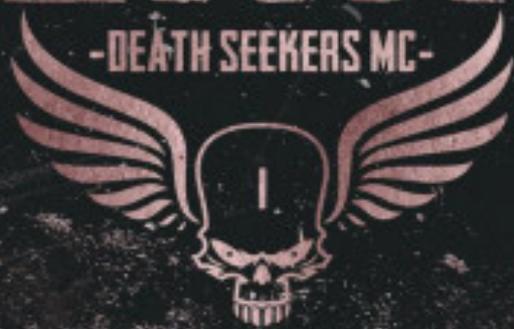


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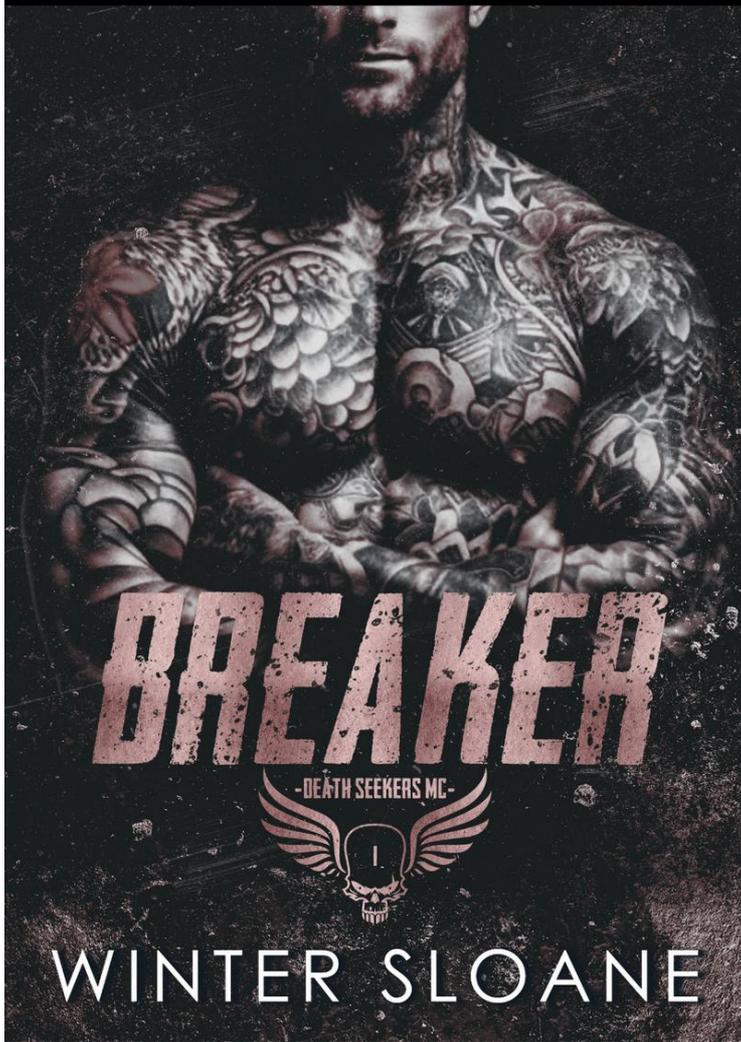
# BREAKER

-DEATH SEEKERS MC-



WINTER SLOANE

EVERNIGHT PUBLISHING®



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WINTER SLOANE



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## **DEDICATION**

To my readers, I hope you enjoy Breaker and Riley's story as much as I loved writing it.

# **BREAKER**

*Death Seekers MC, 1*

**Winter Sloane**

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## CHAPTER ONE

Riley Grayson glanced at her mother's old wristwatch: 2:00 AM. Closing time. She let out a sigh of relief as she moved behind the bar, wiping down counters as she prepared to close for the night.

"Last call," Riley announced to the remaining patrons at the bar. "We'll be closing up soon, so finish your drinks."

Most of the customers, her regulars, gave her understanding nods before downing the rest of the drinks. Her gaze lingered on the dark-haired gorgeous man wearing a leather jacket seated at the end of the bar. He probably wasn't considered handsome by most women's standards, but she certainly couldn't look away the moment he entered the bar.

He sauntered in like a king, like he owned the place, but he didn't talk or acknowledge anyone but Riley. Riley could feel the weight of his grey-eyed stare all evening.

As she served his beer, Riley had wondered what it would feel like to have such experienced hands and lips on her body. She always had a thing for older men and this biker hit all of her buttons from the get-go.

Then she remembered her responsibilities, Rob's expensive habit, and the stack of bills on her kitchen table. Riley had no time for romance.

In fact, it always seemed she had no time for anything, especially after her parents passed away in a car accident when she was 18 and Rob was 19.

As she approached him, she couldn't help but feel a subtle flutter in her chest. His eyes met hers, and the connection was electric, as if they had known each other for years, though they had only exchanged a few polite words throughout the night.

"I hate to interrupt, but we're closing up now. Time to call it a night," Riley told him.

The biker looked up from his drink. He focused his slate-grey eyes on her and Riley's heart hammered. At that moment, he didn't look the least bit drunk. His gaze captured hers, as if he was trying to read her like an open book.

Riley worked as a bartender. Men hit on her all the time. She always dismissed the attention as harmless flirting but the look this biker gave her was that of pure, wild hunger.

