9 line training, that matches the book exactly, has me issuing orders quicker and Artemis showing her mastery of said orders. Throwing words from a book doesn’t give me the confidence that the forty-minute blocks of training does where I can see it. I appreciate the hell out of Piper. “Thanks for showing here again, Piper, Sampson.”

She nods. I think women nod like men throw chin. “It’s a good break from the K-9 compound. Is she getting a suit?”

I shake my head. “I have a PD Flight Guard team if I’m in the air. No one said they’re making Artemis a suit. She wears her regular gear.” Since training, I’ve been in the suit once with Steel’s team for maintenance training. Artemis shows me a picture of her gear daily, like I’d forget to get her in it, so she’s not stressed wearing it.

“Ajax and his Alpha-Bit are training the K-9s. He goes everywhere with Zeke.”

The President that doesn’t move his mouth to talk, who’s ol’ lady has hands that talk, has a dog that has an Alpha-Bit that is training flying dogs with him. Another rabbit hole I have avoided so far. I don’t take the jump down into that

particular hole. I'm walking around the building with her, thinking, the men have a reason for throwing chin. What do I say? What question do I ask first and do I even want to know? All good reasons to nod or throw chin. I do that avoiding the rabbit hole.

“We're here one more time, then you're in the simulator at Rising Squared. I'll take an hour slot so you'll have five or six Op scenarios to see how different commands work with threats. You're done after that and can bring her into the simulator here to train. She's by your side for regular training.” She finishes just as we're at the chopper door. She's good with timing.

“We haven't done the simulator here but she's in training with me. Thanks again, Piper, Sampson. I'll see you tomorrow.”

She nods and climbs in. Before the doors close, we jog to the Club so we're not caught in the hurricane no one reacts to.

“Just who I'm looking for.” The smooth voice sends a shiver through me, or it could be the arms around me from behind.

“Artemis, down-time. You're back sooner than I expected.”

He lifts me so his mouth is by my ear and says, “Hold on.”

My lower half clenches with the soft, silky words and I hold on. At the house, we don't make it past the first armchair before my pants are off and he's biting my ass. The

mesmerizing tone and cadence of his deep voice has me ready, willing and able. The concept of time has no chance against the voice.

Oh, my, God. “Bishop.” I’m ready to pull a gun and take what I want again but I lost my gun belt. I beg once more and he delivers a body racking shudder and moan that I swear is pulled from my soul itself.

Bishop

Lifting my little Champion up, I kiss her lips and hug her tight. “Thank you. You ready?” She never said a word about being taken on the floor in the walkway before the living room. The delusional thoughts are not done yet, I guess.

“You’re like a freight train. I hear you, but time is weird, like speeding on tracks or something. I blow through an orgasm, I’m in a haze, washed and redressed, then I’m asked if I’m ready. I have no idea. The train just left.”

I laugh hugging her tighter as we make it to the Club. Pointing out the delusions floating through my head is acknowledging them but she never stops them and her agreement turns me on. “I’m keeping the rabbit hole interesting for you. I’m glad it’s working but I like the nights when I can feel your hair splayed against my chest.”

She shakes her head and shivers as I lower her. “I’ll keep falling in that one if you keep this up.”

That agreement strikes me as sexy. I really am crazy. I smile and take her hand walking through the door. Twice at work, once at a restaurant and position trials in our bed has me convinced ol’ ladies are the reason we fight to get home so quick. When Cort wanted the job ended, all I could think of was our schedules and how it would work, the Brother is a genius. The job was done in minutes – two to be exact – and we’re home before my next class. His crazy is an epidemic here.

At her office door, I bend and kiss her lips. “I’ll keep it up, little Champion.”

The exaggerated blowing out her breath has me smiling. She's not clear yet but will be. I pull the door closed behind her and turn.

"Boss, I have a question from ABSZ IT about jurisdiction that isn't on the app." Julius surprises me. He must have a class here for Jinx.

"Let's see it. They made the app."

"Their Pres is pissed it's not addressed in the law books they uploaded. It's not in there, Boss. There's a whole block of questions he wants answers for."

I've been on the app, checking for everything I can think of and it has more than I've ever seen. Jurisdiction covers a lot of ground but Alder questions everything when he's learning new.

"Is Alder taking the bar exam?"

He stops as I open the door to my office here at this Club. "The kid President?"

I turn on him before he's through the door. "He's a scientist, science something for genetics, a pilot, doctor in multiple states, architect, engineer, computer genius, master in martial arts-among other masteries, inventor, security specialist, Protector level in Flight Guard and every position for Flight, plus he ran Ops collecting his Ford Brothers. I missed a bunch of shit he does and knows but those are just the basics of Alder. The one thing he isn't is a kid. No Alpha-Bits get labeled *kid*. Alder is our age, a President who earned his position through all the work I listed and honors his Brothers with a better life through the commitment he made to

be that President. All the As are in their twenties, don't ever refer to them as kids."

He looks like he swallowed his tongue, "Roger, Pres. I don't know him but heard he's a doctor. He has a list." He looks toward my desk hoping I'll move on I bet.

I do and sit, not liking the way he brushes this to the side so quickly. Web, Alder and the Alpha-Bits are a big part of how we got here so fast.

Before he has whatever on his hologram board up, I'm hitting Asa in the chat.

He swipes me on from an Ops room that looks like Honor with the flight deck showing on a board. "Pres Bishop."

"Asa, I'm glad you're not busy. Do you have an Alpha-Bit history?"

He rolls his eyes and I see the back of his Mohawk peeking out in red. I always liked the multi color on him. "Pres have Franz make book to Alpha-Bit history."

I nod. "Can you send it to me and does it have all the technology and inventions?"

"I send. It have everything Alpha-Bit work at back. Web in Alpha-Bit book."

I nod. "He needs to be. I want the history so I don't have to hear another Brother call Alder the *kid President*."

He shakes that Mohawk giving a better view of his rainbow colors in measured sections. Someone did a good job for him. "Fuckin' Brothers no respect. Alpha-Bit make glasses

they learn test to lesson, forget we work same to Brother, before Brother.”

I agree. “I’ll fix what I can, Brother. Is there a timeline in there.”

“Yeah, all by date. Ops list show Alpha-Bit collection same to slave.” He’s got my attention.

“There’s a book for slave collection?”

“Slave, kid. It Indian explain to Indian new and connection. White Wave need history connect her to Badass.” He shrugs looking cute as fuck.

“Can I get that for Marli? She’s a cousin to Arndt, Chenoa, Maiyun and Kateri but never knew she was Indian. Her dad told her she was polish.”

He nods. “Similar look, I see that.” He’s got me smiling as he throws it out while typing. “Done, Pres Bishop. You chat me you need more.”

“I will, thanks, Asa. Let me know if you need anything.”

“Pres Alder have list to you, it all law. You answer?”

I nod. “I’m with the Brother he questioned now. I was on Ops.”

“Good job to Op. Pres Cort send Flight Guard no need FBI.”

I nod. “He’s learning like us, Brother. I’ll get Alder’s answer up on his sheet.”

He stops typing and looks at me. “Pres Alder at Veritable. He want answers.”

I'm up. "Fuck. I wasn't told he's here. I'll find him. Thanks, Asa."

He throws chin and closes us down.

I give Julius a look. "Where's Alder?"

"The dining room."

I drag him out by his cut. I have to agree with Asa here, fuckin' Brothers.

In the dining room I point to the seat I want Julius in, "Don't open your mouth unless he asks you a direct question."

His eyes are still darting around. I throw chin to Tats and sit across from a typing Alder. The Brother never stops.

"Pres Bishop, one minute I done."

"Take your time, Little Pres."

He's done in seconds and his hologram shuts down. "Government fuckin' crazy. Bar exam question no ask jurisdiction to crime. How you know?"

"Today's Op?"

"Yeah, city is to state. You charge federal. FBI show, Pres Cort say you ask."

I get what he's asking and why. "It could have been state but the local PD wasn't going to be able to handle it. The press was there before PD so he wanted a bigger audience. It told me his plan was going to be memorable."

He nods. "Big audience mean he plan big crime."

"Sort of. Before I left here, he'd already called press and had hostages. He was pissed he was booted out of office

and planning for a memorable exit. I had Cort call FBI so federal would be the charge from them. It could have gone to the Sheriff or even local, but it felt like more from the start. I had no idea the local was manned by inept Officers so it was the right call. They could have charged him with a felony but probably wouldn't have. They're used to break ins and bar brawls."

"Gut feeling say you call FBI, have more control over charge and experience to Op."

"Yeah, you could put it that way."

"Why no law tell jurisdiction to city, state, federal? State penal code consequence only." He's got a good question.

"They all do if you look at the consequences from that penal code. Misdemeanor, felony, inchoate offenses and strict liability offenses. Each state decides what to criminalize. Some aren't criminal but tax, property, local and a slew of other offenses." I see he gets it and go on. "The federal government does too so the state has its laws and the government has its own laws."

He nods. "Constitution. Bill of rights."

"Yeah. When the law is broken, federal government laws are upheld giving citizens rights that have to be met but also consequences for being broken. Federal isn't jumping in on everything even if the states' punishments are felonies."

"I see now. All law fall to federal if not crime to state."

"Yeah."

“State not give stipulation to city government crime federal have jurisdiction.”

I smile at his quick understanding. “Yeah. This dick wanted to be remembered and had a plan of mass murder and suicide. The local PD wouldn’t have made it to charge him. Carrying a gun in Arizona isn’t illegal and it was the mayor’s last day, so he had a right to be there. Even if PD got to him before he killed himself, they wouldn’t have much to charge him with and we’d only know there was another mass shooting. We don’t hear much about the after but local wouldn’t have hit him with much because their penal code allows concealed carry and he was an official giving him a right to be where he was.”

He smiles. “Good job. I read more to law. Look for best punishment. All question I have answered. All same, no local, state crime, use federal.”

“Yeah. For Native reservations only tribal and federal law applies. US territories carry most federal laws if they’re incorporated, unincorporated not so much. The military have to abide by state and federal law, but they also have the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the court martial system has a range of disciplinary options civilians don’t use and the appeal system is different.”

He waves his hand. “I do state and federal. Military wait I have time.”

“Did you take the bar?”

“States close, federal I do simulator. I no need paper, I need knowledge.”

“Don’t we all. The app is working well and covers everything. Thanks for getting it done for us. Civilians are getting crazier with the entitled bullshit.”

He nods. “Pres Falcon order PD stop give chance to be stupid. All PD be professional not therapist.”

I laugh with Tats. “He’s not wrong. Trask was starting the same before I left.”

He rolls his eyes. “Weeks ago. Brothers calm down... late to now?”

I nod. “Lately.”

“Lately, Protector calm. Maybe civilian calm they see PD professional no therapist.”

“We can all hope, Brother. It does seem to be working easier lately.”

“You find way to stop Alpha-Bit crazy, I take it.”

I laugh. “I need to think about that one. Did they do another crop circle?” Anton made one for his flight suit-zorb-laser tag park.

His head shake is sad, frustrated and has me feeling for the Brother. “Ledell see Mayan influence. He order Mayan Blue, make galactic observatory, terracing crop to building, align all new town building to astronomical event use Mayan architecture. Fuckin’ Brothers.” His head is still shaking.

I do feel for him. “With Mayan influenced irrigation, filtration and the new tech hydroponics, he can probably come up with a town that looks unique. I got to tell ya, Brother, the Brothers here were glad we weren’t in bubble pods.

Uncommon isn't so uncommon to Badass anymore." I know he did the water filtration based on Mayan design.

He smiles looking younger and happy again. "You right, Pres Bishop. I get Ledell new plans he use Mayan architecture mask to new technology. Later, Pres Bishop. Thanks to you explain."

I nod and watch him run with Tats chasing after him. "The Brother never stops."

Julius reminds me he's here. "He's a lawyer in multiple states but doesn't need the degree for Federal?"

I shrug. "He's got a photographic memory and is a seer, if he wants to practice law, he'd get the degree he needs. He's like a computer with a heart, brain and legs. Some basic information is all he needs to run with whatever he thinks up or thinks should be fixed."

"He's unbelievably smart. Mayan civilizations were basic compared to now but they were more advanced than other science, math, calendars and astronomical predictions of their times."

I nod but correct him. "We use the Gregorian calendar, Alder used their design for water filtration in all Badass towns and our zero in math has meaning today. How long would it have taken us to be right here without the Mayans?"

He smiles. "You're right. I saw they have a tie with the Cree and ruins were recently found in Georgia but the government won't let anyone investigate the site. Mayan influence to Natives would change US history more than the

fuck-up of Columbus that's still being fought over to be fixed."

He could have worded that better but I throw him chin. "Now it's a money issue. No one is cutting out days for mass shopper spending. Whether it's St Valentine's who was jailed and beheaded for marrying couples so the husbands didn't have to go to war, or Christmas, a date that in no way belongs to Jesus who it was written to say, *sell your possessions and give to the poor*. Holidays are about consumer spending and rich getting richer. No one is fuckin' with their money, they make the laws. I think they add more to include culture dollars they wouldn't see, but don't think they'll ever take any away."

"What don't you know, Pres?"

That has me smiling. "You didn't know VIP protocol. If Alder or any President is here for me, it's the first thing you say when you see me. I don't know more than I do but I know you need that."

He nods without the *he's going to kill me look*. "I'll remember, Pres. I didn't understand his questions then he had a list in a minute and a half. It was fast then he shooed me away. I'm glad you were here at the big Club."

I throw him chin and get to my office for my laptop. I love the next class.

Marli

“Steel, we need to get to Champion!” I say loud as I’m running out of my office. “Artemis, Attention, Call, Protect.”

She’s at the truck before me. I back up and point the truck toward the road waiting for the sound of Steel and his team coming up behind me.

“Go, Boss!”

Three bikes come up and I move, not waiting for the others. The blurs go by me on the tree side and I think Piper was right, they’re a blur. I wonder if it’s Steel or his second. They’re about the same size. A shot high on my windshield stops that thought.

My eyes go right to the woods before the curve. I see a flash shine just behind the tree line and slam on my brakes while hitting the window button. “Artemis, Stealth, Disarm, Protect, Go!”

I’m in park and out of the truck staying behind the door while I get the shotgun and my helmet out. “Steel, Artemis is out in Stealth. Don’t shoot my dog.”

“My third and fourth are with you. I’m doubling back.” So Steel is in the air.

I hit the board on my helmet and see the list. “Track Artemis.”

She chuffs but my visor changes and I raise the gun. “Two, Steel.” Another shot has me switching targets. I hit the ex-Deputy before he reloads and see Artemis’s tag moving

fast. “Second is running! Steel, follow Artemis’s tracking. Ops call. Ops, this is Champion. I need a medic transport.”

The Ops confirmation shows but flashes in the woods draw my attention from my visor. Throwing the shotgun on the front seat, I’m in and moving fast. Just past the curve, I’m out and running with Brothers bitching behind me and Steel lowering through the trees. “Artemis.”

She growls so I flip my visor down again and follow her tag. She’s in a gulley just behind an old rock wall. Steel jumps over the low wall with his gun out.

“Release, Artemis.” I bend and breathe.

“He’s dead.” Steel isn’t happy.

I shrug. “The last I gave her was Protect.”

“There’s no point in laser if they can’t answer.”

I don’t roll my eyes at him. “Is your other guy cuffing the ex-Deputy I shot?”

His eyes find me. “Yeah.”

“He’ll need stitches and will answer your questions. He’s an ex-Deputy. I don’t know this one.” My face scrunches trying not to see the mess Artemis made of his neck. The thing is, he’s got blood flowing but his neck has a bend that shouldn’t be there so his head is cocked sideways.

“Good job, Artemis. Water?”

“I got her, Boss. I’m K-9 trained.” I don’t know this Brother but he’s on Steel’s team. Steel is talking, probably to Ops.

“Artemis, new member. He’ll get you clean and water.”

She chuffs and sits by me but lets the Brother go in her pockets for her bowl and the shammy towel I put in it.

I watch Steel move the dead guy’s head so he can get a clear shot of his face. “He’s a Mason?” He’s not talking to me.

I’m done with the silence. “Steel, get them to add me in.” It’s a definite order and I get a sharp look.

“Champion isn’t on with us?” I’m glad his sharp look isn’t for me. I’d drop him and request a new team.

Clicks come over so I nod and he relaxes.

“IT patched your helmet in Champion. I don’t know why your piece wasn’t on but I’ll find out when we’re done here. That’s a Mason or was listed as a Mason from a California Club Cort blew up. He was a member of the Club we got Web and the As from.”

Holy shit. “That’s a coincidence I don’t like.”

“Me either. Alder is here and recognized him. Cort is on an Op but I’ll get more when he’s clear. The call in Champion was real, the Marshals office took two firebombs but it’s out and their cells were empty. No casualties. I get you want to check on your PD, but they’re clear and we may need you here.” Pres is ordering me back.

My eyes snap to Steel. “You got a new team member.”

“Yeah, he’s vetted and getting a dog.”

I look at the trees thinking. Protect means Artemis would hold him because he's been introduced as a new member. "Take two with you to Champion and make sure no one needs medic. I'll head back with Artemis and the other two."

"Security and Cleanup are pulling up. I have two Enforcers waiting to get you back, Champion. Steel, check on the PD with your two. Artemis needs a shower. Send the K-9 Brother back to handle Artemis while Champion is in Ops." Pres agrees with me and added help.

We both say, "Roger, Pres."

I turn back toward the road.

"Reagan, Johnny, you're with Champion back to the Club." Steel has me moving faster.

An SUV is waiting at the road with two Brothers I recognize. "Your truck is being towed, Brother."

I nod. "My gun is on the front seat."

He opens the back door and points. "I cleared it. The second shot went through the grill."

"Thanks. Artemis." She jumps in and the door closes. "You did good, girl. Thanks." I rub her neck and chest staying away from blood. She's not really a mess.

She chuffs.

Bishop

“She handled it like a Protector. She’s a good shot.” I knew this but I’m proud and want them to see it.

Cort smiles my way. “She’s a Protector all the way, smart and throws orders out fast. I love the dog. She snapped his neck.”

I nod. Marli is that. “She did, Boss. Why didn’t she let the dick go when he was dead?” I don’t know much about dog Ops but I know the lines.

“Protect while Champion was close.” He shrugs.

I’ll ask Harky or Piper. His smile watts up with his eyes looking above me so I turn. “Good job, little Champion.” I love the shine in her hazel eyes.

“Thanks. Pres said to come up.”

I point at Jinx on with Flight. “He’ll be done in a minute.”

She nods then throws chin to Cort. I feel the need to laugh and hug her but I put a hand out and she takes it. It’s a consolation but I got a hand on her.

“Good job, Champion. Are you a Bishop now?” Cort and the questions.

I smile proud of this too.

She nods with a smile. “Champion for work. I took Bishop but Pres said it’s confusing enough and he’s already used to the confusion of Champion.”

I laugh.

“He’s right. Ester T wrote, *‘Surrender to it all. Let the confusion and chaos subside in your head for just one moment. You don’t have to know all the answers this very second. Stand tall in front of the unknown and instead of trying to analyze it, embrace it. Jump head on, into the abyss. Let the universe catch you and take you where you’re meant to go. Let this chapter be your best one yet.’* I always liked the thought and wait to see what’s next. Chaos and the unknown can be fucking fun.”