What would happen if she bent down and kissed him? Where did that line of thought even come from? Riley didn't kiss or get involved with her customers. That was one of her personal rules.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Two AM," Riley answered.

"That late already?"

"I can call you a cab," Riley offered when the biker didn't make another move.

He hesitated and Riley followed his gaze. He looked out the windows, staring at the lone motorcycle in the parking lot. Of course, a man like this rode a Harley, Riley thought.

What would it be like to ride such a powerful machine, the engine purring beneath her thighs? Riley would probably have to wrap her arms around this biker's inked and muscled body.

God. Her imagination was on overdrive tonight.

Eventually, the biker relented. He nodded in agreement. "All right, fine, call me a cab," he mumbled, sounding irritated.

Riley flashed him a warm smile, before picking up her landline and dialing the local taxi service. While they waited for the cab to arrive, she chatted with the biker to pass the time.

"I didn't catch your name," she said.

"Ben Quinn, but most people call me Breaker," he said.

"Why do they call you that?" Riley asked, intrigued.

She couldn't help but notice the patch on his leather jacket. It was a grinning skull and crossbones. The word "President" was embroidered above the patch.

"I have a tendency to break everything I touch." Breaker let out a hollow laugh.

Most people, Riley guessed, would've been intimidated by the big, tattooed biker who could probably break a man in half, but she wasn't. Riley was intrigued and maybe that ought to scare her.

Breaker had the eyes of an unrepentant killer. Riley knew, because when she was 18, she sat across the courtroom

from the man who ran over her parents.

“This is my first time in here,” Breaker was saying.

“I can tell. I’ve never seen you around these parts before,” Riley said.

“My men and I usually frequent our favorite nighttime joints,” he said. “But tonight, I wanted to be away from the usual noise of the club.”

“Is tonight special?” Riley asked.

“It’s my late wife’s death anniversary,” Breaker said.

At that moment, he looked so infinitely sad and terribly alone that Riley couldn’t help but place a comforting hand on his broad shoulder.

He placed his heavily inked fingers over her hand. They were large, warm, and callused. This was a man who wasn’t afraid of hard labor.

“I’m sorry,” Riley murmured. “We never truly stop grieving our losses.”

“Who did you lose?” Breaker asked. Those steel-colored eyes of his looked uncommonly alert, like a predator shaking itself from sleep.

“My parents,” Riley answered.

Soon enough, the cab pulled up outside, and Riley escorted Breaker to the door. She didn’t have to, but it seemed she couldn’t stop touching the biker.

“Thanks for taking care of me, Riley.” There was a wild glint in Breaker’s eyes Riley couldn’t identify but it made her

heart race a little faster.

“It’s my pleasure,” Riley replied sincerely. “Take care, and have a good night.”

“One more thing,” Breaker said, before getting inside the cab.

“Did you forget anything in the bar?” Riley asked.

Breaker turned to face her, and she found herself unable to look away from those intense, enigmatic eyes that reminded her of winter.

Without a word, Breaker stepped closer, and her heart pounded in anticipation. In that moment, the gritty parking lot and bar around them seemed to fade away, leaving just the two of them.

Breaker cupped her cheek tenderly with his hand, and Riley felt a soft shiver run down her spine. His touch was gentle yet electrifying, and she found herself leaning into it, drawn to his warmth. Without hesitation, Breaker leaned in, and their lips met in a tender, lingering kiss. Riley’s mind was a whirlwind of emotions, a mix of surprise and undeniable attraction. When they finally parted, they both stood there, breathless. The cabbie honked. Breaker looked at the cab, then back at her. Was that longing and regret in his eyes?

“Take care, Riley,” he said.

“You too,” she replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Wait,” Breaker said. “Give me your phone.”

“Why?” Riley asked.

“So I could add my number, in case you wanna chat,” Breaker said.

Riley couldn't argue with that. She didn't know why she simply unlocked her phone and handed it to him.

After adding his number, Breaker got into the cab, and Riley watched as it drove away into the night. She looked at her phone with his number for a few moments, wondering why he did that. Riley returned inside. The bar was now empty, but her mind was filled with the memory of that unexpected kiss and Breaker.

Riley shook her head as she finally locked up. No use pondering over Breaker's kiss. Most likely, she'd never see him again. After all, Breaker mentioned tonight was an anomaly.

Riley turned off the neon lights of the bar, then trudged home. Breaker's kiss felt like a sudden boost of caffeine to her system but the effect was fast fading. Exhaustion set in, weighing heavily on her shoulders.

Riley couldn't wait to take a quick shower, then collapse on her bed. Her phone vibrated in the pocket of her jeans. Riley pulled it out and read the text her brother sent her.

**Rob: Are you on your way home? I'm in deep trouble.**

**Riley: What kind of trouble?**

**Rob: Just hurry.**

As she approached her apartment building, she couldn't shake the nagging worry about Rob. Rob only texted her for

two reasons: One, if he needed money to fund his drug habit; and two, if he ran into trouble. Rob might be one year older than Riley, but he always acted like the younger sibling. For crying out loud, Riley was now 23 and he was 24. Rob was by all accounts an adult capable of getting a job and making his own decisions. It was Riley's fault for enabling him, for allowing him to cling to her like a parasite.