The whole Ops room silently lets that sink in then laughs with Marli and me.

“Pres Cort like crazy. Create crazy. He know abyss jump.” Alder has Cort laughing.

I introduce the little comic. “This is Little Pres, Alder Ford.”

“Nice to finally meet you, Little Pres. I think of it as rabbit holes here and most haven’t been bad to jump into. There are so many it’s hard to choose what questions I’m asking. Most I just walk on by.”

Cort finds my girl funny. Alder is confused. “What is rabbit hole?”

I take it. “Alice in Wonderland is a kids’ book. A crazy queen lives in a rabbit hole that Alice falls into.”

“Badass same to queen. I read to see rabbit hole... similar to Badass.” He turns and starts typing again.

I shrug at Marli. “He likes information but agrees with your analogy.”

She smirks. “I got it.”

“Told you she’s smart.” Cort has me shaking my head.

Jinx comes over, looking right at Marli. “You’re quick with the long shot and decisions. I didn’t expect it. Good job. I sent a bone to Artemis for the good job. She snapped his neck.”

Marli nods. “I thought so. She didn’t have much blood on her but needs the shower.”

“I called the K-9 compound and a trainer said to give her a closing order or she’ll hold until she feels you’re safe. I asked for an example because I don’t know all her orders. He said, ‘*alert me or chuff for a body tag.*’ Jinx is good at finding answers quick.

My girl freezes then nods. “It’s an Ops command. I’ll use it.”

“You have a photographic memory?” Cort asks everyone.

“I don’t think so but I have a good memory.”

“You see book, page?” Alder asks.

Marli shrugs. “Sometimes but only for new stuff I learn. If it doesn’t interest me I can’t just pull it up. Instead of searching my brain I just Google shit now.” She’s cute.

Alder nods. “I ask words hard to me. Faster.”

“Yeah. Google is like that. Not everyone knows the useless information I look for.”

They nod together like they’re commiserating over words.

Cort laughs. “I like you, Champion. Jinx, what do I need here.”

“Alder recognized the dead pussy from the California Club that Web got help from.”

Cort loses the smile and zeros in on Alder. “He’s a dickass Mason?”

Alder nods. “Yeah, Boss. He in workbook to Boss Faith Op. I show Web he bring As food we no talk. Web say he California Club.” Alder puts his hands up. “President send us to Crow I no see until Boss Faith Op workbook.”

Cort nods. “Web is on the ABSZ today. Get with him on contracts for Champion. Something ties her into Crow and the shit he was doing.”

“Roger, Pres Cort. I send to Web. Boss Alexia send search.” It’s done.

“You’re good with what I’m going to ask for.”

Jinx has me smiling. “He always has been, Boss. That’s all I have. Cleanup has the body and the ex-Deputy is patched up. They’ll be on their way to holding there in about an hour. The ex-Deputy will be in pain.”

Cort nods. “Good enough. Anything else?”

“No, Boss.”

“Give your dog a candy from me, Champion. Jinx, have her covered off the compound. She kept herself safe today with her dog but they always try for more. You still have a dick Deputy out there and he may try with three or four more next time.”

“Roger, Boss,” from Jinx and Marli has Cort’s screen fading.

“We’re off Phoenix. You okay with Steel’s Team on you?”

My girl nods. “He has a new member that has Artemis.”

Jinx nods. “He’s vetted from the Elite Club. Those members were vetted in Mass then here.”

“Thanks. I wasn’t sure about leaving her with him but Steel trusted the Brother. Artemis would protect herself anyway.”

Jinx nods. “The call stopped the intro. Bishop do you need to get back to your class?”

“I left Julius in there. He’s a better teacher than I am.”

That has him confused. “Why is he in that class?”

“He’s done here and not on at my Club until four. He was shadowing me I guess.” The Brother is a little off.

“I need to check out the Marshals office.” His eye swirls between Marli and me.

“I have a class at my Club after this one.” I let them know I can’t make it.

Marli nods. “I want to make sure the Brothers are settled and find a new place for them to work out of.”

“I’ll get Kyler on with us. Let’s ride over.” Jinx starts walking.

I smile at my girl. “Go. He’s a doer.”

She pulls my coat and kisses my lips. “See you for dinner.”

Alder stands and shakes his head. “I ride to new town. Tats say history preserve there.”

I nod. “If you’re here for dinner we can ride over and eat there. Marli knows more about the history and shit in the buildings because it’s her family’s.”

He stops then nods. “I send Tats home and stay. You have Protector to me off compound?”

“Always, Brother. We can take the Alpha-Bits from here if they’re interested. Aaron loves the town.”

He nods. “I will ask. Time?”

“Five thirty, six?”

“Works. I have meet.” He runs out of Ops to chuckles from some techs.

I guess I’m done here and leave too.

I was born and bred Badass so saying shit like hugging my girl is one of the best parts of my day and I look forward to it isn’t coming out of my mouth. I do feel it deep but I’m never saying it. My crazy does have limits.

I watched her all through the extensive town tour ending with the brothel. She’s smart to save this for last. The Bits run through the second floor looking for the technology

they know that's hidden in the antiques from a past they never will. It's like a treasure hunt for them, making me smile and getting real laughs out of the little Brothers.

Marli giggles at Aaron who discovers more than he knew about. The LED lights are not something he'd seen or ordered here so he's got us all following from room to room as he discovers switches in cigarette boxes, on a bathing bowl and pitcher stand and the best was a carved pineapple in the headboard. Marli showed them the diagram behind the door and the little guys took off to find whatever they missed in each room.

"Brothel is hotel, hostel?" Alder has asked questions in every building. The news presses had him crawling behind to see the motors and opening all the drawers.

Marli smiles. "Women of the night stayed here. They'd entertain the men."

"Harem?" Alder asks.

I smile at Marli's eyes going huge showing off the green and amber. "Alder has some women working for him. He calls them his harem but they aren't married. They're all ol' ladies to Brothers."

She nods but doesn't say anything.

I look at Alder. "Prostitutes. Similar to Club chicks but they didn't get paid well or have insurance and school options. The rooms were bare and had no amenities."

"Slave?"

"A step up but not by much. They'd have to work off fabric for dresses, food and board here so getting out wasn't

easy.”

He nods once. “Slave to different time.”

Marli agrees. “It’s a good way to describe it. My family always had someone in law and there are Marshal ledgers showing they’d send food from the mercantile, buy meat from the ranch and pay for estate furnishing to go to the brothel and families needing a hand.”

Alder’s head tilts. “You family to prostitute women?” He sections the word prostitute.

“No, or I’d imagine some of the men took whatever was offered but the Champions didn’t belong to a church. It was the family’s way of helping those in need. My whole life I’ve been told it’s what we do. All the little signs about taking care of brethren were from the ranch houses but mostly the main house. The older hands moved to the back bunkhouses with little plots of land to help grow food for the kitchen. They stayed until they passed on.” She’s matter of fact but I’m impressed.

“It’s the same as Badass. Wealthy landowners felt the need to keep the community healthy and growing.”

Marli nods. “Without family in town to keep the businesses running and seasonal ranch hands organized, the town stagnated. Technology is good and bad. If we had more family, we might have helped that, but throwing money where there was no one to catch it, wasn’t helping anything. The people were moving to bigger cities and jobs that they now got information from TV, newspapers and telephones.”

“I see population influx to better living Badass town. No need to Club technology but benefit to civilian need doctor, job, school to kids.”

Marli smiles. “That drew the townsfolk away and now it’s drawing them back.”

“I help get new to here. I like old mask show technology work everywhere. Small town good to live with technology.”

I laugh. “Badass small towns are better than big cities. Your technology isn’t the only draw here. Clean water is huge and a sustainable future is possible in Badass with a simpler life and awesome views.”

Alder nods. “I see it, Boss. Pres Cort need more BSC Club. ABSZ take no more town. Population control need is keep to sustainable.”

Jesus. “Do me a favor and get him moving on the new Clubs so he’ll stop showing here.” I get an Alder look.

Then he smiles. “I consider push to Pres Cort...maybe next month I not busy.” He laughs and runs out.

“Fuckin’ Brothers.”

Marli giggles and I hug her. “I love the little Brothers.”

“I see that. I’m hungry.” She pulls away and walks out.

I shake my head.

“Boss Bishop!” Aaron has me walking. He could have found the transforming kitchen armoire thing or he’s hungry.

Either way I'm hungry too.

I hear Caelan's laugh and shake my head. Or Cort is here again. Fuck.

Chapter Eight

Bishop

It's illegal to fish while driving across a bridge.

Florida is a far reach but she got the elephant parking meter law.

I swipe my phone on smiling.

“Florida again? Are you running out of weird law?”

“No, little Champion, but it’s a weird one. A fishing pole hanging out the window could give cause for a stop. It beats a broken light.”

She laughs. “The reason I called is I’m here with Flame. She’s got a lot of stories I want to hear.”

I’m up and moving toward the door. “Flame is in your office?”

“No, we’re on a bench eating spinach pies. Artemis has a meat pie.” My ol’ lady is teasing me?

I shake my head. “Let me...”

“Here’s Flame.”

“My blood brother.”

I laugh. “Flame, why didn’t you come see me?”

“Then I’d miss meeting your ol’ lady. My way, I get her without you butting in. She tells me you’re treating her right but, Bro, the shaving is just wrong.”

I laugh. “Tell me Stan doesn’t do it. When are you heading back?”

“I’m not saying a word about Stan’s fetishes. Marli just went back in to get you meat pies. I love your girl, Brax. I’m happy for you. What’s up with the dog?”

“She’s protection. There’s a threat out on Marli. Her dad was shot by those faux Masons I told you about.”

“That was a couple of years ago.” She remembers everything.

“It never ends. Are Stan and Raiden here?”

“Raiden was stolen by those little white-haired boys. They’re walking the town. We’re on our way to the MC. Stan is being recruited by Graywolf, the hero Brother from the FBI.” She’s not going to ask more about the dog or threat, she’s an ol’ lady all the way.

“Brekan is a good President and cleaning the Clubs out here. Stan is looking to move?” I don’t have a problem asking.

Her hesitation has me alert. “The Club isn’t the same. Stan called Badass for help. It wasn’t taken well and he doesn’t think it’s going to get better.”

“I know Ben Knight and Ricky Callahan.”

“No. They sent trainers and new shit but it’s not being used and Stan’s getting shut down. He’s persona non grata lately and Pres has an Enforcer BFF that’s always with him. Stan thinks he’s going to be replaced.”

“Fuck, Flame. That is a bad sign. It’s what brought me out here.” My old Club imploded and Badass eventually shut it down.

“I knew you’d get it. Stan wants to talk to you about the Clubs here. All the hype seems too good to be true.”

I know my sister and she doesn’t sound happy. “What do you want, Flame?”

“To be closer to you, my man to be happy, good schools, a job in the Club. Marli is back. We need to gather the army that followed us and find the men in my life that have been kidnapped by little people.”

I laugh and hear Marli’s giggle in the background. “Stay there. I’ll come to you.”

Marli

I get a quick kiss, then watch Bishop hug his sister who says she's five years older but she doesn't look it. Their smiles and quick banter show a love I always craved. A sister or brother would have been awesome to grow up with.

As soon as Bishop steps back, he's got my hand and starts walking. "Tell me about the Club." Bishop has me looking at him. I thought he'd tell her about the MC Club in Colorado because that's their next stop.

I listen to Flame surprised. She doesn't know me so she wouldn't tell me their troubles. As she goes on, I think it may be more than a beef with members. Stan is a VP and the President is blocking him from everything. Poor Stan, I know how it feels to be shunned and I was just a Deputy, the guy is a VP.

We find the Alpha-Bit Protector team by the newspaper and Bishop turns in like he knows who they're guarding. I don't interrupt Flame to ask. They're talking about a Club job for her. I get the feeling their Club doesn't have many women working. I've been in jobs that are predominantly male so the Club didn't worry me but she's worried.

"Uncle Brax!" Raiden yells, then runs through the presses like the Alpha-Bits trained him.

Bishop bends to scoop his excited nephew up. "You're getting big, little Brother."

"I'm just small on the computer. Daddy got new stuff so I'm bigger on the magic phone."

I laugh. “It’s the video chat that pops over the phone. I told him it’s Badass magic.”

“That’s just the tip of the iceberg around here. The Alpha-Bits make quite a bit of that magic. Good to see you, Stan. I’m glad you’re here.” Bishop has a look of seriousness and concern in his eyes.

“I want to see what the boys make.” Raiden isn’t into the serious, I guess. Bishop sets him down with a kiss to his head and he runs.

I shake my head and smile at Flame but she’s watching Stan and Bishop so I do.

“I have my two brothers packing the house and driving my mother out. We don’t have a home yet but I’m not taking chances.” Stan left the Club? He’s a VP.

I reach for Flame’s hand and give it a squeeze. This *is* serious. “I have a ranch house that’s plenty big enough if you need it. There’s a barn for storage needs. It’s clean, empty and free.”

Bishop smiles at me. “Thanks, little Champion. The Club will help with anything you need but Marli has a place you can take a breath before deciding on where you want to settle.”

Stan smiles. “Thanks. I’m going to Colorado tomorrow. I got the call and jumped on it but haven’t had time to sit and think about more than getting out before I get missing.”

Bishop nods. Flame squeezes my hand and turns like she’s looking at her boy and the Alpha-Bits.

Holy shit.

Bishop

I can't believe it but I'm the one calling Cort. "Boss, is Ben Knight still here?"

"Yeah, he's got a meet in Colorado tomorrow."

I nod to Stan. "With a VP from Kentucky?"

"President of a Club for Brekan."

"Brekan is recruiting my brother-in law, the VP of a Kentucky Badass Club. He's due there tomorrow. He's here with my sister and nephew. He called in Badass for help and took shit for it. He left knowing if he stayed, he wasn't making it out."

"Fuck. Get to a board and I'll hit you back in ten. Keep them on your compound until I find out what the fuck is going on in Kentucky. Badass would be welcomed at any Club. I'll get Amal to set alerts for visitors on BSC."

"Thanks, Boss." I look at my girl. "I need to meet on a board. Can Artemis keep Raiden busy while we meet in the office at the house?"

"Yeah. She'll protect him if it's needed or I can take him so you can meet."

He shakes his head no. "You're Head of PD here, you need the threat, Flame needs to see we've got Badass backing and they're safe." I want them both there.

"I can ask Andy to keep watch but Artemis isn't letting anything happen to him."

I kiss her head. “Get both on him. I need to get them in VIP here.”

She calls Artemis and Raiden and starts walking. I love the just do it.

“Marli has us in a house.” Flame points toward the four VIP houses. They even asked us for snacks for Raiden and our favorite food.” Flame has light back in her eyes. “I love your ol’ lady. She didn’t say she handled it.”

I smile at my sister that hasn’t lived anywhere but Ohio and Kentucky. She always thinks I’m exaggerating when I call.

“I love her too. Let the Prospects know if you need anything. The app...” I stop with Stan’s head shake.

“Marli showed us and gave me a phone. There’s a tablet in the house for the house. We have the new app in Kentucky but no one using it.” He shrugs.

I get it. This is how my old Club started down the wrong path. Stan jumped from one of our affiliates just before I left. “Let’s get inside so we don’t miss the call.”

“I don’t want to miss a Cort call. I can’t believe you just called the Territory President.”

I smile at Stan. “We call them POT but I was on Cort when Flight Guard opened and his Protector took VP there.”

He stops at the office door. “You’re a Lead Protector?”

“I was, I told you Cort’s crazy, so now I’m a President.” I don’t say I caught that crazy. He’ll see it and catch his own version soon enough.

Flame laughs. “Marli said you fly around and teach Law.”

I hit the computer on and turn. “I’m lucky if I get two classes a day in. I’m called to Ops for high profile shit that happens in the BSC West territory. Sometimes it’s just calls but we’ve been on jobs daily since I opened. That’s why I’m a Club within a Club. My Officers and trainers teach. I mostly do but the Alpha-Bits are setting me up with virtual classes so I can teach while I’m doing.” I smile knowing they don’t know how it works here.

Stan shakes his head. “Are all Clubs doing specialized training?”

“BSC is shifting to every new Club doing specialized training. Cort likes the Club in a Club set up because he gets the training he needs out to the whole territory.” I type and the map shows.

“Damn. It’s half the country.”

Marli comes in smiling. “That’s what I said. I think of it as wonderland. Watch the holes and don’t stay in any too long.”

Flame laughs. “Don’t drink the Kool-Aid.”

“Exactly.” My girl’s seriousness has me laughing.

Cort’s chat shows so I open him. “Cort, you know Marli, this is Flame, my sister and...”

“Stan Gregory. Ben will be on in a minute. If you don’t want the Club in Montana I have BSC Clubs everywhere.”

I nod. "I showed them the map."

"Montana?" Stan doesn't look impressed.

Ben shows in the chat so I open him.

"Ben Knight, Stan Gregory and my sister Flame. You know Marli."

He throws chin. "Brekan canceled the meet for tomorrow. You need to be in a BSC Club where you're protected and in the know. The Montana Club already has in-fighting and a city it's fighting regularly."

Stan is shaking his head. "I have a six-year-old son, Prez."

Ben nods and shifts his eyes a little to the right. "Brekan is pissed. Do you have a Protector team that can handle the fights in Montana and a Club for Stan?"

Cort doesn't get surprised often. "Brekan didn't say he needed help. We just had the BSC meet."

Ben nods. "That's on me. I told him I had a President for him."

I nod at Stan who has surprise all over his face. Ben smiles. "He is surprised, Bishop. I admitted a mistake, apparently, he doesn't see it often."

"No, Sir. There's always someone to blame."

Ben watches him for a few seconds then nods. "You're not a target here, Brother. Own your mistakes, they're lessons just like your wins."

"It's how I was raised. Thanks, Prez." Stan shows his Badass.

Cort has had enough. “I have a Club for him and can send a Team up to Montana. The snow isn’t going to be easy to fill.”

Ben nods with a smile. “I fucked it up. If you can settle the Club I’ll get him a President. You’re not letting your BSC out to a Club that’s not on the straight Bible.”

“Nope. I can get Protectors to President a Club in a Club with the new Bible. They aren’t going anywhere.”

I laugh and look at Stan. “That’s how I got here.”

Ben shakes his head. “You’re a President, Bishop. I don’t know how he gets so many but he’s got an army of Officers ready for President. It’s fuckin’ weird that they are the only ones that don’t see it.”

I can’t argue. “I didn’t see it. Now I’m glad Cort did. I just thought he was crazy but it works and has been working since I set down here.”

“Luke Rayne and Agent Perez said it’s what you needed there. That counterfeit case netted millions but would have hurt us all at some point. You got the conviction with all that video and lists of every fuckin’ thing you collected. He said they had the wall calendar and pictures listed.” He’s smiling and Marli laughs.

I shrug. “There’s no point picking them up to be let out, Boss, and we have procedures for a reason. I didn’t do anything but follow the procedure for everything there. Cutting corners isn’t in my Badass book. That’s how the fucks get out so fast. Someone gets tired of collecting information so it gets dropped.”

Cort laughs. Ben nods with his smile on. “Perez said basically the same thing. We’re buckling down on the PD procedures so we don’t have pizza-starting house fire calls.”

I laugh. “The house caught on fire?” Fuckin’ Seth.

Ben shrugs looking at Cort. “Just the dining room. Mucimi put it out. I’ll be there tomorrow, Bishop. The alert is out for visitors and Kyler has a Security Team for your family off the compound.”

Ben jumps back in. “I have a team dealing with the Kentucky Club. They were on a warning and you called for help, freezing out a High Officer, the one who called for help, is the President’s last order. Blowback from the hillbilly brigade is expected. Stick with the BSC Clubs.”

Stan agrees and I throw them chin. “Thanks, Cort, Ben.” The feed shuts down. Turning, I smile. “No Montana.”

“I wouldn’t like the cold there. I’m not saying I’m all for the desert but I can’t drive in snow worth a shit.” Flame is cute.

Marli busts out laughing. I gotta explain. “It’s a northern saying. Scare the shit out of me, worth a shit, scared shit. It’s all northern slang used here regularly.”

“I’m in a different rabbit hole. You can explain that and the other phrases I’ve heard when I’m in the linguistic rabbit hole.” She looks at Flame. “Shit isn’t worth much here unless it’s fertilizing something. I’ll assume your shit is laced with gold until I get the details but that’s not right now. I need to get Raiden.”

Stan is looking down, I'm laughing at the shock on Flame's face as Marli marches out. "The gold would make the phrase true. You used to get stuck in three inches of snow."

She pegs a finger at me.

Stan laughs. "She's your match, Brother. I'm happy you found her."

"I am too. You'll get...hold on." I pull my phone. "Bishop."

"You're needed in an Ops room, Pres."

"Give me five. I'll show at the Club."

"Roger, Pres."

I stand. "I've got to go. Ol' lady meet is early. I shouldn't be long."

"Uncle Brax, Ant Marli said I can swim in your pool!"

I laugh and kiss 'ant' Marli. "I've got a call." Bending, I kiss Raiden's head. "Have fun. I'll be back soon."

"I'm with you." Stan isn't staying with the women.

"We're running, Brother."

"Why the fuck is everyone here again?" I ask Ethan.

Mase walks up from behind us. "Old lady meet. They gather at different Clubs. Champion is a cousin so we gathered here." He points at Nova with Parker and Arndt.

I nod. "A night alone is never happening."

Stan laughs. "Who are you? Kentucky? Visitors aren't allowed." Mase's arms are on fire.

I shake my head. "He's the reason the alert went out. Douse your fire, Brother."

Mase closes his eyes and the fire goes out.

Stan doesn't react or ask a single question about the fire. "I'm glad the word got out so fast. You're Blackhawk from Honor Rising?"

"Yeah, I'm Mase."

Stan nods. "I was on Little Brothers. We did the trash and recycle lessons with your Club."

Mase looks at him. "Greg, Ohio?"

"Stan Gregory."

"It's been a minute. Glad you're here. What's with the alert, you're Badass?"

I smile, Badass carries Club protection. They aren't paying attention to me so I walk and listen. Ethan steps up beside me following them toward the walking path to the pool.

"I jumped Ohio to VP in Kentucky. Greed has it going down hill fast. I called for help from MC Mass and it wasn't received well."

"Fuck, Brother. Glad you landed here." Mase's accent is strong when he says shit like that. He-ya means here in New England.

Ethan smiles my way and points to the food. I throw him chin seeing Marli at the pool and keep listening. Marli blows me a kiss. I throw her chin. She's not ready for food yet and answers Kateri.

"I'm seeing it's a good place to settle. I have a meeting with Cort tomorrow. He sent the alert." Stan is impressed.

"No doubt. Jumping to Badass isn't a guarantee. BSC will keep you covered. No one is fuckin' with Princes, MC or Cort."

"It was a hope. President Graywolf originally called recruiting but the Club doesn't fit me."

I'm not needed here but I'm waiting to get my ol' lady food so I follow along.

"Brekan is like Ricky at MC Mass. He's Badass all the way. What do you do?"

"I was Captain of Emergency Response in the National Guard. Ohio had me using it for Ops. Kentucky is all about bourbon now but I did business and Ops there. They're more interested in drinking and bartering the bourbon than selling it."

Mase shakes his head. "Greed brings more Clubs down."

"Brother. Glad you're back."

I look back at Nova. "I just got here. I was on with Flight Guard but didn't leave. How is Parker doing?" I was floored he found a Brother at Alpha.

He sits by me and throws chin to Mase and Stan.

They're still talking so I tell him, "Stan Gregory, my brother-in-law."

He nods. "I met Flame when I sat Mikey down. Parker is working at the animal shelter. Garren got him some good contacts for food and supplies." He's proud and should be.

"Good for him. Garren did the budget and contract shit for the D'ability start up. He knows a little bit about a lot of shit but he's got kids down. Parker reminds me of him. I'm surprised he hasn't opened a garage."

He laughs. "Not yet but he makes kids bikes. I've got a good maintenance crew, they set him up his own bay and love working the kid bikes. Michael got the Alpha-Bits to build him better motors for kids. They're all electric now."

"I'll talk to him. Ledell wants to build a Mayan inspired town on the ABSZ. Michael knows water shit."

"I heard that."

He's up and I scan for why and go with him to the food. The women are looking our way, they must be hungry.

Artemis runs by with Perses so I know the women are close. Flashing light has my gun in my hand. Cort laughs. "Fireworks, Brother, put your gun away."

Music blasts and women move through the pool area. As soon as her arm is around my waist, I've got mine on her shoulder and pull her closer. "What's going on?" I'd think it's a laser show but I'm not seeing lasers. I move us so she can see by Jinx and his girl. As if he's not tall enough, he's got his girl on his shoulders making him a wall well over eight foot.

"Fireworks without the thunderous effects. Aaron said it's better for the military Brothers. Every Club has a show going on."

I smile wishing I was wherever Anton is tonight. "That explains the patriotic music. It's not laser."

She points her free hand. "Drones."

Sure enough, the Alpha-Bits have controls in their hands. Alder and Aaron are in suits about ten feet above the little ones.

"How was your meet?"

"Stan is going to be a happy man." Her giggle gets a kiss on the head.

Jesus. "Don't tell me."

Chapter Nine

Bishop

I'm never moving here because you need a license to wear a goatee. I smile, this one is not well known.

Mass MC Badass' loss.

I laugh at the quick reply. She knows her law.

Opening my door, I step back. "Cort, Thrasos. Stan's at the meeting room. I gave him the Bible last night but he's never seen it." Why is he here now?

He nods. "I got Alder, Justice, Mase and Stella. Copper and Mag are on a board. We're waiting on you."

I raise my brow. "The meet is in an hour."

"I'm early. Let's get this shit done. I'm blowing a Club up with Ben in an hour."

Okay then. "Roger, Boss." Not asking keeps me in the clear and out of his crazy.

He laughs opening the door to my meeting room. I think he likes when we just agree to his crazy shit. Everyone is and then some are here. BSC Presidents are on the second board.

Cort doesn't let me sit before he starts. "What do we need for specialized training?"

Mase is brave. “He was a head for emergency response in the National Guard. Ohio had him using it for Ops. Kentucky, business and Ops.” He got quite a bit of info from Stan last night.

“Doctor?” Alder asks.

Stan shakes his head no. “PA and Nurse Practitioner training. We were all certified but we didn’t deploy to just medical. Fire, rescue, bombings, floods, earthquakes, mud slides, we did everything.”

“National guard? Huh. What jobs did the team do when they were home?”

“Fire, EMT, forestry and state jobs in water or utility. Brothers worked the Clubs.”

Cort nods. “I missed the whole national guard.”

“Oh shit, a new platoon.”

I look up and smile at Kristos.

“He’ll get it now,” Falcon says smiling.

“Pres Cort, Emergency Response Task Force be same to Flight Guard Law, new Club specialty base off ERTF advice. No time to fact find and input today.”

“He’s right. We know there’s a need for emergency response. We need bios to pull teams together before we break sections for specialties based on the jobs the original teams are doing.” Falcon sees more than I do.

“Don’t miss environmental restoration in there,” Justice throws in. The Indians will jump all over that.

Falcon nods and points. “That would be a specialty that could pair with Alpha-Bits and Paul.”

I nod seeing the bigger picture of new technology and building more, along with the cleaning shit up.

“So ERFT. Where?”

Jinx jumps in quick. “You want an airfield up here. Club in a Club him from the new Club between Veritable and Sentinel. The new land has quite a bit of grazing land outside that Club, it’s close and gets his team in and out without the long chopper ride.”

I nod. “For all of us. My last job was with jet transport.”

They laugh. I shrug. Military jets are not made for transport.

“ERFT, airfield and training. I need the Club in a Club set up, suit training, teams built and Officer training. Jinx and Bishop, Stan is based out of the VFGPDL until his Club is built. Presidents, get the schedule for two and three day stays in your VIP and get it to Stan.” I guess Cort’s doing letters to save time.

Stan is surprised. “Boss, do I get training on the new technology? We got some of what I’ve seen here from Badass but I’ve never used it.”

Cort is taken aback. “The Club didn’t use it?”

“Not at all. I’ve been playing with the apps on the tablet that was left in the house we’re in.”

“Huh,” Cort doesn’t go on, he’s looking at Falcon.

“He wasn’t in a BSC Club. I bet they made nice but aren’t taking the Bible.”

Stan shakes his head. “Pres pitched it as soon as his door closed. Badass wasn’t even out of the Club.”

Cort shakes his head. “Get the shit I need. Send everything to Amal for me. Alder, get Akai on how to get payment from the government every time the ERFT moves. Stan, you’re at Phoenix for a week learning Badass and technology from Web. Alder, get that to Web. Bishop, did Zeke’s book work?”

“It did, Boss, but it’s more Flight Guard. Aaron used my notes and reprinted the new one for me with on-call trainers answering calls and the app.”

‘Boss, I made one with lines so you can add the purpose and specialty...’

Alder interrupts Zeke. “I have. Aaron send new Club in a Club book Pres Zeke make with new... fill in procedure, Boss.”

Justice nods. “I’ll get with Akai and fill in the book for them based on emergency shit the government will pay for.”

“We’re done.” Cort walks out with Thrastos.

I smile at Zeke then Stan. Falcon laughs. “He’s blowing up a Club with Ben. They’re both fucking crazy. Do you have questions?” We’re all fuckin’ crazy.

Stan nods with his eyes showing his surprise. He’s an even-keeled Brother that knows how to appear calm even when he’s unsettled but I see that unsettled now. “A million,

Boss. I'll ask what's needed here so I'm not putting everyone out. When am I at Phoenix and does my family stay here?"

"Cort's got a compound for VIP. While you're there, your boy will get tested for and set up on a school plan, ol' lady will go through an orientation process for ol' ladies and a job." We all nod at Falcon's answer.

"The teams for Emergency Response can't be local firemen." Stan makes his needs clear.

Justice jumps in. "Military grade, specialty training and most importantly, vetted."

"Alpha-Bits need equipment to jobs." Alder jumps in.

Justice nods. "I'll base it off what's paid for."

Falcon smiles. "Anything else you need right now?"

I stand. "I've got him, Falcon. If I don't know, I'll call who does."

Maverick laughs. "Welcome aboard, Brother. It's crazy but fun."

Stan nods. "I've never seen a meet run so fast with so many smiling about new work dumped on them. I'll take your word for that, Brother."

We all laugh. "It's spread out and we've been here before. It's getting to be cookie cutter for us." Trask has us all nodding.

"Bishop, get him the Bible..."

"Pres Falcon, I send everything to chat, Stan Gregory. Add to Presidents, bio to BSC. Factory schedule from Boss

Natalia we have time to build new to ERFT.” Alder looks from Falcon to his hologram while he’s still typing.

I shake my head. He’s got the Bible but the rest will curb questions.

“Good enough for me, Alder. I can’t keep up with you when I’m on down-time. I have shit to do.” Falcon smiles showing the bond between them.

Alder stops typing and smiles. “I no tell you uniform, gear, suit, schedules, information, technology sent. I tell you done.” He looks at Stan, “Pres Stan, you like bubble pod, cabin, Adobe?”

Stan looks at me so I answer. “He’ll send a chat before the end of the day.”

Alder nods, typing away. “I send all questions to chat.”

“Thanks, LP.”

“Welcome aboard, Brother, We’re out.” The screens go black when Falcon says out.

Stella stands. “Why am I here?”

“I send preliminary list you see equipment. Lightweight, laser, alternative energy, anything we make you find better, easier. Send Boss Alexia virtual IT class to Pres Stan chat.” Alder isn’t wasting time.

“Fuckin’ Brothers. I didn’t need to be here,” Stella bitches.

“I no call you to meet. Shit talk waste time. I play question game later to you.” Alder’s hologram drops and he’s

packing his tablet up. “Pres Bishop, I work small meeting room.”

I smile having seen his little banter game with her. “Use my office.”

He’s running with a thanks. Mase walks Stella out the door but I know they’re gone.

Justice smiles at me. “They are, Bishop.” His eyes jump to Stan. “I was at your Club when I was in my teens.”

Stan nods. “You were right. Is it like Rhode Island here?”

Justice laughs. “Not even close. You’re in the right place, I’m glad you’re here, they’re blowing up the still behind the Club.”

Stan shakes his head.

I shrug at Justice. “Just go, Brother. I need this room since Alder is in my office.”

He disappears.

“That’s new.” No surprise shows on his face.

“Pull your phone, I can explain freaky later, I may get called.” My girl should be free around lunch. My crazy is pushing for this to be over so I’m free with her.

Marli

The freight train has left without me.

“You’re ready, beautiful little Champion.”

I nod thinking at least the conductor has my ticket. “This is a rabbit hole I love and have no problem jumping in but I need lunch.” I need my brain to catch up to me but I’m not saying that to the gorgeous guy with the calm and collected I’m missing.

“Let’s get lunch.” He hands me my gun belt.

This Badass claimed life is pretty easy. We arm ourselves and make it to the dining room at the Law Club walking and talking about Stan’s new Club. They move fast with everything here. It’s no wonder I’m here, running PD for three counties and claimed within a month and a half after meeting the genies. I had no idea they’d not only change my life but give me family and the handsome goatee’d bad boy on the side of me. I smile walking through the door he holds open. He did laundry last night while I finished the PD reports and sent the weekly to Pres. I didn’t expect that equal would touch every part of my new life. I love equal and sit, still feeling the last place equal was pounded in. Scanning the table fast, I don’t see freaky and relax. I don’t need Jeti or Kyler reading my erotic jump in that last rabbit hole.

Wait a minute, my eyes snap back to Bruno. “Bruno?”

“Still in a frenzy?” He has me searching our conversations.

I smile remembering the ol' lady lessons sending me into a sexual tailspin. "Something like that. I'm glad you're here but why are you?"

His hand goes over his heart. "I'm wounded. Bishop said I'm welcome anytime."

I roll my eyes at him, not really caring that it shows my immaturity. The trainers laugh. "Always, but what's up with you showing for lunch?" What if I was eating at the big Club?

"I asked him to lunch." Andy surprises me.

My eyes bounce back and forth between them. Bruno has a new shine to his eyes. "Damn. Badass and the fast."

Everyone laughs. I give my order ignoring them and the new hole that opened up.

"I'm glad you're here. The weekly report has more overtime logged. Veritable Rising has teams in Phoenix finishing up their training. How many do you need?"

Andy laughs. "You work fast too, Boss."

"Don't you go through the Club?" Bruno asks.

"No, I work only with the PD Head. For each Club, PDs are paid directly from city and towns. That budget isn't in any trouble even with the new training and tech shit. It's cheaper to add teams than pay overtime that's draining your force. That drain will end up costing over time. How many teams do you need?"

He shakes his head. Bishop takes my hand under the table so I smile up at him. I love the twinkle in those blue

eyes.

“Three if you have it.” Bruno tears my eyes from Bishop.

“I’ll get the need to Pres and send you the bios. There are ten teams coming out but I don’t get their preferences.”

He nods. “Jinx said he had teams for you at the fireworks the other night. These aren’t flying Brothers?”

“Straight PD. Do you need more Flight Guard?” I’ll need to talk to Zeke for that.

“No, the two teams are splitting time with regular PD now. It’s working. Together, I use them more for SWAT than PD but we don’t have much for SWAT.”

“Enforcer level is regular PD’s SWAT?” Julius asks.

Bruno nods. “If we have a need, we call Team Ones out but Flight Guard gets it done without the bloodbath. Spreading the Flight Brothers has us using laser more.”

I nod. “It’s their training. I’m still getting used to the laser. I took a long shot the other day and Steel said he’s ordering a rifle with laser for me.” I’m actually excited to try it out.

He smiles. “We had laser but didn’t train much with it before the Club went in with Colorado MC. The Flight Guard are the only ones with the laser MPs.”

I look up at Bishop. “They’re not BSC?”

“Not yet. Jinx said the PDs are under you. They’ve been through the readers and are vetted.”

“Thanks.” I turn back to Bruno. “You’re following the training and we have the money. I’ll talk to Pres about getting you guns with the laser. You’re in the gear now so you’re not getting hit with bullets.”

Bruno likes that. “I didn’t understand what your position was for. I see it now. You’re like a commissioner.”

I shrug. I thought sheriff but maybe commissioner is it. “Outfitting the PDs so you all have Badass gear, tech and procedures is part of the job but my focus is on being the Sheriff liaison for the Clubs. These aren’t high population areas but the spread is too much for the Sheriffs and smaller PD’s in the area. Badass is changing that population and will police the new. We’ll do that with consistency across the counties working with the Sheriff’s departments.”

He nods. “You were a smart choice for the Clubs.”

I move for my sandwich. “Thanks. It’s easy and I love my job.”

“Eat, little Champion. You’ve got a meet and I’ve got to find Stan before my class.” Bishop reminds me to get a move on it.

Artemis comes in as I stand. She’s got good timing. “Good. Food?” I hope she ate. She chuffs and shows me Raiden and Flame. I think she likes hanging out with Raiden.

With a kiss to Bishop’s lips and a nod to Bruno and the trainers, I’m off.

While eating, I was thinking of this meet. The three Sheriff’s knew my dad. He didn’t care for one but always invited him to big holiday or department shindigs. After the

fake sheriff being removed and missing, I'm wondering what this one is going to show today. I always took him for an arrogant ass. He's a little man in stature but wears a big hat to match his mouth. He called me a he-she at the Tri-County Christmas Event. All the Deputies were having fun on the obstacle course. The county teams were pitted against each other and bets were raising money for the kids. As soon as my team went up, he made sure I was pointed out. *'The Champion he-she ain't winning shit for the kids. Put a real deputy out there against my best men.'* The crowd bet against us. My team heard and made the ass choke on his words. His best team lost and lost bad to a girl. Daddy was proud and had the crowd laughing as he pointed it out. Today ought to be interesting.

At the big Club, I park the truck and get to my bike under the portico. Pres isn't down yet. Steel and his team show with another team of Protectors. I'm getting good with the gear recognition and more familiar with this Club's Brothers.