Her pulse raced when she saw that the door to her apartment unit was unlocked. She sucked in a breath, wondering if she should call the cops. Then again, Riley never had a good experience with local law enforcement. The last time Rob was arrested, the coppers at the station only gave her and Rob a hard time. Rob was the addict and he had a criminal record, but the cops looked at her the same way. Like she was scum. No, Riley decided. She'd see what kind of mess her brother had gotten into, and decide after. Taking a deep breath, Riley pushed her way inside the apartment.

"Close the door behind you," said a voice.

Her heart sank when she saw Rob slouched on the couch, his eyes vacant and glassy. Standing next to Rob was a large man in a leather jacket. She swallowed, seeing the snake emblem on his cut. A member of the Black Vipers MC. Rob got his heroin supply from an MC member and everyone knew the Black Vipers owned this town.

"So, you're Rob's little sister, Riley. I'm Snake, Rob's dealer," Snake said. He regarded her with an unsettling intensity. Unlike Breaker's welcomed attention at the bar, this man's stare sent shivers down her spine.

“What are you doing here? What do want?” Riley asked, her voice quivering with a mixture of fear and anger.

“You’re Rob’s sister, so you’re connected to his mess now,” Snake said simply.

Riley’s heart pounded as she swallowed the lump in her throat. “What mess? What do you want from me?”

“Your brother owes us a significant debt, and it’s time to collect,” Snake replied with a cruel edge in his voice. “You’re going to work for us until the debt is paid off.”

Her mind raced, and she tried to think of a way out of this nightmare.

“I don’t have anything to do with his debts or your club. Let me talk to Rob, and we’ll figure something out.”

Snake’s laughter was cold and unforgiving. “This ain’t a negotiation, sweetheart. You either work for us, or we’ll make your brother’s life even more miserable than it already is.”

Tears welled up in Riley’s eyes, her frustration and helplessness boiling over. She clenched her fists, trying to find the strength to stand up to this dangerous biker.

“I won’t let you ruin my life or my brother’s,” she said defiantly, though her voice wavered with emotion.

Snake’s eyes narrowed, and he stepped closer. Riley took a hesitant step backward. She knew Snake could hurt her for real. The Black Vipers MC had sent plenty of good people who stood in their way to the hospital or the grave.

“You don’t have a choice. The clock is ticking, and we’ll be in touch to tell you where and when to start,” Snake said.

With that, he turned and left, leaving Riley and her brother alone in the suffocating silence.

The weight of her brother’s actions crashed down on her. Riley didn’t even have the energy to be mad at him. Typical Rob, always landing her into this kind of predicament.

Riley sank onto a worn-out chair, burying her face in her hands. She knew the Black Vipers were ruthless and that there would be no escape from them. If she refused, they would destroy her and her brother’s life. But if she complied, she would be sucked into their dark world, forced to do their bidding.

What did Snake even mean, by “work” for them? Riley knew the Vipers owned a couple of strip clubs in town. Did she have to sell her body to save her brother?

Rob groaned, as if he was finally waking up from a deep sleep. He blinked at her, as if he wasn’t sure why she was there. Riley looked at the needle tracks on his arm as numbness settled on her.

“Riley, you came. Where’s Snake?” Rob asked her.

“Gone,” Riley whispered. “But his message was loud and clear.”

“Riley, they’re going to kill me if we don’t give into their demands. You’re going to save me, right?” Rob asked, sounding hopeful.

Riley left him in the living room. She needed a cold shower after that conversation. Riley was a good sister. Certainly better than Rob deserved.

Whether she liked it or not, Snake held their pitiful lives in his hands. She was going to do as he asked, but Riley was going to let Rob stew in his own guilt for one night.

## CHAPTER TWO

A loud thud made Breaker curse and grumble. Another thump made him look up from the table, where he'd fallen asleep the night before.

Breaker didn't remember much from last night. He'd driven into another MC's territory, found a random bar ... and a gorgeous redhead to kiss. That particular memory he didn't forget.

Riley, that was the redhead's name. He silently congratulated himself. Breaker didn't bother remembering the names of the women he'd fucked. Then again, Riley and he hadn't gotten to that part. What was wrong with him? Then again, when was the last time he kissed a woman?

More like never. Breaker was the President of the Death Seekers MC. He could get any woman he wanted with a look or a crook of a finger. Kissing had been reserved for his dead wife. Breaker doubted he'd ever find that kind of love again.

Rage made that annoying sound again and this time, Breaker growled at his vice president. Rage had been using an empty beer mug and tapping it at the edge of the table to get his attention.

"Knock it off, I'm awake," Breaker grumbled in irritation.

Breaker rubbed his tired eyes and realized they were in the bar area of the MC clubhouse. He didn't even make it to his room the night before.

“My Harley,” he suddenly said.

“Don’t worry. I got your text message and sent a prospect to retrieve it. It’s in the parking lot,” Rage assured him.

“What would I do without you?” Breaker asked the younger man.

Six months ago, Breaker hated Rage’s guts, only because Rage asked for one thing he didn’t want to give away—his daughter. But Rage and Cassie were happily married.

It seemed a blow to his ego that his much younger vice president had settled down before he did. Then again, after Marie, Breaker didn’t plan on tying the knot, although a certain redhead might change his mind.