"Does Artemis get transported?" I ask Steel as Pres walks out with Champ.

"She can ride on the trike with Champ." Pres's zooming eye doesn't even get a second glance from me.

The new that fascinated me is now normal. Life changing genies don't screw around when they pass out those miracles. My dog is riding on a trike. I point and she jumps on the big seat with Champ.

"Jetti, ride with Lenny. Champion, you're beside me."

We roger with me thinking this is off. The ride position is always Officer by rank. Head of isn't a high Officer

or I didn't think it was.

As soon as Pres rolls forward, I'm moving and get why I'm riding out of position. "Are you expecting any problems with the three Sheriffs?" His zooming eye sees everything.

"One. My dad kept him close but didn't care for our northern Sheriff."

"He's been a problem for the Club up there. Jeti will read him as we meet. If it's needed, the Masons will replace him." This worries me.

"Masons up here aren't like you, Pres." Debra said he's a master with degrees or something. I don't get Mason anything since dad didn't like them.

"Masons are like Badass. I'm not asking the local Masonic lodge for anything. I go right to the BSC of Masons." I can tell he's smiling.

"Then I'm with you. Something is wrong with the local Masons."

"Yeah, Ellison was running shit around here."

Holy shit. He was trafficking women and kids from Wyoming and here? Cort said they did Ops shutting him down in a bunch of states out here. I don't know why I thought Nebraska was safe from all that. There weren't even whispers from the Deputies. I bet that's why he wanted the land.

"Is the Sheriff a Mason?" Pres gets me paying attention.

“I don’t know. I was told to stay away from him and he didn’t like me. At tri county events he made snide remarks a couple of times. My dad had a Deputy partnering up with me after that.”

“Mase said your dad was one of the good Sheriffs. I’m sorry we lost him. Make sure Artemis is in Protect before we meet.” He’s a good man.

I smile at him saying it like I’m shifting her into a gear. “Roger, Boss. The city needs three of the PD teams. Champion will need two now that the three neighborhoods are done and I’ll get with the PD Leads here to see if they need more.” I only have five teams left and this is a huge area.

“Your problem Sheriff may need to be replaced before we’re working with them.”

I turn fast seeing bikes coming out the back crossroad from the PD Law Club. Bruno and another PD Brother wait until we pass before I hear them pull out.

“How come we hear their bikes?” They sound like bikes. Ours don’t.

“They’re new to us. You can get the PD working your counties the equipment they need but the Club has some hoops to jump through before we fully equip the Club.”

So, PD is considered Badass but the Club is working for it. “I’ll get on it when we get back. They’re using laser more now that Flight Guard is working with them.” I’m proud to spout that off.

“Your uncle is open to all the Badass training. Kyler met with him this morning. Get the list to Kyler and he’ll slot

them into the maintenance class he's got set up for them." My uncle?

"I will, Pres. I put the list on the hologram book thing at the PD. Before I left, there was a line to add their names. Bruno knew my uncle but he's not related to me, or I don't think he is."

He laughs. "Crow was a funny Brother, you never know. He thinks of you as an uncle, I guess. Kyler said uncle. That's good about the list. The more we can push training and show they're serious about following procedures, the faster that Club will get through those hoops. Cort needs results and getting that from us will make his part easier."

"He trusts you. I didn't understand how we got PD that's not BSC but I see how the training and Brothers from Veritable add to their force." They're already almost all Enforcers now.

"We need to get rid of or move the lower positions to different jobs."

I can see that. "Once they're in, am I liaison for all the northern PD's?"

"Veritable and the Clubs opening were your job. Cort is making changes to that. I think you'll have the states BSC up here. He may get MC as the territory Lead to work the straight Badass Clubs." He says that like it's not adding two or three more whole states to my job.

Holy shit. I can't think about it without a map and the BSC map. Up here means I'm not... "You're going to be the territory Lead for BSC?"

He slows to pull into my old station. “The BSC PD Lead. I think he’s setting the Clubs up to work together for what we need collectively. It will make all the Clubs coming in and his new shit easier to staff. He doesn’t have time to staff them anymore so he’ll use the other Presidents to do it for him.”

I get it. Other than getting training and reports to Pres, my job isn’t really changing. I’ll have more but they’ll give me the staff to help. I haven’t needed help yet but I may soon because they move crazy fast.

“Artemis, Intel, Protect.”

She chuffs and Pres laughs. He’s always a happy President. I was scared when I first met him. He’s huge and has robot parts. He told me he’s a cyborg with that big smile on and I instantly was at ease. I bet he can be scary but he’s just Pres to me now. Debra said he’s a teddy bear that always has her and their girl laughing. I’ve seen it so I know it’s true. He had his girl giggling on his shoulders for the non-fireworks show.

I follow him and the army with us to the door wondering why their girl isn’t seen much. I’ve been on Bishop’s compound more than the big Club and I was new so I’m not on their compound to see much.

“I’m outside, Boss.” Steel has me doing the chin thing. His team laughs. Men are weird.

The Protectors with Pres follow us in. Jeti moves up. “This was your old stomping ground?”

“Yeah, I met the Lieutenant last week in Champion but I haven’t been back here.”

She watches a Deputy that’s fairly new but doesn’t say anything else. The conference room fills up fast. Pres doesn’t say a word to the Sheriffs and points to the door. “Champ.” The big dog sits and watches.

I look at him wondering if I need Artemis over there. She’s always at meetings with me. “She stays with me.” I decide.

He nods. “You know Marli Champion, she’s Head of PD for Veritable and all outlying BSC PD in this territory. Jeti Callahan is my SAA and I’m Jinx Solaita President of Veritable Rising, Artemis is Champion’s Op dog and sits beside her.”

I smile at the look that gets from the arrogant ass and point. “Artemis, intel, notes.”

As soon as she sits, her hologram board goes up. I sit beside her and watch the shock that causes.

“Newly appointed Sheriff Denny Lima, Sheriff Abbott from the north and I’m Sheriff Lenny Morgan from the west,” Sheriff Morgan says pointing each out.

Pres nods and we all sit. “PD chiefs are Bruno, Kemp, Mallory, Suffix and Andrews. You’ll meet more once we’re fully staffed.”

The Sheriffs sit. Sheriff Morgan smiles at me. “Glad you didn’t quit law, Champion. Your dad would be proud.”

I give him a smile for that. “Thank you and I think so too, Sheriff.”

“How’d you get in with Badass? Is this thing the new man or part man? Heard the last got dead.”

Holy shit! Artemis jumps on the table and growls right in the ass’s face. Pres is up and pulling the Sheriff out of his seat around Artemis without touching her. That’s some muscle. Damn. Jeti puts a hand on my arm, keeping me right here, I guess, but I’ve got no intentions of moving. What a dick. The gall of the man is astounding. Pres should knock him out for that one.

“She ranks higher than the Brothers in PD, knows the Sheriff job and law probably better than you and aced every test in the Lead position.” The ass swings to the side landing shocked and hard on his feet between Pres and the table – right on the side of me. “Jeti, am I wasting time on him?”

My favorite genie, Mucimi shows in the ass’s seat. I smile at him. “Hey, Mucimi.”

“I’ll get what you need, Jinx. Just cuff him for now.” The genie is gone and the two Sheriffs are shocked.

Jeti smiles at me then Pres. “I can’t catch everything from Mucimi but he’s bringing you proof, Pres.”

Pres’s hand moves so fast I almost missed the gun coming out of the ass’s holster.

I lift a pant leg and pull the velcro. “Here’s this one.” My helpful tone has Bruno laughing with the PD higher ups. I shrug and put the little pistol on the table.

Pres swings his arm and the ass hits the wall. “Get Artemis to hold him.”

Gladly. “Artemis, hold until he’s cuffed.” My dog makes me proud pushing the ass the rest of the way down and clamping on his neck. The ass has not made a sound until the gurgle that Artemis stops.

Apparently, I’m not the only one who notices. “What kind of Sheriff doesn’t say a word getting hauled around like a sack of flour?” Sheriff Morgan asks.

I laugh. His wife is a blue-ribbon baker, I guess flour is hauled around his house.

Pres sits but he’s pissed so I stop laughing pretty damn quick. “What’s the proof, Jeti?”

“A rustler? I didn’t get it before Mucimi was gone. Is that a thing here?”

“Sonofabitch, it’s been a problem for years but it’s getting out of hand lately.” Sheriff Morgan isn’t smiling anymore. He’s got rancher family.

I shake my head knowing we’ve lost cattle over the years – probably to the ass.

“Cort, I need that Sheriff. Yeah, the north. Mucimi is doing whatever he does. This dick isn’t working with Champion. I’ll send what we get. Thanks, Boss.” Pres puts his phone down like this is all normal.

I bet my eyes are huge. I scrunch them then look around. Bruno smiles at me, the rest of Badass looks amused and the two Sheriffs are mad about the rustlers I bet. Checking on Artemis, I see she’s still holding the ass in place. It’s weird that he isn’t making a sound or moving.

Pres focuses me back to why we're here. "Is working with Champion a problem for either of you?"

I hold my breath so I don't bust out laughing. Jetti calms me with her hand on my arm again.

"Not at all for me. I've known magpie for years and watched her follow in her daddy's boot prints." Sheriff Morgan has me rolling my eyes with a smile. He always calls me magpie.

The lieutenant-new Sheriff shakes his head. "Champions are honest as the day is long. I've got no problem with her."

Pres nods. "Good, let's get to the area we're covering and pickups we'll call you for. Have you met the judges?"

My dog still has a Sheriff's neck in her mouth and Pres gets on with the meeting. This rabbit hole is beyond odd.

I pay attention and pull the maps and report I have up so they all can see the area. Andrews is the only Lead PD Brother that has questions and Pres tells him he'll have a new Sheriff that will follow the PD Protocol Badass uses. It's good enough for him and me.

Bruno moves my way. "Call your dog off. I'll cuff the Sheriff."

"Artemis, Stand down."

She sits making me smile. I love my dog.

As we stand, Sheriff Lima, who I keep thinking of as the Lieutenant, asks about the holograms and new lasers. I

smile up at Pres knowing he's not giving them anything unless they earn it.

“In time that will be an option for you. You're new to us and don't have a track record we can get behind. I know Morgan has always worked with the Badass PDs and helped us out when it was needed. He spent time and money cleaning up his department and has new hiring practices in place. With a threat to Champion still out there and no help from your department to investigate or search for them, we're not handing you weapons to use against us.” Pres's eye zooming in and the color draining from Sheriff Lima's face shows he understands how this will work. Badass isn't Santa.

“There's a young Deputy we passed that wants a shot at Champion or me, if I show here again. Hannah would have killed him for the shit he was thinking, Pres.” Jeti has everyone's attention.

“Get him in here.” Pres turns back to Lima. “Clean up your department.”

Jeti comes in with the new Deputy. “You're fired. Hand your gun and badge to Sarge.” Sheriff Lima looks pissed.

I offer a hand while Jeti pushes the sleaze out the door. “Sarge and Danforth need to go too. They aren't helping you and loved the fake Mason who shot my dad.”

He looks worse than when Pres zoomed in on him. “How do I get better backgrounds?”

I roll my eyes. “Sarge checks everything and you have secretaries and dispatchers that the murderous Mason hired.

Look at who touches personnel and replace them. They're obviously not doing their job and are a threat to this office and you."

"I can help if you're looking for advice and I can loan you my brother for a week or so to get it all straight." Sheriff Morgan offers, getting a smile out of me. His brother is like Julius at Bishop's Club.

"There you go." I look up at Pres who isn't happy.

"Clean it up. I have trainees who ask about Sheriff jobs. My Brothers aren't in a department with no one at their back. Get your updates to Champion and she'll decide if and when she'll add Brothers here."

I shake my head. "Training will be a problem." The fake that replaced my dad dropped training for more cameras or whatever he used the budgeted money for.

Pres is done. "Not *my* problem. Give the criteria. The rest is up to the Sheriff." He's right.

Because I'm from this station, I want it running right. Daddy will be proud to look down and see it's being cleaned, but he'd be ecstatic to see it running right. "Roger, Pres."

He smiles. "You're quick with seeing the bigger picture."

Bigger picture? I don't ask and follow him out. Bigger picture.

On the ride back I think about what Pres said. It isn't until we stop that it hits me like a ton of bricks. "Cort is using me to staff Sheriffs?"

Pres laughs, Bruno and Andrew's stop and watch. "We're going to need Sheriffs to replace the dicks out there. You know the job, training and Brotherhood. Tell me what you need."

"They aren't trained."

"Keep pointing it out and they will be. Add Brothers to their teams and they'll point it out. It isn't happening overnight but it will happen and we're not fighting fuckin' sheriffs that aren't doing their jobs." Oh, that's all.

Holy shit. Bruno laughs. I peg him a finger. Shit. Badass Deputies. Great. After a deep breath I see that better. Badass Deputies will know how Badass works and make my job easier, happier and just plain perfect. Half the Deputies and non-Badass PDs around us don't know law like they should because it's not required to get the job. It should be so I'll make sure they're all trained right. Now I see why Cort wanted me at Veritable, the PD training Club will be expanding to Deputies. I wonder if Pres caught the ass saying he knew my ex is dead. I didn't know for sure but I do now. This rabbit hole is growing fast.

Bishop

The ride seems to have settled my girl. Seeing her with Bruno and the northern PD Lead, I knew something was off. She had a meet today with the Sheriffs. If they're fuckin' with her, I'll remove them without the Masons help.

Carrying the bag over to the picnic table, I drop it and let her hand go to pull the two waters from my lower pockets. "Dinner alone. I love the view and come here to get away from crazy for a while."

She looks around the little lake and nods. "The ducks floating around give it a relaxed feel. This is pretty."

"It's not too far from the Club. I found it flying around when I first got here. It looked like an old park. I put the new table and had Prospects clean up the weeds."

"There were campgrounds all around here." The history makes the other spots I've seen make sense. I like that she knows that shit.

"How was your meet?" I ask nonchalantly while taking out the Whoppers and fries.

Her smile lights up. "Why is it in a Badass bag?"

We stopped to meet the Prospect on the way here without her questioning it then. "So it wasn't cold by the time we made it here. The bag keeps food hot or cold." I bend the edge so she can see the silver lining.

"Badass does everything."

I smile handing her napkins. "Badass utopia. Faith has utopia tattooed on her wrist. The meet?"

“The Badass utopia is moving into the Sheriff’s departments and I’m going to help.” She bites into her Whopper making ‘like it’ noises.

Holy fuck. Cort planned this from the beginning. It would help the Clubs but holy fuck. I guess it was just a matter of time. Masons, Indians, satellites, banks, Alpha-Bit intel & technology, platoons of army and Air Force, FBI, PD, Flight Guard, lawyers, doctors, inventors, mayors, now Sheriffs. I almost forgot the emergency response. Jesus, he’s making sure Badass is covered for everything. No, he’s making sure BSC is covered for everything.

I eat thinking about that. Badass not in BSC want in but Ben, Cort and Hemy aren’t fuckin’ around with Clubs that aren’t all in.

Today, we watched the Kentucky Club get blown sky high with laser drones. It was like seeing the Rising Squared Club but way more spectacular and precise. Cort was on with MB’s ol’ lady Copper and Ben with a young Blackhawk. They both had what looked like Nintendo game controllers in their hands. The look and smile they shared just before the mini-Hiroshima-looking blast had me shaking my head. They’re diabolical with technology and resources that extend their reach far and wide. The blast was massive but the fire was out within two hours.

Ben is building a town on the land and a Badass training Club a little higher up the mountain which had me smiling. He’s pulling a Cort.

The closest city’s mayor was crowing like a rooster, according to Stan. He picked up back wood speak there so I

assume it was preening like a peacock or showing his excitement about Badass moving in and helping with businesses, PD, vets, homelessness and the general standard of living.

When I'm done with my Whopper, I eat a couple of fries looking at the ducks floating around. "Are you happy about helping the utopia?"

She drops her sandwich and flashes a killer smile at me. "Daddy's gonna be proud, Bishop. I didn't expect it so it was a surprise when I realized Pres wants me to get training and Brothers in there. That's only if the Sheriff shows he's working for it."

"You only have the three Sheriffs. The one to the west is already working with Badass." I point out.

"Abbott was using his office to aid and abet rustling and was always giving the Club a hard time so Pres and Cort are replacing him. I think it's good because he mentioned that he heard my ex is dead so he's got to be in the know about bad Mason Sheriffs. My old lieutenant, Lima, is so green it's not funny. Sheriff Morgan is sending his brother, who is a stickler, the guy reminds me of Julius. Bruno is going to show and play nice to get training started again. The new Sheriff will sink or swim but it's got to be him doing the work to make the changes. He still has the idiots the fake Sheriff brought in doing his hiring." She shakes her head disgusted by her old boss.

I take a few seconds with the ex being dead comment. I'll need to get that to Cort. Finally, I answer her, "You're right. It's time for him to step up."

“Wait, you haven’t heard it all. Pres thinks Cort is going to put me on PDs in the states up here. There will be more Sheriffs to deal with.”

It makes sense. She’ll be staffing the departments with Brothers who could possibly step into Sheriff positions. We’ll get more Masons up here. We’re already training Leads and Supervisors and it goes along with his streamlining Clubs into specialty training centers with the Club in a Club plans.

“I think you’re the perfect Brother for the job. Trask was a Sheriff’s Deputy. We’ve had others like Mouny and Cad that I know personally. Badass is everywhere. You know the Sheriff’s job and were trained like you were brought up in the Club. You got this, little Champion.”

I get another killer smile. “I do. I’m waiting on the new northern Sheriff and Lima to stand up so I don’t have much to do with the Sheriff’s right now. Sheriff Morgan is working well with the PD. I guess I could get him some perks for that help.”

I laugh. “Cort outfitted the Sheriff with lasers and better Kevlar, then boot camps for training. They aren’t Badass but they help.”

She nods. “Lima said something about the holograms and I thought, *not on your life*. I like the laser and Kevlar. Morgan does a good training but I’ll look at the boot camp Cort offered. He may like it.” She’s cautious with how much she’s willing to give them. Since she worked there, she’d know.

“Sounds right. Your dad is proud, Marli. You’re the new Sheriff in town.” I love the little giggle that causes, then I

love my girl on the new picnic table bench in my favorite position. I wish it was later but I'll get my hands in her hair tonight. The reward for controlling that always makes it feel better.

Chapter Ten

One week

Bishop

Ben must have a hard time with this one. You may not educate dogs.

Harky would become the governor of Connecticut just to change that one. I put my phone away and stand at the chopper door.

Bishop: “Readied, Flight.”

Pilot: “Jump, Brothers.”

Bishop: Ethan takes my forearm and we jump out then down fast. “Go.” We hit the roof and move toward the door.

Ethan: “What’s the tower?”

Bishop: I follow his arm. “Hamm radio maybe. It’s an antenna.” We take the stairs without touching the stairs.

Ethan: “Old TV shit?”

Bishop: “Similar.”

Raid: “Next floor.”

Bishop: “Where’s bomb squad?”

Raid. “Out of the building. You’re cuffing the dick and getting the bomb in the cement thing. It looks like a square recycle barrel.”

Bishop: I want to roll my eyes but he won't see it. "Where's the barrel?" A flash shows on my visor. "Got it." It's down the hall by the stairs from our tagged apartment. FBI got cameras up but Luke Rayne called Badass in. I guess freaky wasn't available. Raid said they didn't need a whole team so he called me. There's a daycare, title company, lawyers office, two stores and a parking garage at the bottom of this five floor building. Our newest Unabomber wannabe must make good money to live here. We slow and hover before our last turn. "He's not alerted?"

Raid: "The bug camera shows he's still in bed. He's got the deadbolt and a board across the door about a foot above it. No wires, sensors or anything lit up on the FBI satellite scans."

Ethan: "Must have been a wild night."

Bishop: "We need the layout and those scans."

Raid: "Aris has them up, swipe right."

Bishop: I swipe surprised to see them there. "Thanks, Aris. They aren't on my menu." The words FBI thermal, FBI section 4C and FBI roach stills, show on my menu as he's typing. Ethan laughs softly. "Thanks, Aris." I smile looking for anything someone might have missed.

Raid: "Aris, Asa and Phoenix went through them. Phoenix said nothing shows until the workroom. Keep the pussy's mouth closed. He's got Alexa on a table in the living room."

Bishop: "Once we get in, jam the apartment. We've got ours on."

Raid: “We lose feeds, Brother.”

Bishop: “The bugs? We’ve got cams on and the satellite isn’t getting jammed. Follow us on thermal or tracking. I don’t know if Alexa has a battery backup but jamming renders her and any other technology from working.”

Ethan: He shakes his head. “A watch. You’re smart, Boss.”

Raid: “Alpha-Bit IT is ready when you are.”

Bishop: I look at Ethan. “Stop him from getting out of bed. I’m going to the workroom. I’m not going through the door.”

Ethan: He smiles. “I thought the same thing. Feet first through the bedroom window is better than the crash that will have him armed.”

Bishop: I move through the hall happy we think alike. “Leave this open.” I give the order but no one is here to take it. Raid will let the FBI or bomb know. Moving along the windows I stop. “Bedroom.” I whisper. I go past the bathroom and stop at the workroom. Everything is right out in the open.

Raid: “Fucking hell. They could have used a drone to see that shit.”

Bishop: A drone would... I touch the frame with some pressure. “Ethan, check to see if it’s open.” Nothing happens when I lift the window up. Who’d think of locking windows this high up without even a ledge outside. “They’re old looking but not old windows. No wires or trips.” Laying out flat, I float through. “I’m in. Where’s my package?”

Raid: “Straight to the table by the cabinet. This is like Mission Impossible.” Raid can’t help the comments.

Bishop: “There are three boxes of different sizes on the table.” I turn so he can see them.

Ethan: “He’s down for four minutes, cuffed and duct taped. I’m opening the front door, Pres.”

Raid: “Take them all.”

Bishop: “On my way, Ethan.” Now that I’m here, I take the packages gently wondering how much it takes for them to go off. With enough pressure above and below, I hold them out in front of me and fly fast through the apartment, door and hall. A thickly suited up guy is waiting with the top of the barrel open.

Bomb Squad: “Gentle, then move out.” He sounds like Darth Vader.

Bishop: I wasn’t hanging around so I nod and place my little stack of boxes in the concrete box. He closes the top gently and winds a screw thing on the front. I guess it’s like a bomb pressure cooker. I smile at the thought. I’ve never seen bomb shit up close but I’ve seen my grandma’s pressure cooker. “I’m clear,” I say when I meet up with Ethan on the other side of the hall.

Raid: “FBI has the pussy. There’s a ride for you downstairs. It will get you to a park four blocks away.”

Bishop: We could fly it but low profile means we’re riding. “Roger, Boss.”

We take the stairs down without touching them until we reach the landing that turns us for the ground floor. “That

didn't take long." I'm thinking of my little Champion and her meet with her new support staff. She's been giggling more and happier than I've ever seen her.

Flame, Belinda and Debra took the trip down to the ABSZ so Flame could meet Maiyun and Chenoa. I swear all they did was giggle and laugh. At Champion, Trask took me to lunch so I wasn't stuck with the women's cackling. I wondered where he got the 'cackling' word but didn't ask. It sounded like the backwoods I'm hearing from Raiden and Stan.

"I like being called for more than just law. I've never done Ops like this and can't wait to get to work everyday. The classes are good, trainees are in it to learn and Ops are fuckin' awesome." Ethan is a fan.

"Glad you like them, Brother. I have a feeling this is the new normal." I point at a Brother raising his hand by an SUV and turn Ethan toward it. I check out his uniform thinking he wouldn't be out here without gear.

Aris: "No, Pres Bishop!"

I'm a step behind Ethan and have my gun out before he stops. The idiot shows his taser or whatever the hell it is, with a cocky smile on. I step to the side and shoot. "Cocky gets you nowhere in Badass."

Raid: "Who the fuck is that?"

Bishop: "I don't know, Boss. He raised his hand waving us down."

Raid: "Your ride is FBI."

Bishop: "Boss, news is moving our way."

Raid: "FBI is too. They'll take him in, get out of there. Fifty yards south, the SUV with agents in front of it."

Bishop: "Why do we need fuckin' Ops to get us out of here? Is he on the chopper with us?"

Raid: "Hold on. Phoenix is running his face and Cort's on his way up. Get to the SUV and chopper. I'll have him transported if he's going with you."

Bishop: "Roger, Boss." This is some shit.

We're at the chopper before Cort comes on through my piece. "Brother, how did you know? You had your gun out before Aris warned you."

I smile. "He should have been in gear. Something with the uniform was off, Boss."

"Good job. It took me a minute with the frozen feed. He's Badass with ID from Wheeling West Virginia but IT shows he was Michigan, Ohio and Kentucky before that."

"What? Was that before all those Clubs were closed down or the Presidents were taken out?"

"Huh, look that up, Amal." We hear Amal's funny voice but Cort keeps going. "Luke Rayne has FBI transport for him to Phoenix. You're clear to come in."

"Roger, Boss." I figured, since the doors closed and we're lifting.

"Good job, Brothers. You're getting a reputation for more than the law shit, Bishop. Using the windows and jamming was quick thinking. I knew you'd fall perfect."

I smile. “Thanks, Boss. Now you’re not worried, maybe you’ll find a new pool to park at.”

He laughs. “I’m out.”

I grab the cans Ethan holds out for me.

Ethan shakes his head. “He’s right, the Brothers are amazed with the shit you know. They thought you’d act like a hot shot because of your Badass rep. But you’re quiet and know more law than Julius and that guy’s first blanket had to be the constitution. He’s annoying with it too.”

I laugh and hit his shoulder. “Julius is a good trainer and is learning Badass through all his questions. Good job today, Brother. Everything I do you’re right there making it happen. We don’t think about civilian technology but Apple has watches now. It’s not something that crossed my mind until you said it, now, I won’t ever forget it.”

He nods. “The Alexa thing surprised me into what else is out there. Does the FBI collect all the shit from the workroom?” We’re done with the Op.

“Yeah, they’ll log it all for court. This guy killed one and the judge is still in the hospital. They don’t think he’ll make it.” The judge. “The counterfeit job had a court ID mixed in with the Badass.”

He nods. “For some Utah appellate court I think. We left it with the Badass pile.”

I pull my phone and send a chat to Cort about the judge that’s in the hospital and the ID from his courthouse. The uniform was wrong but I couldn’t put my finger on it. Badass on the front had red flames but no yellow or orange

like the Badass Flight gear from that counterfeit Op. I type that out too.

Ethan watches me but doesn't ask. I hand him my phone. "Fuck."

I agree and don't have a better response so I stay quiet.

Marli

Steel's second stops with an arm out so I don't pass.
"Who are you?"

"New PD, Brother."

I sign, 'Protect,' to Artemis.

Steel touches my arm moving up to his second. "There are no new PD here."

The guy laughs and I wish I was taller so I could see who this is. X-ray vision would be good, or I could use a couple of smaller Brothers on my team.

The laugh again has me on alert. I sign it for Artemis.

"The whole training class is new PD."

Steel looks like steel runs through his blood and fortifies his suddenly motionless body. "I'm from Veritable and know every trainee. What Club?"

"PD law." This guy isn't laughing now. He doesn't sound sure about his Club anymore.

I touch Steel's arm and take a half step to the side whispering, "Artemis, Stealth, hold."

She's a blur at the corner of my eye. "I don't know him."

I pull Steel's arm as Artemis pitches this guy forward. The second has his gun on him and Steel turns toward me, all in the span of a second or two.

"We need to get back to the Club." He pulls me back to the Marshals door. "I need a Team and this dick transported

to the big Club.”

PD file out to see what’s happening and one bends to cuff the imposter.

I point. “Artemis, Stand down. The logo isn’t Badass from here. Even the inlaid has the lines for detailed flames. His doesn’t have the colors at all.”

Steel nods. “Now, Boss. I need that Team now.” He doesn’t wait for an answer. “Reagan, you’re in the truck. Ops, pull the feeds from outside the Marshals office. Something feels way off here.”

We’re moving fast with a small army. I’m glad I’m in the truck.

“Champion, Steel. You have a Protector Team a mile and a half away turning back. There are close to twenty bikes and trucks coming up from the crossroads. You’re going to run right into them. PD from the Marshals are readying now.” That’s Pres.

Shit. “Roger, Ops. Steel, we could run, or my way, stand our ground with Brothers coming up from behind them. We got surprise, training, the truck and trees right now.” I’m all for the stop and fight. I’ve never taken to the coward’s way out and let my team handle a fight while I sit on the sidelines wishing no one gets hurt.

“You’re right, Boss. We’ve got the gear. Let’s do this your way.”

“Ah, forgot about the gear. Pull in so your bikes are hidden and rise up. I’ve got Artemis, Reagan and two PD

Brothers. Ops get us on with each other and whoever is joining the showdown.” Someone is laughing in my ear from Ops.

“This is me, Brothers.” I pull over. “Artemis, surveillance, stealth, Protect, tag location, find me when you’re done.”

She chuffs and runs across the road to the woods. I didn’t tell her they’d be coming from that way. I hear the bikes and get how she knew.

Steel takes my arm with my new rifle in his hand. “Glad you got the new gun. Reagan, help me get her higher.”

I’m up and on a branch before I know it. They’re all crazy but sort of smart. “I’ll start from here and move to the rock.” I point the boulder out and he nods.

“We’re above you.” He’s rising but I don’t watch.

“PD, use the trees. They’re coming from the other side.”

“The bikes are loud.” They scramble, maybe they are surprised by real exhaust.

I smile and look through the scope. Steel is marking location but I don’t see him. I flip my visor and see he’s a good quarter mile away. Protectors are coming our way about a half mile behind the yellow tags.

I see blue with a highlight and smile. “Flight Guard is coming this way, Steel. They’re a quarter mile east of you.”

“Bishop and Cyrus’s teams. Cyrus is west of you, Champion.” Kyler is on now.

“Roger, VP. PD, we’ve got eleven Flight Guard and my dog out there. Don’t shoot the Brothers or my dog.” I get back laughing rogers.

“Watching from the trees will give us a better view.”

I have no idea who said that and adjust the scope to the front bike. “Ops, that’s not Badass from around here.”

“We see it, Brother. Bishop met one at a job he was on this morning. Now you’ve got a whole crew. Pres is on with Phoenix trying to find out who we’re dealing with. He saw it when Steel said to pull the feeds.” Wow. He already knew? Bishop said Pres doesn’t miss anything with his zooming eye.

“Roger, VP.”

“Bishop is your Lead, Brothers. PD, stand down unless a gun is pointed at you.” VP must be stepping aside.

Bishop: “Stay in your teams with your Leads. Cyrus, take the back, Ethan has the middle and Steel you’re on point. Hard and fast. Let us know what you need, Brothers. Champion, you’ve got the shots clearing for them.”

We all roger. Mine is with a smile for the low, silky, smooth voice that instills an inner calm.

Bishop lowers close enough for me to feel him. I look away from the scope and smile. “Thanks for showing.”

He smiles back with a wink. “Badass doesn’t run and hide, baby. You made the right call.” He kisses my helmet. Issuing PD orders to cuff and hold the dicks for cleanup he’s moving on.

I laugh when he rises fast. He's a keeper.

I'm called for a shot by Ethan on a truck's tires then Steel for two runners trying for a wooded path that isn't a wooded path. The truck was a bullet and dumbass a laser shot. I like the easy options my new gun has. Artemis took down the second runner by flying and rolling him right over the bars of his bike – that would not make it on the barely-there foot path.

I'm proud when she chuffs as soon as a PD Brother cuffs the dumbasses.

“Artemis, guard prisoners.”

A PD Brother thanks me. Again, I have no idea who it is but really, I don't need to. The job is the same no matter who talks to me.

Bishop finds me watching the Brothers. “You orchestrated it like it was a game.”

He smiles. “Before Texas and Marks moved, we hit the party scene hard. Every week someone had a party for something and we'd show. The rides were sweet, the Clubs getting further and further away, so conversation flowed. Marks told us about the FBI Ops commanders running jobs from an out position. He said it was like watching an orchestrated showdown. I heard you say showdown and remembered Marks out position. It worked and there are no casualties.”

I bust out laughing. “Good work, Bishop. I like the out position. It's like control for Ops.”

VP disagrees. “It used to be, Champion. Now, Protector and most Enforcer teams don’t get anything but a heads-up from us. They don’t need the control for more than us watching their backs. You’re clear to come in.”

“Good to know, VP, and thanks.”

Bishop rolls his eyes.

I hit my mic off. “I need a word with Steel,” I tell him.

“At the Club.” He’s got my eyes snapping to his as he sets me down.

“I planned on a door being present. I’m telling you I need to be at my office at Veritable.”

His smile shows when he gets it. “I’m headed there too. This is more than a coincidence. Cort will show or be on a board in Ops.”

VP told us about his Op with one of these idiots earlier today. “It will be a quick word.”

I get a kiss on the head with his chuckle.

Bishop

Standing in Ops, I wait for Cort to finish with Jinx. As soon as he does, his eyes bore into mine. “You missing another class?”

“No, Boss, I asked the Alpha-Bits to get my classes on virtual for when I’m out.” I see him nod at virtual and know he’s done with that one.

“Does Champion need a new team?”

My brain takes a second. “She’s having a word with Steel. She didn’t say anything about replacing him.”

“He saw her as an ol’ lady, Boss. She handles it and Steel falls in line.” I don’t see Justice but that’s his voice.

“The dickasses are wearing the same logo. Trask is with the dickass that tried for you. When he’s done, we’re headed up there.” His eyes tell me he’s done and there are no questions to be answered.

“Roger, Boss.”

“Champion did a good job. She doesn’t need to appease Steel.” ‘Appease’ comes out like it’s offensive.

I nod making sure he sees I agree. “She knows, Boss. It saved face just before an attack but she was in control. Jinx had me showing just in case there was a problem.”

He nods and his eyes lose some of that hardness from a second ago. “Good. She can run her own Ops.”

“She can, Boss. I told her she made the right call. I can see Steel shielding her like an ol’ lady but she shrugged

him off and was handling the job before I got there.”

He nods and his eyes shift back to Jinx. “Make sure this is her last talk with him. I’m out.”

“Roger, Cort.” Jinx turns. “Let’s go see what the fuck that was.” Since he looks as pissed as Cort was, I nod and walk out with him. They’re both on alert when it comes to my girl because of the northern Sheriff little bastard. He still must be in holding and not talking. He knew her ex is dead and that had to come from someone.

“She isn’t fighting her second.” Jinx stops on the landing with his hand on Champ.

“She didn’t. She put him in place without it causing a problem before an Op. I’m guessing it’s a reaction she used as a Deputy. She stood her ground and threw orders out with the Brothers following her at Lead. Justice said Steel saw her as an ol’ lady.”

His look softens. “Yeah. Freedom would have shot him.”

I laugh. “Everyone is afraid of Freedom. Marli handled it different but she’ll get the same results.”

We walk. At the Officer hall, we see Marli then Steel coming out of her office. “Pres, Bishop.” My girl never forgets to acknowledge making me proud. She’s relaxed, if a little surprised.

“Let’s go back in.” Jinx doesn’t stop walking.

I close the door and lean on it, watching Jinx zoom in on Steel.

“Champion is a Protector. What the fuck were you thinking?”

Marli doesn't say a word. Steel nods. “I was ordered to be her Security. The lines cross there with that order and her being my Boss. We protect the package. My package is like Aylen, Freedom and Hannah.”

I see Jinx relax then nod. “I can see a problem there. You're not her Security anymore. You're her second.” He turns toward Marli. “Do you want a new second?”

“Not at all. I saw the problem and fixed it. Steel is a good second and knows the job. I've got no problem with him but had an issue with leaving the PD and Brothers short. We didn't and cleaned the lines up for him.” She's Badass to the bone.

“Good. I'm glad you handled it. You're one of the highest Protectors we have, so you're Lead on any job you fall into.”

“Roger, Boss.” She smiles at me. “You're higher than me so feel free to step in.”

I smile. “Jinx thought there was a problem and sent me so toes weren't stepped on.”

“I thought so. Thanks. We're good, Pres.”

Champ and Jinx walk out, Steel watches me. I shrug. “I was ordered there. Marli was issuing orders but I followed mine.”

“Thanks, Brother. Cort gave me the Security order. No one changed it.” That's a tough one.

“Jinx just did.”

“Yeah. I need to order the guns for Morgan and the PDs.” Steel is done for her and throws chin walking out. “I’m glad that’s fixed. Flame and Stan are back tonight. I need to get the Sheriff rosters and watch the boot camps before I leave today.”

I kiss her head and get out so she can do her job. No drive-thru tonight.

“Raiden is excited for school.”

My eyes snap from Raiden in the pool to Stan. “He didn’t like it before?” He seemed happy on the phone with me.

“He didn’t like the kids. He’s how I knew my time was up. The kids were getting mean with him.” Fuck, he’s lucky, the old Club had Brothers missing at the end there. Because bikers are known for moving around, no one ever knew how many were actually missing. I know one on my Team never made it out of the Club. He was supposed to follow me here but his ol’ lady showed without him. She’s with a Brother in Bravo now.

“I’m glad you’re out. How was the Web lessons?”

He smiles. “Mind blowing. I didn’t expect the Head of IT for the whole territory to teach from the bottom up. I had no

questions because of how thorough he is and he didn't think anything of that either."

I smile. "He taught the Alpha-Bits and teaches trainers and Club Head IT now. The Brother is smarter than Cort but I'll deny saying it."

"I believe it. He makes virtual everything and had tiny tots on computers at his house. I see why the Alpha-Bits are drawn to him. His compound reminded me of Willy Wonka and the orange guys. They're all amazing with showing Brotherhood to everyone. Raiden needs to grow up in Clubs like these."

The Wonka reference makes me smile. "I emailed you the links to the Alpha-Bit history. Web is in it every step of the way. They only know Brotherhood. Beacon said Web kept the A's secluded until Cort opened Phoenix. They didn't talk in the labs so they didn't talk or know English. When they got here, they learned English and the other Bits learned or knew the new saved kids languages. They helped each other learn Badass and freedom."