Who was Breaker kidding? Marie had been one of a kind. Riley might be tough enough to man a bar on her own until closing time, but could a tough and beautiful little number like that survive being in Breaker’s world? Few could survive and thrive but that was the reason so few of his men took old ladies. Rage and Cassie were an exception, because Cassie was his daughter. Breaker and the MC had practically raised her.

“I’m a gift,” Rage said in his typically arrogant way. “Anyway, wash up. We have to leave soon.”

“Relax, Rage. What’s the rush?” Breaker asked.

All he wanted to do was get a shower and slide in his sheets. Maybe one of the club whores could warm him up. The thought crossed his mind, then he dismissed it. Breaker

pictured a beautiful and freckled redhead lying next to him. He could already picture Riley naked and all his for the taking.

Breaker vaguely remembered giving her his number last night and now wished he'd asked for hers as well. Damn it. He was rusty at this game. Maybe he could drop by her bar again one of these nights and rectify his error.

"Relax?" Rage scoffed. "We have a meeting with the Black Vipers MC in an hour. The president of our MC can't appear drunk in that meeting."

"I'll be fine by then," Breaker muttered. Rage's persistence was beginning to piss him off.

Rage's patience must've worn thin because he grabbed Breaker's shoulder and leaned in close. "Get your act together, Breaker. I know last night was tough on you, but this meeting is crucial. We can't afford to screw it up because you're drunk."

Breaker narrowed his gaze and a flash of anger crossed his face. Who was Rage to give him orders? Maybe Rage needed to taste Breaker's fist in his face every now and then to remind him who was boss.

"You think you're invincible, but you're not," Rage continued, his voice firm and unyielding. "Your actions have consequences, not just for you but for all of us. We're a family, and we rely on you to lead us."

Breaker finally sobered up as the weight of Rage's words hit him like a punch to the gut. He swallowed down his pride and focused on the problem at hand.

“You’re right,” Breaker finally said, his voice tinged with remorse. “I can’t let my emotions get the best of me. We need to handle this meeting with the Black Vipers tactfully.”

Rage nodded, seemingly satisfied that Breaker was starting to come to his senses.

“That’s the president I know. Now, pull yourself together, and let’s head to the meeting. We can’t afford any mistakes.”

Breaker made a quick trip to his room. He washed up and changed into fresh clothes. Then he met Rage and the others outside the clubhouse. He gave each of his men a nod. Rage, his VP, Cross, his sergeant-at-arms, Priest, one of his enforcers, and three other club associates.

Two hours later, they pulled into the parking lot of the Black Vipers MC clubhouse parking lot. As Breaker dismounted from his Harley, he could feel the thick tension in the air. Snake’s men gave Breaker and his crew hostile looks. Both clubs knew any wrong move could ignite a dangerous confrontation.

Breaker scanned his surroundings and noted the number of men in the parking lot. There were probably a lot more inside the Vipers’ clubhouse.

“Looks like Snake called everyone in,” Rage remarked next to him.

“He isn’t taking any chances. Neither are we,” Breaker said. His hand hovered briefly on the concealed gun inside his

jacket. Every single one of his men was armed to the tooth. They were ready for anything.

They entered the noisy bar, which grew quiet at their arrival. No surprise there. The roadhouse the Vipers considered their home base, looked a little like the clubhouse back home.

Seated in one corner was Snake, the president of the Black Vipers, along with his trusted men. Snake rose to his feet, a smile on his face. Breaker didn't trust that grin one bit.

Both their clubs were in the drug trade, so this wasn't the first time their paths had crossed. The Seekers and the Vipers had been at each other's throats for years but this time, they were both here to address a much larger threat.

Snake gestured to the unoccupied chair across his table. Breaker sat down. They sized each other up silently.

"Breaker," Snake acknowledged with a nod. "Thank you for coming."

"Snake," Breaker replied with a curt nod of his own.

"I assume you didn't call this meeting for a casual chat," Breaker said, getting straight to the point.

Snake inclined his head slightly. "You're right. The cartel is becoming a problem for both our MCs. They're encroaching on our territories, and it won't be long before they target us directly."

Breaker frowned, his mind racing with the implications of this development. The cartel was known for its brutality, and facing them alone would be a daunting task.

“What do you suggest?” Breaker asked, his voice guarded.

Snake’s expression hardened. “A temporary alliance. Our clubs will work together to drive off the cartel. Once the threat is neutralized, we return to our own territories, and our rivalry continues as usual.”

Rage stepped forward, his stance defensive. “And how can we trust you won’t stab us in the back the moment the cartel is gone?”

Snake glanced at Rage. “You can’t, and I expect you to be just as cautious as we will be. But our mutual survival depends on it.”

Breaker considered the offer carefully. It was a risky move, but the cartel’s expansion was a genuine threat to both their MCs.

“Agreed,” Breaker finally said, extending his hand to Snake in a show of reluctant trust.

Snake nodded, accepting the gesture. “We’ll draw up the terms of the alliance. We’ll each contribute our strengths, and together, we’ll crush the cartel.”

Breaker was about to go, when he caught a glimpse of a familiar figure behind the counter. His heart skipped a beat as he spotted the redhead he recklessly kissed the night before. Riley. That was her name. Was she with the Vipers all along? Was she a spy? No. That couldn’t be it. The sweet and gorgeous woman last night couldn’t be part of Snake’s crew.