He shakes his head. "It's sad but amazing that they moved on so fast and are happy here."

"It is." I turn at the commotion by the gate. "Fuckin' Brothers."

Cort and Ben come in with Brothers following. I shake my head. "I had one day off last week, Boss."

Cort smiles.

"You were lucky." Jinx sits with his Jinx smile on.

Luke Rayne sits beside him. “Maiyun is at the Protector compound. She needed a day off.” They were here almost every day this past week.

I nod. “A man can dream.”

Cort hits my back and sits beside me. “Luke Rayne wants his Ops controls to get the app.”

It’s a good idea. “Since they’re Badass Officers and Presidents, it would be a benefit that isn’t wasted.”

Ben and Jessie throw chin setting down their arms full of water and beer from the cooling drawers. I’m honored they feel comfortable enough to make themselves at home.

Ben smiles. “We do, Brother. I didn’t count or probe anyone. The drawers over there have whatever I missed.” He hands me a water. “You remind me of Cort when I first met him. He didn’t care about politics in the Clubs, he had Badass in his blood and let it guide him, knowing that belief was all he needed. He sees it in his Presidents better than I do and he isn’t a reader. You never thought you were glad that we feel comfortable here, you’re honored that we do. Just so you know, we’re honored you feel that way.”

I throw him chin understanding the feeling well. Jinx has gone out of his way making sure I see my place and value in his Club, all Clubs.

Dakota sits with a plate. “Our great Leader is honored always, perhaps iced coffee being available for our next visit would garner more enthusiasm from Jessie and me. Dunkin’ Donuts is supposed to be nationwide, Prez,” he says it all with a straight face, clearly not happy.

The table cracks up. I raise a hand and a Prospect comes running. “Believe it or not, east-bum-fuck Nebraska has a Dunkin’.” I turn to the Prospect. “Get Dakota and anyone else an iced coffee from Dunkin’.”

Teller drops a plate by his dad. “I got it, Bishop.”

I wave the Prospect off surprised I didn’t see Teller come in, but I watch him walk to the gate and vanish. “Iced coffee it is, Dakota. I hope he knows how you like it.”

Jessie laughs. “He grew up with us. We all know how everyone takes their coffee, iced and hot.”

I guess it’s good to know but I don’t drink it enough to care. “Jinx got hooked on it at Champion. Kyler said it’s the first thing he built and Jeti didn’t move in until it was open.”

Jinx disagrees. “The one back here is the second. There’s the Dunkin’ by the highway.”

I don’t answer because I haven’t ridden to the highway south of us. We always go east and north. They go back and forth about coffee shops at every Club here. I look at Stan and shrug.

He smiles. “I missed it in Kentucky.”

Not caring to prolong the coffee conversation, I look toward the women and see more over there and Andy coming in the back gate. Chenoa is in the water with Marli holding one of her boys. I can’t believe I missed them coming in and Marli moving for a coffee debate.

“Bishop, focus. The app?” Cort stops the great coffee debate.

“I already said it’s a good idea, Boss.”

He gives me a look like I’m holding out on him. “Do they need training for it?”

“No. They’re Protectors and had law to get there. The app just makes looking shit up easy. I can send the virtual classes to them but they have the basics down.”

He nods. “Send the classes to Luke Rayne. The weird shit is how you can stop them and look for more. Freedom is using it now and said it should go to all Protector Teams.”

“Champion has a law class now, Boss. It’s what I was teaching there.”

“Huh, get your virtual over to Trask so they still have you teaching there.”

I smile. “Roger, Boss.”

Ben elbows his arm. “He forwarded them to Trask when he got them.”

Cort looks at me so I explain. “Pres said the Brothers went to every Club for perspective from the Leads, Trainers, Officers and High Officers. I was a Lead, Trainer and Officer so I sent him my classes when the Alpha-Bits had the two-week course done. It’s a little more than I did there but they need it and he was giving me the extra hour each week before I left.”

Ben shakes his head. “That’s how he gets so many fuckin’ Presidents. You all see everything.”

Cort gives me his politician smile. “Good job, Brother. I knew you were it.”

Okay. I turn away from crazy and laugh at Teller and the Prospect with a cart of drink trays. They're all crazy.

"This is you, Brother."

I take the cup from Jessie surprised at my name on it. One sip in, I smile. He knew how I take my coffee. The iced coffee is a good break from water when I'm not ready for a beer.

"It is why we drink it, Bishop. Our bodies do not require so much water and crave the caffeine." Dakota has me tipping my cup to him.

Jessie laughs. "We grew up on Dunkin'. Prez even had one built next door to Security."

Dakota nods. "That too."

I laugh. "Anything on why we're being attacked?" Getting us away from another coffee debate is my plan.

"Dakota will get it after dinner. The pussies are hungry and bitching about the cranked up heat and no water." Luke Rayne has me smiling.

"We'll meet tomorrow. Make sure Champion is there," Cort adds.

"Roger, Boss."

I look at my girl and remember the law I sent her this morning. Pulling my phone and typing, I hand it to Ben. "Did you know this one?"

He reads part of it out loud and laughs handing the phone to Jessie. "Harky will lose his shit. I think he likes dogs more than humans."

He's got us all laughing.

Cort takes the phone from Jessie.

It's a better debate than coffee.

Slowly, I unbraid her hair from the bottom up while she sits quietly, as if she knows this is another of my crazy needs. I never thought much about braids before I met her, but the first time I pulled the elastic out, I was amazed at the ingenuity of the braid hanging down her back. Her unbraided hair is longer, shiny and soft in my hands. Once the braid is unraveled, I always use my fingers like a comb and rake down, spreading the soft mane across her back. So much hair in one braid transforms into a silky cape reaching to her lower back. I love the long hair that's only out of the braid for me.

Every time we go out, if her hair starts out down, she puts parts in loose braids at some point. Sometimes it's the sides, or a thin single braid that looks like a chain meeting in the middle just past her neck to hold the loose hair down. I've come to love her braids. Women are fuckin' amazing.

"Bishop?"

I smile. "I love your hair."

"Got that. Are you done loving my hair?"

Reaching the bottom with my raking fingers, I move them to her naked front and slide them down from her neck to

her nipples giving a quick pinch. I swear her moans come from deep in her stomach. “I love the moans too.”

“You’re just full of love tonight. I want to be full of you before I fall asleep.”

Magic words to any Brother. Not a chance of me missing my shot.

Spinning her around, I hug her tight with my hands on her hair against her back, then I get to work. Roaming hands, kisses and love bites are all it takes for her hips to grind against me and my name to come out in that breathless whispered moan.

“Little Champion, move up and slide me in.”

She lifts her ass. “Mmmm, I love the low, smooth, silky orders.” A shudder runs through her as she slides down.

Once she’s seated on me, I hold her still loving the deep. “Now you’re full of me, show me that love, beautiful.” My hands slide up her back with her moan.

My girl has dancing skills no other Brother will ever see. It takes everything in me to hold on to my control while stoking her passion the same way we got here. When she bites down on my chest, I growl and breathe, letting her have hers while thinking she’s testing that control by doing that for the first time tonight.

My jaw clamps tight as I ride through her orgasm just barely holding on. There is no way I’m missing out on her cape of hair rubbing against my chest, stomach and arms after that, so I lift her like a rag doll and spin her. Her head hits the new little sting just above my peck causing a low rumble from

my chest and a jerk of my dick. I want more of that and take it moving her until she's lifting herself and chasing that feeling with me.

Chapter Eleven

Bishop

You may not have an ice cream cone in your back pocket at any time.

I laugh at this one wondering how many times this happened to cause a law to be put in place. Holding my phone, I run up the stairs knowing she'll be answering soon.

She comes out of her office and her smile lights up her face. "Does the law apply if it's no longer frozen? Alabama has some weird laws. The alligator chained to a fire hydrant, illegal to operate a vehicle blindfolded and no blue jeans worn on Noble Street make me think of going on vacation to see what the rabbit holes are like there. Is everyone on Noble Street nudists? It could be fun."

I kiss my little comic's lips before she goes on. "I don't know and I'm not sure I ever want to vacation in Alabama. An FBI Brother said it's hot and muggy on the good days."

"I've heard it's humid and they have chemical issues. We could go to a cabin in Alaska."

"Still not sold on the lagoon?" I don't care where she picks but a threat to her means we need Security.

"Seren and Aylene say it's perfect." She stops a few doors away from the meeting room and waits for Brothers to go in. "I'm not sold on taking men with us."

I nod. “Brothers. We can wait until it cools down. When and where is all I need. We’ll have Security anywhere we go because Cort is crazy, but no threat will make it one team, not two.” I am not telling her the horror stories ol’ ladies have dealt with on these getaways. Luckily, not all have lived through vacation fails and ol’ ladies don’t share the fails. I’m not worried because my girl is trained and knows how to keep herself safe.

“Cort is crazy so we’d have a team even without a threat?” She really doesn’t want a team with us.

“You hit the nail on the head but shit happens and the best readers don’t see everything.” Mase throws out walking by.

I give him a push. “I’m a President and have a team wherever I go. It’s a thing with Cort,” I tell my smiling girl.

“It’s as it should be, Brother.”

I turn and push Kyler’s shoulder so he moves along faster. Marli laughs. “We can talk about Alaska later.”

Shaking my head, I pull her along. “Fuckin’ Brothers.” The meeting room has Mase, Kyler, Jinx, Champ, Artemis, Stan, Ben, Dakota, a Brother I don’t know in a Prince uniform, Brekan and what has to be the brother of his FBI negotiator.

Brekan throws chin my way after I seat Marli by Artemis. “He’s his twin.”

I nod and sit. “I met him on the mayor murder-suicide job.”

He smiles making his scars look lighter. “You didn’t need him.”

“He was a good distraction that clued me into just how inept the Chief was.”

The twin laughs. “My brother said he couldn’t have graduated high school.”

Sadly, I nod in agreement. “We have quite a few small towns protected by PD just like him.”

“Until now.” Cort’s voice gets all of our attention as he walks in with Justice and Thrasos.

Everyone throws chin then again when the boards light up with BSC Presidents and a slew of High Officers.

“We’re gearing up to train PD for BSC West. Between the military and FBI joining Badass, we have training jam packed. This Club will work out the shit show that’s become PD and Sheriffs and start staffing all PDs in the west. Zeke is cranking out Flight Guard and Bishop the Flight Guard PD Leads. Four weeks are all they need. While teams are waiting for their training, they’re in Phoenix for Badass boot camp. We have Badass Brothers that are looking to move to PD. Enforcer and above need to be law trained and moved right away. Trask is handling that two-week Enforcer training.” He looks around but no one says a word so he looks at Ben. “The crew that came at Bishop and Champion?”

Ben nods to Dakota. “They are not all ex-Masons but all are ex-Badass. The men in charge are the ex-Masons. Your Sheriff in holding took over when Ellison died and is searching Clubs around reservations for specific names. There

is a list of names that Prez had me send to Co so I do not know the significance of them all.”

“The Masons are all Badass?” Cort asks.

“They are but not BSC. The group stays away from BSC Clubs while searching for the name they received from the ex-Mason list. The Sheriff thought the name would give them land and money.”

Land and money? The trust? I watch Cort’s eyes change to hard and icy in a heartbeat. Jesus. He looks at Marli then Justice.

“We don’t have her name but Maiyun, Kateri and White Wave’s names are on the list. Atseeltsoi and Ayakuhsak are there too, Boss,” Justice answers cautiously, gently. Why? There’s more.

Cort paces. “Crow’s family. Kristoff, Chenoa...” he stops and turns toward Ben. “Aiyana’s family? Aiyana, you, Dakota are related to Crow and Co, here? Knight and Aylen said it feels like home. They’re looking for the next Badass Royalty, holder of the trust? That’s not just here, is it?” How the fuck did he jump to that?

Ben nods. “We believe it’s connected to Mass MC Badass but I can’t tell you how because I don’t understand it. I didn’t know we were related to Wall. I didn’t grow up on a reservation, Brother. We did get the Cherokee tie from Champion’s father, I don’t think it’s just the tie to New England.”

Cort looks at Mase. “You’re the Warrior and know Indian.”

Mase nods looking at Justice getting a hand wave. “I don’t know how to explain Indian past. I get future.”

Mase nods. “Justice, Tyson, Kristoff, Atseeltsoi, Dreng, Daniel, Stefan...” he looks at Ben and nods. “The new ability babies, and Caelan need protection. Christian says there are more but those were his, now my priorities. Because we’re Badass, we cover the women and everyone knows the women that need tighter coverage. I don’t know the lineage but do know that Christian and Aiyana are somehow related to everyone I named. My guess is through Crow and Co.”

Justice sits straight drawing my eyes to him. “Some of the stronger abilities are found in the south with Hemy and Aaron. I didn’t get a vision but can see a tie there with abilities.”

Holy fuck.

“Who am I?” My girl asks Mase as she takes my hand. It’s a good question.

Justice stands before Mase can answer. “A warrior like Arndt, Atseeltsoi and Mase. No one, including the ancestors are giving lineage but everything points that way. You’ve been doing the job for years and never thought of another line of work. This is where you’re meant to be and what you’re meant to do. Law was a sect of warriors started by Crow. Cort pushed for you to be put here and given the job before he talked to you. The trust details, the lineage, the job you were meant for, wasn’t known then and I don’t think matters. You were raised to be a Protector and Badass warrior. You know the how. The who isn’t going to help us find answers to why ex-Masons are showing up now.” Justice’s

words feel like a warning is mixed in there. Marli squeezes my hand.

I tighten my fingers around hers. “You’re Marli Champion Bishop, Badass to the bone and the new Sheriff in town. Do you need your bloodline to be the woman we all know and see?”

Her eyes close. “No and thank you. I was raised by my father and questions are part of my life. Maybe the question should be, *Am I under a greater threat because of who I am?*”

My eyes snap to Justice and I’m relieved to see his smile. “Aylen, Maiyun, White Wave...” he waves his hand, “I can name them all but you hold the same threat they do. You’re all trained to keep yourselves safe and you’re all surrounded by Badass.”

Marli nods. “Then it’s good to be normal.”

We all laugh but my eyes are on Cort who is frozen in place, while everyone gets the tension out, then settles. Cort keeps watching Ben then nods. “So the new threat has been to Clubs that are going down and the dicks are looking for the trust or a trust the Club holds and Indian kids?”

That’s what I assumed from the cocky Badass-like-uniformed idiot that tried to get me and Ethan in an SUV. I turn from Cort to Ben. “That can’t be all of it. The counterfeit job has to be how they’re funded.” Why else would Badass evidence show there?

“Veritable isn’t going under either.” Jinx’s growl surprises me but he’s far from over here, he’s drawing

Brothers and civilians faster than Falcon did.

I look back at Ben. “You’re both right. Web and Brantley are working with the ABSZ IT to find out how they’re getting information. Alder is positive it’s not coming from here because the satellites hold all BSC phone records.” His hand goes up stopping whoever has questions. I know I do.

“With the scanner program from the Adroit engineer, Alder had Copper and Stella use it to target burner phones through drones and the force fields on buildings and Clubs here. Those calls are logged on the satellite but can’t access it. The ABSZ went through the burners and found nothing on the days that shit was going down including the counterfeit raid. The FBI has nothing going out for any agents or Badass Brothers on those days.”

I smile at Cort. “The drones are good on the Ops. I didn’t get why you wanted them out with us.” I always picture a room full of Alpha-Bit IT little Brothers with gaming controls at our jobs.

He nods. “Phoenix Knight started it. Alder saw the benefit. This isn’t open. It’s Security for the Clubs, Brothers and satellites.” The warning is clear through his hard intense eyes and the tone of that particular order.

I nod and give a little squeeze back to Marli’s hand.

Cort goes on, “So that means we’re looking at the north and south?”

Dakota stands. “I do not believe social media and the Nomads spreading news should be dismissed from the ever-

growing list of threats.”

Cort’s head whips around to the board Alder is on.
“Do you get those logs on the satellites?”

“We do, Pres Cort. IT put same keyword to find use to other...” he looks at Justice.

“Platforms.”

Alder nods. “Platform. Boss Alexia make NIT to get information.” He stops and looks at Justice so I do.

“Alexia made a program like the one the FBI uses so she gets back information that is on whatever device that hit an alert. It’s running now but doesn’t have any alerts showing so far.”

“Perhaps the program can be used elsewhere.” Dakota has my skin crawling.

Cort nods. “Web and Brantley are working on getting this to the other satellites?”

Alder stops typing. “Yes, Pres Cort. Boss Stella change manufacturing to drone...past two month. Boss Justice send to BSC North, South.” He stops typing and looks our way. “Pres Cort, no force field, no jammer, no cover to Club. No cover mean ex-Mason-Badass have safe home.”

“Safe haven,” Ben adds.

Cort turns toward Brekan on the other board. “Hurry the fuck up already.”

I look down glad Marli isn’t giggling.

“Roger, Boss.” Brekan sounds like he isn’t hiding his smile but I don’t look up. We’re sending drones? They do

everything now.

“When do the drones get to the other BSCs?” Cort has my head up.

“They’ve had them but we didn’t send enough to cover everything. Hemy’s got him and Aaron covered. We didn’t know we’d need to cover the whole fuckin’ country, Boss. They’re set to ship on a schedule.” Justice does a lot with the business shit, or the BSC opening need shit.

Cort nods. “Do we need another factory?”

Alder looks surprised then annoyed. “You tell Boss Stella? You no tell her more manufacture work, I need new business ol’ lady to add in harem. Boss Stella have list to work three month long.”

I laugh.

Ben is amused watching Cort’s face.

“Can’t you build a hologram? The fucking Brothers are getting harder to match and I’m too busy for that matchmaker shit.” Cort isn’t easy. He always pushes for more.

Alder shakes his head. “I get three-hour sleep time, you build hologram to me add harem ol’ lady?”

Ben laughs. I keep watching the crazy shit they’re talking about and seeing it’s just their normal. Holograms to run businesses is just the way it is here at Badass. Marli is right about the rabbit holes and I think her squeezing my hand is so I acknowledge it. I give her bugging eyes a nod. It’s just a rabbit hole. It’s no wonder I had delusions before claiming her. I close my eyes for a second, I still have them but they’re not as bad or I’m crazy and don’t think they are.

“Fuck.” Cort gets me watching as he scans the table like we’d have ideas for this new crazy. “Raid is too busy to be a matchmaker.”

I look down again. Jesus, he’s fuckin’ nuts.

“We’re all too busy to be matchmakers.” Falcon has a good point so I nod as I look up to see Cort’s eyes on me.

“What?”

“You’re new and found yours. You’re good with Brothers and everyone listens...”

“Not a chance, Boss. I’m training, running every fuckin’ kind of Op because I put the fuckin’ suit on, I’m getting more trainees fast tracked in, get called out for every damn volatile high-profile job, plus the call-ins for legal questions. I’ll be on Alder’s three-hour sleep schedule soon.”

The Presidents laugh.

“Huh. You are busy but you’re always here when we show.”

“Not being able to escape you doesn’t mean I’m not working before and after your ‘visits’,” I make the quotes, “*because* I couldn’t escape you.”

Jinx has my back. “He’s right. When you’re here, his Officers are on nonstop. You’re going to burn them out. They’ve got Brothers to train for us, to run as Leads, just added Deputies and now all PDs. Their training isn’t going to crank out your Chiefs, Sheriffs and Leads if they’re all exhausted. It’s not a full Club of Brothers. Club within a Club means he’s only got a handful of trusted Brothers at his back when he’s called away.” Thank fuck.

I throw him chin.

“Huh, I didn’t think of that. I see he isn’t held back by the kitchen, Prospect or security issues.” Cort is going to fold.

I breathe.

“Jinx is right. Club in a Club isn’t bad because it gets you your focused training with double the the numbers and just a handful of specialty trainers added but your Presidents are limited by a very real 24/7 time limit,” Falcon makes me smile as he drills that limit in.

“I agree.” I throw in hoping that Cort will back down.

Zeke and Harky agree making me wonder where MB is.

“Alright. You should be the matchmaker, Falcon.” Cort isn’t giving up easy.

“Because running everything new you come up with, my growing towns, Club towns, training schedule and all you’re fucking meets aren’t enough? Let the Brothers find their own women. We’re all fucking busy.”

We all agree with Falcon. Cort is pissed. “You throw up that wall and every time I’m going to find a way to get over it.” His look is fierce enough for my girl to be squeezing my hand again.

“Brother, we’re done. I need food. They won’t have anything until everyone else does their job so we don’t have a direction. I’m meeting Lily and Aylen this afternoon for zorbing before we leave.” Ben walks toward the door.

“Yeah, I’ll get Seren and Caelan. He likes the new track at Zion.” Cort making time for his ol’ lady and son is good to see.

I breathe deep when it closes behind them.

“Tell me I’m still a Club within a Club,” Stan says breaking the silence.

“You are, Brother and you’re busy but only to a point. We find three teams that give you breathing room so you can raise your kids and old lady isn’t threatening to call Sheila down here.” Justice has us laughing.

“Who’s the matchmaker?” Falcon asks.

Justice shrugs and Mase stands with his arms in flames. “Doesn’t matter, it’s not us.” He pulls Justice out. I bet it is to avoid more questions.

“How come Justice doesn’t catch on fire?” Marli has me smiling.

“His anger must be directed at the target he incinerates. I am told I do not answer questions here and am also hungry,” Dakota says as he walks out with the Prince Brother I don’t know.

I shake my head. “Crazy must have been handed down by the ancestors.”

“We’ll get a plan at some point, Ops Brothers and Clubs, be prepared. I’m out.” Falcon throws chin and is gone. The others follow suit.

Jinx looks down the table at us. “We met to find out that we can’t find out who you are Champion and Bishop, be

prepared for more Ops. I will be too. Stan, keep learning the Phoenix crazy and gear up to get your Club open. Cort isn't going to stop for a threat."

I nod. "His meetings used to be shorter."

He nods while Champ makes it to his side. "He's bored because they don't have a plan yet and I think Seren is getting tired of the parties everywhere. She wants more at Phoenix."

Marli agrees, standing. "She said that at an ol' lady meeting. I want to see Freedom's triplets."

Champ helps him stand. "They're cute kids but I could use a minute. I've been nonstop for a couple of months now. The Club is open, towns are growing and Club membership is up. I wouldn't mind a week off to see that in person instead of from a report."

"Brother time at the Club tonight?"

I ask getting his Jinx smile. "Yeah. We can ride after. Three hours is about all I've got but it will be good to meet the new Brothers, unwind and disconnect from Cort and whatever his *what's next* plan is."

I smile and put an arm around Marli. "What do you say?"

"Hell yeah. It's getting hard to navigate around the rabbit holes lately. Three hours of reality will help."

My girl has me smiling. "I can get Ethan on my calls for an hour and take you to dinner. We can go to Champion and see what's happening there before the Club."

She pulls my shirt. “Yes. I need to get to work. I’m glad I’m not at all these meetings. I’d never have time for dinner.”

Stan laughs when she walks out.

I shake my head because she’s got a point. We had a meet to learn we don’t have anything more but there was a reason for it. There’s always a reason. Marli doesn’t have a family line identified, we have PD gearing up, drones sent everywhere, phone logs on the satellite from those drones and force fields, the Prince Brother wasn’t introduced and Ben and his entourage is going home.

Sitting at my desk, Dakota’s words hit me. He said he’s not answering questions before he walked out. He knows the lineage and someone is stopping him from telling it? Justice doesn’t know, Ben doesn’t know and Mase deflected the lineage question and told us who Christian has as his focus to protect.

This is Christian, a Brother that sees across the country and has more vision and ability than I’ll ever understand. He was at Princes and here. I didn’t ask because my head may explode with his answers.

Dakota walks in surprising the fuck out of me.
“Brother.”

He hands me an iced coffee and sits. “I am always surprised by the insightful Brothers that surround our great Leaders.”

I nod, getting that he sees Cort in there.

“I do, Brother. Indian is not easily explained. While Ben Knight is the Great Leader foreseen generations ago by the ancestors, many other Leaders are seen and spoken of. Badass and Indian work much the same. Cort Masters is building and sharing his knowledge and resources with our Great Leader as is Hemy with his ability to draw and train many Brothers with the skills we need.”

I see that. “They strengthen Ben and Badass.”

He smiles, tipping his coffee toward me. “They do. The Brothers under Cort and Hemy are more organized and do the same for them. All are not clearly Indian but have long forgotten ties to Natives all across the world.”

I smile. “We all had to come from somewhere.”

“Exactly. Badass is driven by those Brothers and their old ladies. Because the Brothers do not show obvious ties does not mean the ties are not there.”

I put my cup down. “Badass does the three thing. Cort, Justice and Hemy are Ben’s Badass three.”

He smiles. “Yes. For every Indian position there is a Badass counterpart. We do not always see that clearly but everyone with ties to Phoenix Rising and Cort see it in...”

“Falcon and Raid. Crow had that too with Co and Reed. Do Masons have the Indian counterparts?”

He laughs. “You are a very insightful Brother, yes. I will go further and say every Leader has the same three. You, for example, have Marli and Ethan. Your story is long and has been seen by many.”

He stands and I’m scrambling to get up quick, almost knocking my coffee over in the process. “Wait. Who is Marli’s family? And, what’s Christian’s tie or job in all this?”

Only his head turns toward me and I see his amusement. “Our Great Guardian is a Protector and teacher to all, Badass and the vision.”

Holy hell. I sit and look back at the door. He’s fuckin’ gone. They’re not saying who she is for a reason. A reason that they can’t say now. Why? What difference would it make?

I smile, we have a long story. My smile falls. I wonder who my story is with as she walks through the door.

“What’s wrong?”

I smile. “Nothing now that you’re here. Ethan has a date so Julius took my calls for two hours.”

Her eyes light up. “I wanted to get Raiden some cowboy clothes. Flame said he can learn to ride at their new Club and Pres said he can start at the big Club.”

Shopping? She wants to spend the extra time shopping? Every thought is *no fuckin’ way* and I can picture her over my shoulder, while I carry her home. I close my eyes and nod. Delusional thinking isn’t done for me.

“Do you want Italian?” She asks with no clue what I want or am thinking. She’s obviously not a reader and that makes her perfect because she can’t read me.

I want *her* so I nod and let her pull me out. Her braid swings back and forth as I follow. I almost groan but hold it in, I'll get into that braid later.

Marli

Stella turns fast. “You were dragged into a meet?”

I nod wondering who rained on her parade. “Yeah, but it was like twenty minutes.” I avoid what the meet was about.

“They’re fuckin’ crazy with the meets all over the place. I could have joined virtually but Mase dragged me there and back. Where’d you have to go and did you have freaky transport? They’re lucky they sent Mase.” She’s really pissed over a meet? I get why Alder didn’t want to tell her about more work.

“It was here. Ben and Cort came here.”

She shakes her head. “I don’t want to know. They’re both crazy.” She says that a lot. Everyone here is crazy so I’m not disagreeing.

“I got Raiden clothes for riding in town.”

Flame helps me out. “He loves the hat, boots and belts.”

Maiyun swats Stella. “Tell them.”

Stella rolls her eyes. “I’m pregnant with twins. Don’t send me clothes, their dressers were filled when Uncle Danny built their room almost two years ago.”

Holy shit. “He knew you’d have twins two years ago?” Rabbit hole, here we come. I shouldn’t have asked.

“Yeah. Jordan is doing inventory so the big boy-toy brought me here to tell Jinx.”

Jeti laughs. “Jordan is going to be a basket case. Brinks will keep you away from all that. I bet Jordan has a new something for the boys when you get home. He already built them all those weird hologram sensory things. Now he’ll be building for their ages. He said the newborn stuff doesn’t last long and they’ll need more challenges as they grow.” Hologram sensory things? For newborns? I know he programs everything for Badass Innovations but for newborns. Since kids are everywhere, I guess there’s a market.

I look at Flame. She shakes her head at me but no one else notices. They go on about the predicted twins like this is all normal. I watch and avoid asking anything else. I never want to know what they know, were told years ago or how that was told. The architect built the predicted kids a room and filled the dressers with clothes. He can be a scary architect. We hear a whole story about circus elephants in a bay that Stella had to be save from and Cort being the boys god father in stunned silence. Flame’s eyes are huge, I bet mine are too. I look for Bishop. I need a rabbit hole rescue.

Thank God the men dragged us away from the Club after only an hour. Stella is quiet while riding behind Brinks and I got to dance with my velvety voiced man who always seems to rescue me from the Badass Wonderland. He told me more of their escapades while we danced but his shaking head reassured me that he doesn’t believe they’re normal either.

Now, with my arms around him, the peace of the night and vibration lulling my thoughts, I can appreciate the Badass Wonderland while doing nothing more than taking a ride. Those kids were brought up thinking it's just the way. I'm not sure they understand normal.

“Good night, little Champion?”

“Better now.” I tighten my arms a little. “It was good but showed me how different I grew up. They have no idea what's normal.”

His deep laugh makes me smile. “They don't and Ben says it all the time. I'm not sure what makes them so oblivious to how their sheltered lives, Indian heritage and abilities has changed Badass. They don't see anything at all wrong with the way they live. It just is and they've adapted to it. Hannah thinks nothing of snatching one of her boys out of the air as they float by. It's weird to anyone who didn't grow up with all they did.”

They've adapted to it. “I think I'm adapting to it too. Other than the unbelievable memories that cause a rabbit hole rescue, I'm not at all surprised by flying men, dogs that are smarter than some deputies I know and giants in the land of Oz.”

His rumble comes from his chest. “Wonderland. Trish calls it Oz. I need you to keep it straight.”

I laugh right out. “Faith calls it a utopia, Trish is Oz. Got it. I'll stick with Wonderland but you do have giants here in the Badass Wonderland.”

“We do. Marks is an inch or two smaller than Brinks and Jinks but he’s from Boston and was FBI. Creed is a huge Indian from the desert tribes but he’s too tall to be from there. Cort is smaller than his dad who was Crow’s second. Reed’s twin is my size.”

“So, they’re not all Badass born and bred but the giants migrate to Badass like the military.”

“Yeah. Badass has always had a large military presence then started sending Brothers to the military or college. Military find it easy to live Badass because it’s a predominantly male world. The women in Badass earn their places and have a confidence that we all notice. It’s not like the women you meet in an out of the way bar. We have real conversations, compatible views and a genuine respect for experiences we didn’t live. Those experiences teach us shit we never see or thought of and new ways to spread what we learn to more.”

Holy shit, that’s exactly what they did with me. I was scheduled to meet Pres for a conference call with Cort. I got grilled on what my job and training was, then offered a job. When they saw my training and tested me, they gave me a more focused job. It’s a way better job and I have better tools to spread to the PDs and Sheriffs. Badass Wonderland with my genies and Bishop is a good place to be.

“You still with me?”

Oh. “Yeah. I was thinking about Cort giving me a job then using what I know to spread it to more. He’s doing it with Stan now. It’s smart and took you saying it for me to see it. Bruno knew it.”

“He’s Badass. He understands the Clubs, whereas you saw Badass but didn’t know more than they collect criminals for you.”

I squeeze him. “That’s really all I knew. They didn’t give me shit for being a woman so I didn’t care who I picked up from. The group I was in for training had Badass but they were quiet and followed sparring rules. I should have asked but was there to train so I trained. Bruno never said much about the Club so I stayed away from questioning him.” My dad shook his head once and I never asked for information even after he died. How odd that I’m doing the same with where I come from because Justice shook his head. I see Justice as a wise man who knows more than I ever will too, I guess.

“You know now. I can see your dad and uncle showing you Badass but not explaining who we are. You may have been hidden and needed to see us but you were on a different path. The readers always say, *it wasn’t time*, or *now it’s time*. It may not have been your time.” He’s so damn smart.

“Justice said it when he showed the second time with Mucimi. Something about the smaller ranch house staying with me. It’s the old homestead.”

“The original. What do you think about the town tonight?”

I smile. “It’s amazing what a couple of weeks has done. When I first saw it with some of the shops open, I wondered what a bustling town looked like. Tonight, with bikes instead of horses, it felt right. It’s bustling with businesses and patrons happy to stop and chat or walk along to

the benches and sit to people watch.” It’s exactly what we did. Everyone we met were happy, had questions or acknowledged us with chin or a tip of their head. It’s not like the city where people don’t even look in your eyes. I know daddy is proud and swear I felt it. I give another squeeze. “Daddy is proud.”

“He always will be, little Champion. Bruno said you couldn’t spit wrong in his eyes.”

I laugh knowing he loves weird phrases. “Bruno isn’t wrong. My dad pushed me but always made everything I accomplished feel like I won the Olympics. Of course, I wanted more of that so I’d push myself. Being the best me was and still is my goal. Daddy said it never ends, the older I get, the more I’ll learn and reach the best me I can be.”

He slows as the rumble bubbles out of him. “It’s a Badass trait. Learn from everyone and use it.”

I read that thinking it was similar. “Yeah, I guess I knew Badass before I knew about the rabbit holes and genies.”

He laughs pointing us toward home. The Badass Wonderland. My next day off, I’m going to get a tattoo. Kateri is a graphic artist, I bet she can make it good for me. Family is good to have. I’ll get to see the kids again, Raiden will love them, Artemis does.

“You thinking of my hands on you?” He’s cute with that curious in his sexy voice.

“I am now.” My tattoo can be a surprise. “It’s my choice tonight. We have a position video or fruit waiting.” I hope he picks fruit. We’ve done too many of the positions in the video but there are a few I’ve never heard of.

“Fruit? Chocolate and whip cream were good.”

Oooh, a shiver runs down my back. I really like wearing chocolate. “They were. I’m told the fruit is one you’ll love. On the way, tell me what Aquarius is. There are positions I’ve never heard of.”

I feel his rumble before I hear it and smile. I love the *my choice* nights and teasing him. We’ll both be ready as soon as we have a door between us and the Wonderland world. Maiyun said anticipation is the way to go with the grapefruit. I got this.

Epilogue

One week

Bishop

Valentine's Day is coming, I'm glad we don't live where it's illegal to give your sweetheart (sweet Champion) a box of chocolates weighing less than 50lbs. I do believe you'd shoot me and every Badass Brother I know would probably encourage it.

I laugh with her quick reply.

Idaho is crazy. I'd definitely shoot you just before I call a Prospect to witness and take away the (thoughtless, tortuous and just plain mean) 'gift' that will have me in a workout frenzy. A much smaller collection of chocolate (without lb in the weight) would be welcome. Dark chocolate with caramel would be a very good choice and the 9oz bag is the perfect weight.

I make a type and weight note remembering her truffle choice in town. Maybe a couple of mixed chocolates in small amounts will keep her sweet and happy. Leya makes good chocolates. I scratch the note and put her on the schedule for the 14th. A trip to Bravo would make it better, Marli will like the old-time ice cream-chocolatier shop.

The board turning on stops me from planning a whole night of slathering chocolate in a new way delusions.

My board lights up. “Get two teams readied for flight. I’ll get back with you in a minute.” Jinx is out.

I hit my watch. “Ethan, Cyrus, ready teams for flight.” Changing quickly, I send Jarret, Andy and Julius a quick heads up to cover us all while we’re out. I know Julius will be the first to step into covering. The new Brother is dependable and always willing to help. He’s still annoys the hell out of everyone, but I get him and have come to like the updates he gives us every week. I should ask Alder about having the...no, I drop that thought. Julius needs something that’s his.

Marli barrels through the door. “Pres said I’m with you.”

“Readied at the chopper. Is your team alerted?” I turn her and we jog down the stairs. Here the chopper pad is right outside the back door.

“Pres just said a team. I think Steel is out on a job for PD Flight.”

I throw chin to the two teams. “Ethan, Cyrus, everyone have full batteries?”

“Roger, Boss. We’ve been training with the test suits like you said. It saves our gear for when we need it.” Ethan never misses anything I order.

“Good. The chopper is outfitted to charge and has a spare for everyone. If you get low, drop your batteries for a fresh.”

“Roger, Pres,” the Brothers say.

I give Marli a hand up and step back for Artemis, hoping I get a call before the blades spin. The phone with no

cans is hard to hear. The rotor spins and I climb in. Shit.

Ethan gives me Lead cans. Unless someone's talking directly to me, they aren't helping.

I offer the set to Marli. "They're Lead cans."

She takes them and another set is handed over. I sit and pull my tablet waiting for what we're doing with two teams.

"Pres." The engineer has me up and at his computer.

"Thanks. Cort, Ben." I reach back for Marli and pull her up to my side.

"This is a collaborative Op that Alder put together and Mucimi says works. Jinx is on with you two, he has a PD team and a PD Flight team that will meet you in Madison. Flight Guard has a team and Pablo is lead. He'll be on with me. Zeke is on with Ben. Alder is control. We'll meet you there."

"With a team?" I ask before he shuts us down.

He smiles and I know he's not taking a team. "Freedom's Team and an Enforcer team are on their way and Ben has his Protectors and Enforcers. We got the dogs too." He shuts down before I can ask. My first thought is Ben is back and it's going to get crazier than usual this time.

Marli laughs. "He's covered by his dog and Ben's teams?"

I shake my head. "Ben's Flight Crews are called Enforcers there, it's Protector without ability here." I smile when her eyes bug out. I don't know why but I love that look. "He has Pablo and Ben has Zeke. They're not letting anything

close to Ben or Cort. The dogs will get the order to protect them too.

“I’m glad you have a team. They’re a little crazy with covering everyone, but they’re Territory Leads.” She’s right.

I nod. “Cort has always been number one on the Leaderboard, I’d guess Ben is too. They know the job but shouldn’t put themselves on it. I do but it’s the job Cort gave me. Plus, they lived through the bomb blasts so they think they’re invincible and now they have flight suits.” I knew Cort had a reason for the new suit.

“Wasn’t the vision of them dying?” Kateri and Mase told her all about that one and Nash showed her the magazine pictures of them walking out of the burning rubble.

“Yeah. Zeke said they had Protectors all over the country helping at the reservation to hold a shield over them.”

“Stop. I can’t do a rabbit hole right now. I have questions and no time for their Badass Wonderland shit.” Her disgusted look makes me smile.

The teams laugh loud and Flight Crew try to hide it. “You know the story. I’ll answer later over spinach pies.”