He couldn't believe she was here, in the heart of enemy territory, working in this hostile environment. Breaker's protective instincts surged, and he felt an overwhelming need to shield her from harm.

She probably had her reasons for being here. Breaker would find out all the answers he needed later. Riley looked up from the bar, her eyes wide with surprise as she locked eyes with Breaker. A mixture of fear and relief flashed across her face before she quickly masked her emotions, returning to her role as the bartender. So, were they going to pretend they didn't know each other?

He watched, silently seething as a Black Viper approached Riley, wearing a smirk Breaker wanted to wipe off his face. He leaned against the bar and said something that made Riley uncomfortable. She stiffened and stopped cleaning a glass.

Breaker's jaw clenched and he tightened his fists by his side. He couldn't stand by and watch as this Viper disrespected and harassed Riley.

"Breaker," Rage hissed in a low voice, following his stare. "It's time to leave."

"There's something I need to take care of," Breaker said.

He stepped forward, aware everyone's eyes were on him. Breaker didn't give a damn who was watching. He locked eyes with the scumbag harassing Riley.

"Don't be such a bitch. You're property of the Vipers now. Do as I say or else," the biker was saying.

“That’s enough,” Breaker said. His voice was loud enough to cut through the murmurs and music in the bar.

Breaker and his men knew how to treat the women in their club with respect but he doubted the same went for the Black Vipers MC.

The biker turned and when he spotted Breaker, he sneered. “What’s your problem? We’re just having a little fun,” he said.

“She’s off-limits. You’ll leave her alone, or you’ll regret it,” Breaker said coldly.

“Who the hell are you to tell me what I can or can’t do?” the other biker asked recklessly.

Breaker could smell the alcohol on his breath. Since he got home drunk the night before, who was he to complain? At the very least, Breaker had sobered up. If this bastard had any shred of common sense left, he wouldn’t be starting a fight with Breaker.

The tension in the air escalated. Some of Snake’s men called out to their fellow Viper to take Breaker on. Rage positioned himself next to Breaker, although Breaker didn’t need any additional help. He knew his other men would be fanning out, forming defensive positions in case things turned nasty.

His gaze shifted to Riley. Some women would be quivering on their toes by now, but she wore a calm expression on her face. Good girl. Undoubtedly, she was probably afraid for her life but she just wasn’t showing it.

Breaker had seen something special in her last night. A spark. Marie had the same spark. The same core of steel inside her.

The Viper glared at Breaker, his hand inching for his gun. Before anything interesting could happen, Snake got between them. He gave his man a gentle shove.

“Enough, we’re not here to start a war,” Snake said, scowling at him. “Keep your men in line.”

Breaker saw that Priest and Cross had their firearms out. Reason returned to him. He got hotheaded for a few moments there. One wrong move could’ve ended the night in gunfire and death. He stood firm but didn’t want to escalate the situation any further.

After giving the Viper one last warning glare, he stepped back. Riley was safe. For now at least. As the tension eased slightly, Breaker signaled to his men to stand down. Cross and Priest tucked their guns back but Breaker knew they’d respond quickly if the situation took a turn for the worse.

Deep down, Breaker knew that defending Riley had complicated an already dangerous situation. But he couldn’t ignore the connection he felt with her, nor could he stand idly by while she faced harassment.

“Let’s go,” he told Rage and the others. Breaker didn’t like leaving Riley there, but he had no other choice. Good thing he’d given her his private cell phone number. She was a smart girl. Riley could call if she needed help.

## CHAPTER THREE

An hour after Breaker and his men left, Riley's heart still pounded with fear. Rat, the biker who made the mistake of hitting on her, had thankfully left the bar to find his entertainment elsewhere.

Her relief would be momentary. Rat would find a way to get back at her. She knew it in her bones. Most of the Vipers were proud and arrogant men and they treated the women working at the club like shit. Her survival plan was to keep her head down and go unnoticed until Rob's debt to Snake was paid. It looked like Riley had to find a different plan.

"Riley, the boss wants you in his office," one of the Vipers told her. He gave her an unpleasant smile. "Don't make him wait."

Riley wasn't planning to. Taking a deep breath, she left the bar and proceeded to Snake's office, which was at the basement of the clubhouse. Riley delayed the meeting as much as possible, buying more minutes so she could think of a good excuse.

Eventually, she reached Snake's door. Riley froze when she heard a woman moan from inside. Should she turn back? No, that Viper was right. Making Snake wait was probably a bad idea. Snake was the equivalent of a king in this place. She raised her fist to knock.

"Who is it?" Snake asked, clearly not happy to be interrupted.

“It’s Riley. You wanted to see me?”

“Come in,” Snake said.

Riley entered the office, steeling herself for what she’d find. Arlene, one of the club whores, was perched on Snake’s lap, completely naked. Snake pushed her off him.

She pouted at him but Snake only told her, “Leave us.”

Arlene promptly snatched her clothes. She gave Riley a sour look before exiting Snake’s office. Snake zipped up his jeans and regarded Riley with an intense stare. She stood her ground, because Snake hadn’t offered her a chair.

It felt like he was searching Riley for any sign of weakness. She boldly met his stare, because Snake probably got off intimidating others. Sure, he was her boss now, but she wasn’t going to let him or anyone push her around.