She smiles. “Artemis likes the chorico.” Artemis isn’t wrong. I like that one too.

I sit her down and re-buckle her belt, then pull my tablet. Holy fuck. “They found the ex-Mason-Badass hideout. It’s in a high rise? Ethan, find me the building.” Looking up I see Ethan on his tablet.

He pops a hologram out and moves a seat over so he’s in front of me. “Alpha-Bit IT is sending it.” Two strokes and

the building schematics show.

“Eight floors and they’re on the fifth. It’s half the building.”

He points to the lower section of the hologram. “Basement has storage and access to the garage.” It’s outlined in red too. Jesus, fuck.

“Pres,” the engineer moves so I can see the chat request.

“Open it. Ethan, Cyrus, let’s see what the crazy Presidents of Presidents come up with.” I unbuckle Marli and pull her with me so we all get the plan.

Ben and Cort are smiling. I almost roll my eyes. “You really are some crazy Brothers.”

Ben’s eyes flash in amusement when Jessie and Dakota agree. “I don’t see it as a bad thing anymore, Brother. We’re effective and growing beyond what was ever seen.”

I nod. “I have to give you that but more and more Indian vision shit spills out into our lives so I’m not sure I want to know how much or what has already been seen.”

They all laugh at me. I shrug. “What’s the plan?” I’m not sure I want to know, but I need to know.

We’re dropped four buildings away and every Brother hits the roof and bounces right back up. Cort stays a step

behind me. At the next roof, he's in step with Thrasos as if they practice this daily.

Pablo shakes his head. "He just learned the chopper drop five minutes ago." I guess it's not a practiced move but Cort is good in the suit. I gave him the heads up on a count so we're in at the same time as the other teams and hope two seconds is enough, but he's quick and should make it.

Axe: "Team A, readied." Axe is the basement teams with Freedom, Marli running a team of Ops dogs and Zeus with a full team of dogs armed with lasers.

Alder: "Hold, A."

Ben: "B readied." Ben has Zeke, Endo, Harky and a team of dogs taking the three hall doors.

Alder: "Hold, B."

Ethan: We make the last building and Ethan and Cyrus move toward the north side. "C1&2 readied." I take a deep breath and nod to Cort.

Cort: "C readied."

Alder: "Hold, C. D, feed disable, building jam."

Jessie: "D, readied." D is for Dakota with the Veritable PD Flight Guard teams and Mucimi, but I guess Jessie is Lead.

Alder: "On one. Three, two, one."

Bishop: I'm glad he gave a beat in between numbers and hit the window at the same time Cort and Pablo do. It sounds like a bar brawl is going on four seconds in. Dogs slide across the corners of my vision but are moving like they have

a target, Alder said more than thirty on the floor so they may. Blue light is flashing everywhere and the volume drops considerably.

Cort: “D, C is clear. We’re moving forward. This is a nice setup. They have some backing behind this.” No one answers about the money behind these assholes but the counterfeit job we closed on them can’t be their only backing.

Jessie: “Right behind you, Brother. PD, cuff them and get them to the box truck.”

Bishop: I turn back and smile, Veritable PD is flying through windows, I’m glad they’re opening them. “Eight, Steel.”

Steel: “Roger, Boss. Impressive for five seconds.” I point at Cort and get a nod before following the giant with my own gun flashing light. The dog’s lasers are a lighter blue. I should ask but not now.

Axe: “I’ve got sixteen and we’re clear. No one left the building, Brothers, but they’ve got a whole fuckin’ arsenal down here.”

Alder: “Boss Freedom, move dickass to delivery van.” He’s got us all huffing into our mics.

Freedom: “Mucimi and Axe are floating them into it.”

Alder: “Roger, hold to new order, A.”

Bishop: We get through the maze of rooms to the hall that splits this section and find more dogs opening office doors along with Ben and Zeke. I point Ethan and Cyrus toward the doors on our side and they move going down to clear the south side of our hall. It’s been quiet, for a good three minutes. All

we hear is a yell or body fall here and there as Brothers and dogs shoot lasers. Not one bullet has been fired.

Dakota: He floats by us toward Ben. "Living quarters have been cleared, Prez."

Ben: He nods, opening a door fast. He's fuckin' quick with a gun too. "How many left here?"

Dakota: "Against counsel you wanted to be here only to cheat, Prez?" The Brother makes me smile as I'm opening the door opposite them.

Ben: Moves on to a door ahead of me while I check the office I'm on. "Good point. Go help Axe and Mucimi move the arsenal in the basement."

Dakota: "I would miss the frustration and realization that you brought too many Brothers and will be reminded of my early Op of shooting fish in a bucket. Sadly, they do not need my help."

Cort: Laughs loud. "Jessie told me about you sinking the ship."

Bishop: I shake my head and open the next door to two quick, loud shots. I hit the dick in the head with the laser. "Fuck. That is gonna leave a mark. I'm glad it's not going to be a bruise from hell like the old suits."

Pablo: He touches the mark on my suit. "It didn't even dent it."

Ben: "Better plating and it's lighter. Our new gear is made out of the same material."

Bishop: We're all still opening and checking offices like the shots weren't loud as fuck and more could be waiting. Well, Cort, Pablo and me are clearing offices. Ben and Zeke are just opening doors and moving on. They must feel it's empty. I don't ask about it but do ask, "How'd you get them done so fast?"

Ben: "Dakota bought a textile mill. We've been shipping them here. At one time, the city Mass Badass is based out of was the textile capitol of the world. Child labor, greed, unions and more recently the EPA slowly made it impossible for the factories to make money. They left the buildings and quite a few are still standing." He turns at the end of the hall. "One here and we're clear." He points to the last door Cort is a step away from. Zeke smiles. I haven't heard a word out of him yet.

Cort: He doesn't hesitate and opens the door as he simultaneously answers and shoots. "Your PD is in an old mill but looks brand new. We're clear, Alder. Next time we don't need the dogs. They took down more than I did." Ben agrees. I walk away. They're both crazy.

Marli

The chopper ride is longer but Freedom tells me about her boys and Ranger's new fishing expedition. Ranger sounds harder to handle than her boys. The team members tell me about his escapades with Anton and now his new flight suit.

I listen and laugh while wondering why no one says a word about the Op. I wouldn't talk about it but the Deputies always talked about the highlights after a big bust. This was so impressive with the dogs and men moving everywhere at once, with not one single casualty or injury reported. It was twenty minutes of holy shit moments then we were told to board the chopper.

Freedom pulled me with her saying Bishop is on with Cort and Ben so I'll see him at Phoenix. Trucks moved, the basement was empty and all the bad guys were collected. I don't ask if we were even seen. Every person I *did* see was loaded in a van and driven away.

"We weren't seen." My genie answers the question I didn't ask.

"Thanks. How do you know?"

He shrugs. "The building was shielded. Dakota and Aiyana made sure."

Not a rabbit hole I want to jump into right now. I ask, "Are we getting lunch at Phoenix?"

He smiles looking young. "Yeah, you'll get status once Alder's IT goes through the paper. He had Red fly the bigger office files to him."

Red? “The jet pilot that Jeti works with?”

“Yeah, Red, Blue, Justice, Jeti, Aylen, Nash and Luke Rayne fly the new jets.” This makes him happy.

“I know all but Red and Blue, but I’ve heard of them. The rest are your family.”

He nods. “We’re all family up there. Justice, Jeti, Nash and Luke Rayne were all on our Prince Crew. Aylen was on the other but she was Lead for the Kids Crew Team Two. They worked Ops when we were on vacation or New England was being attacked.” They were kids then. Holy shit.

“Did that happen often?”

The Brothers paying attention to us laugh. Mucimi smiles. “More than was ever shown on the news. We were never seen because we were so young.” He answers everything whether I ask or not.

I don’t remember anything from the news but don’t ask or think so I’m not dragged into the rabbit hole unwittingly. Freedom hits my arm. “How do you like the new job?”

I smile. “I love it. We got three Brothers in a good Sheriff station. The Sheriff is happy and has them training the Deputies with the laser.”

She’s surprised. “That’s fast.”

“They asked for Deputy on some job form Bravo hands out to military.”

Her face clears and smile shows. “Falcon made the form but Phoenix uses it too. I think all training Clubs do.”

The things I learn. “How long have you been Badass?” All the ability Protectors grew up in the Club from what I’ve heard but no other women have as a member. Flame wasn’t a member and didn’t work for Badass.

“A couple of years. I’ve been on an Ops team for a year now, before that I was just a trainer.” For Krav maga and martial arts. Unbelievable.

“I’m glad you took the Ops job. I love the job but being able to work busts like this makes it better.”

“You’re good with the dogs.”

I scan over to Artemis sitting in a seat looking out the window. “Thanks. Piper and Artemis are good teachers. Today I met Zeus, who lead that whole team barking once. He’s huge and has a commanding presence feel about him. They’re amazingly intelligent. I saw a Marine with a dog on some talent show a few years ago and thought they must be way smarter than what I saw when they’re working. I never expected them to be more human than some people I’ve met over the years.”

She laughs loud surprising me. “They’re Brothers like the rest of us. I agree but never ran a team of dogs. It’s like the flying for me. I have enough to do with the training, kids and Ranger. I let the K-9 and flying Brothers do their thing and don’t need the how.”

“I get that. It’s more rabbit holes I don’t need to be dragged into. For me, Artemis is my way of moving around without teams of Brothers following me, so I learned what I needed to.” I feel us lowering and watch the men collect their bags. Everyone has backpacks around here.

“Smart.” She stands. “I’ll take you up to the meeting room. Cort is here.”

My earpiece hasn’t made a sound. “How do you know that?”

She points. “That’s Ben’s chopper. They flew in a jet back here.”

I nod figuring I wouldn’t have missed that either.

“I’ve got her, Boss Freedom. I’m going up.”

“Thanks, Mucimi. I need to change. Stay safe, Champion. I can’t believe your name is a Badass Club.”

I smile. “Me either. It’s a good Club from what I’ve heard.” Pres loved being VP there and Debra said it was low-key freaky making it better than Phoenix and Bravo.

Freedom turns and walks away with her team.

Mucimi laughs. “Hannah is my sister. I love all the Badass Clubs but think she picked a boring one.”

I laugh jumping down, thinking he’s nuts and has no idea what boring is. “Artemis, Attention.”

She stays by my side as we meet up with Bishop under the huge portico. This whole Club is over-the-top and giant like the over-the-top giant who built it. Bishop said it was a hospital. I don’t believe it. It fits in the Badass Wonderland you’d imagine seeing in a book.

I pull his coat and he bends so I can kiss his handsome face. “Glad you’re here. Are we eating first?”

“We are. The Princes, Mass Badass and Virginia Badass are collecting the strays we didn’t collect today. The

Protectors spent the morning collecting from the west Clubs. It feels like the slave collections but I only heard about it on the plane.” His voice goes right through me. The low and silky feels weird saying those words.

“Everyone collected on one day?” This is the whole damn country.

“A couple but the Clubs all worked on different states. We had a lot more traffickers, monitors and slaves than these ex-Mason-Badass idiots.”

Holy shit. “How many?”

“Less than a hundred.” Bishop takes my hand and starts walking.

Mucimi says, “Ninety-one.”

They had more than that for human trafficking? Whoa. I don’t want to know. Artemis chuffs when we get to the dining room. I scan then look down. “Down-time.”

Bishop and his low, lazy chuckle have me smiling. “She wants to eat with her Brothers.”

There is a whole table of huge dogs. These are the Leads that Piper told me about but I see Loki in with them. “I didn’t see Loki today. The others were on Zeus’s team.”

He nods pulling my chair out. “He was with Harky and the team with Ben. I don’t think Loki has a laser yet.”

Cort laughs. “Texas said he isn’t ready for that one. You did good, Champion. Harky was impressed.”

“Thanks. I run Artemis in the simulator but never a team of K-9s.” I turn when Mucimi sits beside me with a plate

of food.

He shrugs. "I'm hungry."

Ben smiles our way. "You're too impatient to wait."

Mucimi smiles nodding like a little boy. "I am, Prez. The food is out, hot and good." He points at the buffet. "No one fucks with me so I'm safe getting it."

That's why women sit and wait. I don't mind waiting, some of these Brothers aren't from here or known to these Clubs. Freedom explained how that looks when they cornered her and her sister Victory at training.

Mucimi touches my arm. "You stay at the Officer's table. Artemis will keep you safe but you always stay with your team or the Officers." His voice is soft or in my head. My eyes whip to his and he nods.

"I will." Before I finish he's back to eating like that didn't just happen. I look up at Bishop but he's talking to Jessie and Dakota. Feeling weirded out, I order as soon as the Prospect steps over. I will not ask or think of anything.

Mucimi laughs softly. Great.

Bishop

The Club is still celebrating when we walk in. They cheer together getting my head shaking. Marli gets dragged to the women's table with Artemis following. Marli told her it's down-time but she isn't hanging with the other dogs tonight.

"Mucimi told her she's Champion's protection when she's out. She's an Ops dog." Kyler shrugs.

I shake my head and brace for Jinx's hand coming down on my shoulder. "Good job, Brother. We had thirty minutes for the time bet and were closest." He's a happy President tonight.

"How much did you win?"

"Eleven grand. All the Clubs were in. The Prince Protectors worked their asses off but made it." He's proud.

I shake my head. "You should give the money to them."

Kyler laughs. "We gave it to Champion for Sheriff gear and shit. With all the bets, there's not many that need it. She's the newest old lady and has a cause. "

They're too much. "Thanks and thank them for me."

He nods with a big smile that puts me on alert.

"What?"

"Cort didn't tell you about your time off?"

"No. What about it?"

Jinx laughs clapping a hand on my shoulder that almost buckles my knees. He's not done there and pulls my cut

over to the women's table. Jeti busts out laughing. I'm almost afraid.

"Champion, your week at the lagoon starts next Sunday night. You'll have two K-9 teams with you." Two?

I look at him waiting for the rest. "And?"

He smiles his Jinx smile. "That's it. The chopper is there with their crew but up the hill is only K-9."

Fuckin' dogs? We need to feed and gear them up for whatever we're doing. I shake my head, boating, jet skiing, snorkeling or diving. Fuckin' Cort.

"I love it!" I look at the demented woman I claimed. Her eyes are shining and her smile is megawatt.

"Fuckin' great."

"It's better than two teams of men." She has no clue.

No it's not.

Kyler and Jeti are cracking up.

I notice Mal from Bravo's big smile and point my finger at him. "Oh, just you wait. You're going to get slammed from MC Badass, Princes and Cort. When the delusional thinking hits, see the clown here." I point at Jinx. "He can fuckin' smile you through it." He looks sick and should. We'll be gearing up dogs all fuckin' week.

They all laugh. I walk to the bar for the beer I still don't have while pegging them a finger.

Fuckin' Brothers.

Thanks for reading Brax and Marli Bishop's story. This one felt different, but the theme is the same. I hope you enjoyed the Law protector and new Badass Sheriff as much as I did (delusions and all). I wonder what's next.

Until the next one, faithful readers...

Please leave a review or hit the stars on your way out,

Thanks,

L.

Acknowledgments

Mel, Christine, thank you for all you do, for all your time and for all your support. I could never do this alone.

My betas and readers, Sherry, Pam, Allena, Jenny, Lisa, Lynne, Jacilla, Sandra and Tonya, thank you, ladies. You make getting books out easy. I appreciate your time and support but mostly your smiles and lol's. Your ideas, names and help when I'm stuck make the books better, interesting and always fun or just funny. <3

Readers, without you there is no purpose. Thank you for giving me a purpose. <3

About the Author

L. Ann started with the Baxters and followed that with multiple series and genres. While her books feature paranormal, FBI, ex-military and Badass Bikers, L. Ann is writing about the strong women that these men need in their life to help right the world's wrongs and keep their small part of the world safe. The women are extraordinary, strong and determined to make a difference.

The men fight for right in every book. Yes, they kill people. Yes, the MC shoots at the bad guys' feet to cause them pain. Yes, some throw tampons at each other regularly.

That being said, they do these things while stopping human trafficking and experimentation, bringing their world into legitimate businesses, fighting gangs to keep drugs away from their town and kids, keep women sheltered safely while trying to stop domestic abuse. These are men that don't leave a pack, Team member or Brother behind. They don't treat women as possessions and they don't cheat. Respect takes on an honorable meaning. Women and kids are cherished. Everyone is looked out for and everyone is equal.

L. Ann has made amazing worlds, tackled the taboo subjects and made it easy to imagine living in a world where your protection comes from the vampires, shifters, freaky kids, albinos and orientals, military turned FBI and some Badass Bikers.

With readers writing about rereading the series over and over, she feels like she's told her characters' stories in a way that would make them proud.

Every book will make you laugh, every book will make you angry for the wrong that happens in the world. Every book will make you cry for the pain that a character feels. Every book gives you hope that we may just get it right yet.

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Reading Order

It is better to read them in order so you don't miss anything. The *boxed sets* help keep them straight. I answer questions from previous books as I go along (the not easy thing). So, here is the order in which they were written.

She Found Us - Baxters

Our Wife - Baxters

Our Angel - Baxters

Knight - MC

LaPonte - MC

LaPonte-Karr - MC

Pres - MC

Blackhawk - MC

Tailley - MC

Callahan - MC

Jake - Baxters

Brighton - MC

Rayne - Baxters

Moniz - MC

Behind the Scenes - MC

Prophet - Princes of Prophecy

Reader - Princes of Prophecy

Leader - Princes of Prophecy

Enforcer - Princes of Prophecy

Coder - Princes of Prophecy

Sniper - Princes of Prophecy

Christian - The Protectors

Ricky - MC

Aiyana - The Protectors

D.C. Security - Baxters/MC/Princes

Jeremy & Jacob - The Protectors
Saber's Vida - The Providence Series
Saber's Porthos - The Providence Series
Saber's D'Artagnan - The Providence Series
Saber's Sombra - The Providence Series
Saber's Aramis - The Providence Series
Saber's Athos - The Providence Series
Spying Eyes - Standalone
Princes' Reward -The Other World Series
Fated Mates -The Other World Series
Princes' Pack - The Other World Series
Master's Rise - The Phoenix Series
Benga's Rise -The Phoenix Series
Ranger's Rise - The Phoenix Series
Jack: Honour - The Bravo Series
Falcon: Respect - The Bravo Series
Mag: Loyalty - The Bravo Series
Allegory - The Champion Series
Endue - Champion Series
Conform - Champion Series
Justice: Tenacity - Bravo Series
Ford's Rise - Phoenix Series
Driver: Grit - Alpha Series
Christiansen: City Boy - Alpha Series
Nova: Creed - Alpha Series
Blackhawk: Mase - Honor Series
Cooper: Gunslinger - Elan Series
Teller: Connect - Bravo Series
Maverick: Insight - Delta Series
Spano: Foresight - Sentinel Series
Marks: Enforce - Rising² Series
Harky: Elite - Rising² Series
Adroit Force: SEALed
Adroit Force: Hunted

Adroit Force: Saved

Luke Rayne: Vision

Knight: Heart

Michaels: Choices

Brolin: Revered

Zeke: Unseen

Bishop: Wonderland