“I don’t like beating around the bush, so I’ll get right to the point. Who is Breaker to you, Riley?”

Riley’s heart pounded, but she knew she couldn’t reveal anything that would put Breaker in danger. “He’s just a customer at my old bar, nothing more,” she replied, keeping her tone steady.

Snake’s eyes narrowed slightly, as if he could sense her hesitation. “Don’t lie to me, Riley. I saw the way you looked at him. He means something to you.”

Riley fought to maintain her composure, knowing that any slip could lead to dire consequences. “You’re mistaken. He’s just a random walk-in, that’s all.”

A glimmer of annoyance crossed Snake's face, and he leaned in closer, his voice lowering to a dangerous whisper. "Let me remind you of your brother's debt. You owe us, Riley. If you try to defy me or any of my men again, you'll pay for it. Is that clear?"

Fear tightened its grip on Riley's heart, but she refused to show him that. She wanted to show him she wasn't a pushover.

"Crystal clear," she replied, her voice firm.

Snake studied her for a few seconds. Then he straightened, seemingly satisfied with her response.

"Good. We have an alliance now with the Death Seekers MC to deal with the cartel. But remember, alliances can be fragile. If you or your brother do anything to jeopardize it, there will be consequences."

Riley swallowed hard, the weight of her brother's debt and the threat of Snake's retribution hanging over her like a dark cloud. She knew she was treading on dangerous ground, but she was willing to take the risk to protect her brother and herself. Someone knocked on the door.

"Boss, our important guest is here," reported one of Snake's men.

"I'll be right there," Snake answered, rising from his chair.

As Snake turned to leave the room, he glanced back at Riley one last time, his gaze cold and calculating.

“Choose your actions wisely, Riley. Your life may depend on it. I trust you can see yourself out.”

With that ominous warning, he left, leaving Riley alone with her thoughts and the knowledge that she was now entangled in a dangerous game with the Black Vipers and the Death Seekers.

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It was 3:00 AM by the time Riley walked home from the bus stop. It had been a rough night at the Vipers' clubhouse. After Breaker's intervention and that talk with Snake, the hours seemed to drag on. All Riley wanted to do was go to bed.

Riley looked over her shoulder, her senses suddenly on high alert. She couldn't shake off the unsettling feeling of being watched, the hairs on the back of her neck standing on end. Her heart pounded with a mix of fear and adrenaline.

As she approached her apartment building, her exhaustion weighed heavily on her shoulders, but she couldn't let her guard down.

Just as she reached the entrance, a chilling voice cut through the silence. “Well, well, look who's here.”

Riley's heart skipped a beat as she turned around to find Rat watching her. He was unmistakably drunk, his eyes glinting with malice.

“What do you want?” Riley demanded, trying to keep her voice steady despite the tremor in her hands.

Rat grinned menacingly, taking a step closer, his movements unpredictable.

“You think you’re too good for me, huh? Rejecting me like that in front of everyone,” Rat said, spitting at her feet.

She knew Rat intended her harm. Riley knew she had to act fast. She couldn’t afford to let this encounter escalate any further. Her mind raced, searching for an opportunity to escape.

Before Rat could react, she swiftly pulled her pepper spray from her purse and sprayed it directly into his face. Rat yelped in pain, temporarily blinded and disoriented. Seizing the opportunity, Riley dashed toward the entrance of her apartment building. Rat snarled. He quickly recovered, lunging after her.

As Riley fumbled for her keys, her heart pounded in her chest. She managed to unlock the door just in time, but Rat was closing in fast. With a surge of strength, she slammed the door shut, the echo of his fist pounding against the wood ringing in her ears. Riley leaned against the door, trying to catch her breath, but she knew she couldn’t stay there for long. Rat wouldn’t give up that easily.

With adrenaline coursing through her veins, she quickly ran up the stairs to her apartment, hoping to find safety inside. But as she reached her floor, she could hear Rat’s heavy footsteps following close behind.

Fumbling to find her keys again, Riley finally managed to unlock her apartment door. As she rushed inside, she slammed the door shut and quickly bolted it. Her heart was

pounding in her chest as she leaned against the door, panting and trembling with fear.

But the danger was far from over. Rat was now furious, his threats growing louder from outside the door. “You can’t hide from me forever! You and your brother will pay for my humiliation!”

Riley leaned against the door, her breathing harsh. Rat unloaded more obscenities at her, but finally he went away.

Riley curled into a protective ball on the floor. Oh, God. What had she just done? Didn’t she promise Snake only a few hours ago that she’d be on her best behavior from now on? She didn’t imagine the crazed look in Rat’s eyes. That bastard probably intended to harm her, rape her even. Was she supposed to just let it happen? Riley’s mind raced, knowing she didn’t have any other choice. She had to find a way to protect herself and her brother.

She finally got up. She walked to the window and saw Rat getting on his Harley. He continued shouting threats at her. Riley had to make a decision. She couldn’t let fear paralyze her—she had to be strong, for her own sake and her brother’s.

Swallowing her pride, Riley picked up her phone and dialed a number she never thought she would call.

“Breaker,” she said, her voice steady despite the fear in her heart. “We need to talk.”

“Riley, what happened? Are you okay?” Breaker asked.

She could hear the concern in his voice and it touched her. After all, Riley was a stranger to him and yet he was

willing to go the mile for her.

“I’m fine, but we have a problem,” Riley replied. She wasn’t even sure why she was whispering. No one was watching her.

“Tell me,” Breaker urged.

“Snake questioned me about you, about what you mean to me. I didn’t reveal anything, but he warned me about the consequences if we defy him or the alliance with the Death Seekers.”

“What consequences? And why are you working for Snake in the first place?” Breaker demanded.

Riley took a deep breath. She didn’t like airing out her dirty laundry in public but she felt she owed Breaker an explanation, so she told him everything. About Rob’s debt and how she ended up working for Snake.

“Damn it. This alliance was already risky to begin with for my club. I wasn’t aware of your situation,” he said.

A moment of silence passed and Riley was afraid Breaker was going to cut her off. After all, she didn’t mean anything to him. Her problems were her own and yet, she couldn’t deny the unmistakable spark between them.

“Snake really should control his guys better. I can’t believe Rat waited for you until you arrived at your apartment. You must’ve been so scared,” he said.

“I managed to fend him off,” Riley said. *For now*, said a quiet voice in her head.

“Don’t worry, baby. I’ll find a way to handle this,” Breaker said.

Riley felt a sense of relief wash over her, knowing she had Breaker’s support but she also knew that the challenges ahead were far from over.

“We have to be careful, Breaker. Snake is dangerous, and he won’t hesitate to use any weakness against us,” Riley warned, her voice filled with concern.

“I won’t let anything happen to you, Riley. We’ll be smart about this. We should discuss this in person,” Breaker said.

Her pulse raced at the prospect of seeing and talking to Breaker again. “When?”

“I’ll pick you up tomorrow,” Breaker said. “And pack your bags. It’s no longer safe there.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

Riley anxiously paced back and forth in her apartment. She checked her wristwatch, then her phone again every few seconds.

Rob still hadn't replied to any of her texts and all her calls went to voicemail. Frustration welled inside her. This was so typical of her brother. She'd been through this before, but the uncertainty never got any easier. Her gaze lingered on a framed photograph of her and Rob smiling together, back when they were kids and before their parents died. She clenched her fists by her side.

Breaker would be here anytime soon. The plan was for Breaker to pick her and Rob up. He generously offered to let them crash on his couch a few times.

"Come on, Rob. Just call me back. Let me know you're all right," she said. Her phone remained silent. Riley glanced at the clock on the wall, noting the time. She took a deep breath. Rat was still out there and she couldn't wait on Rob forever.

Riley sat on the couch, her legs feeling heavy. She clutched the phone in her hand tightly. Then it buzzed. Seeing Rob's name flashing across the screen, she automatically answered.

"Hey, Riley..." Rob said, his voice a little slurred.

"Rob, are you okay? Where are you?" Riley tried to keep the anger out of her voice but some of it seeped out

anyway.

“A few friends of mine invited me to stay with them a few days in the city. Couldn’t handle it anymore, you know?”

Riley clenched her fists, trying to keep her emotions in check. They were in trouble with Snake and the Black Vipers in the first place, thanks to Rob. Did he even listen to her calls? Did Rob even care that she was attacked last night?

“Rob, running away won’t solve anything. Breaker’s willing to help us. Please, tell me where you are, and we’ll come get you,” she said. Breaker made it explicitly clear on the phone he didn’t give two shits about her brother, but he was still willing to let Rob stay over. Riley knew he was mostly doing it for her.

“No!” You don’t get it. You always want to control everything. I need to figure things out on my own,” Rob said, tone defensive.

“You’ll figure out how to pay off your debt to Snake? Do you even give a damn what happened to me last night?” Riley demanded.

“I know ... I messed up, Riley. I messed up real bad. I don’t know if I can fix this,” he said, voice breaking.

Her heart ached a little as she heard the pain in Rob’s voice. She knew he was struggling but a part of her was also tired of hearing the same excuses.

“It’s never too late to turn things around, Rob. I know you’re hurting, but you don’t have to face it alone,” she said.

“I have to go, Riley. I hope this Breaker will be able to help you out,” he said.

“Please, promise me you’ll stay safe, and when you’re ready, call me. We’ll find a way to help you,” she said.

“I’ll try, Riley. Thanks for not giving up on me.”

They ended the call. A sudden knock on the door startled her. Riley jumped to her feet, heart pounding with fear. She hesitated before opening the door. Riley looked through her peephole and relief washed over her, seeing Breaker’s familiar figure.

She opened her door and let Breaker in. Riley almost forgot how huge and imposing Breaker was, as he stood there in her living room in his leather cut. Breaker studied Riley’s expression, concern etched on his face. “Hey, what’s going on? Did Rat come after you again?” he asked, his eyes darkening with worry.

Riley took a deep breath, trying to compose herself. “No, it’s not Rat. It’s my brother. I was up all night trying to contact him. Rob just called me. He said he’s out of town with some friends,” she said, her voice trembling as she fought back tears.

“The coward ran?” Breaker asked, his voice laced with distaste.

Seeing Riley begin to shake, he gently placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. “I’m sorry, Riley. I know how much you’re hurting right now.”

Her facade finally crumbled, and tears streamed down her cheeks. Without hesitation, Breaker pulled her into a comforting hug, and Riley sobbed quietly, finding solace in his embrace.

“He wasn’t always like this,” she whispered, her voice soft and vulnerable.

Breaker’s warm breath brushed against her ear as he whispered, “You’ve done all you can. You can’t control your brother’s choices, but you can take care of yourself.”

She clung to him, feeling his strength and comfort. Despite the circumstances, she couldn’t help but notice how incredible he smelled—like a real man should, a mix of leather, smoke, and a hint of pine.

“We should probably get going,” Breaker suggested after a moment, pulling back slightly.

Feeling a sudden surge of emotion, Riley rose on her tiptoes and dared to do something bold. She kissed him on the mouth, a spontaneous and passionate gesture. Breaker was momentarily taken aback, but he quickly responded, his hand gently cupping her cheek.

The kiss was electric, and Riley felt herself melting against him, the comfort and desire intertwining. A soft moan escaped her lips as Breaker deepened the kiss, exploring her mouth with his tongue. The intensity of the moment sent shivers down her spine, and she couldn’t help but feel her body respond to his touch.

Breaking the kiss, Riley remembered their original purpose.

“We’ll continue this at my place,” Breaker said, his voice husky with desire.

A flush of excitement rushed through her veins, and despite the turmoil in her heart, she felt a spark of hope.

She was relieved Breaker pulled away first, because it was starting to occur to her that when it came to this man, she had very little self-control. Her visceral reaction to him scared her a little, but after her nightmarish experience the night before, she just wanted to cave. To let loose. Riley was so wound up, she could use a break, a distraction—and Breaker seemed like distraction of the best sort.

“These are all your belongings?” Breaker asked, nodding to her duffel bag near the couch.

Riley nodded and he easily hefted it up. He then smirked at her, and her heart thudded in anticipation. This weekend was going to be interesting.

Sure, the stakes were never higher, but that didn’t mean Riley couldn’t enjoy Breaker’s company. This was also an opportunity to get to know her biker savior a little better.

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Breaker was distracted with Riley behind his back, her slender arms wrapped around his waist. Damn it, but she smelled good.

When they kissed in her living room, he could smell the lavender of her shampoo, the clean smell of soap on her skin.

She tasted so addictive and he couldn't wait to put his hands and mouth all over her gorgeous body.

Honestly, he couldn't care less about her good-for-nothing brother. Addicts were the worst in his opinion but he could tell she cared deeply about him. Cared deeply enough that she was willing to pay off his debts by working for someone like Snake. He had to factor in her brother when it came to winning Riley's heart.

When she called him last night, practically in tears, he'd come to a decision. Breaker intended to claim this woman as his. Screw everyone who got in his way.

Finally, they arrived at his house. He'd never taken anyone but his wife here before. When Rage asked him where he was going that morning, he told him about letting Riley stay at his place.

Rage's mouth fell open and for once, he had no words. His VP put two and two together. Rage understood that Riley wasn't just some random woman Breaker would be momentarily distracted with, then discard. She was something different. Something special.

Breaker carried her duffel and led her into the house. He watched her eyes widen in awe as she took in everything before her. He knew what she saw—the large windows that allowed natural light to flood in the living room, the tasteful furnishings to complement the rustic stone fireplace.

After Cassie moved out to strike out on her own in the city, the place had felt hollow and barren. Barely lived in. Breaker spent half the time at the clubhouse, preferring to

sleep there instead of living in the empty shell of a home that held painful memories of his late wife.

“Your house is stunning, Breaker,” she said.

“Not what you expected?” he teased.

“No” she admitted. “I expected ... I don’t know, something wild I guess?”

“Wild?” he asked, amused.

Riley paused in the living room, her gaze drawn to the mantelpiece which contained framed photographs of Breaker with his MC brothers, and of Marie and Cassie. She looked hesitant. Breaker set her duffel down and waited for the questions to come.

Riley picked up a photograph of a smiling Marie, her arms wrapped around a young Cassie.

“Breaker, is this ... your wife?” Riley asked.

His expression softened and he nodded. A wistful smile tugged at his lips. “Yes, that’s my Marie. She was my everything.”

He wondered what was going on in her mind right now.

“I’m so sorry for your loss, Breaker.”

He nodded. “Thank you, Riley. Marie was an incredible woman, and losing her was the hardest thing I’ve ever faced. The second was having to raise Cassie alone.”

“Cassie, that’s your daughter?” Riley asked.

“That’s right,” he said.

“I can’t imagine how difficult that must have been for you, raising her on your own,” she added.

“It was, but thankfully, my MC brothers helped raised her. Meeting you, Riley, has brought some much-needed light back into my life.”

Their eyes met and Riley blushed. Pink was a good color on her, Breaker decided.

“I’m here for you, Breaker. Whatever you need, whatever you want to share, I’ll listen,” she said.

This woman, Breaker realized, couldn’t be any sweeter. “Thank you, Riley. It means more than you know, but we’re not here to talk about my late wife.”

“That’s right.” Riley placed the photograph back on the mantelpiece.

“Follow me,” Breaker said with a smile.

He took her bag once more and led Riley upstairs, feeling her gaze lingering on the open door to the master bedroom. Sensing her embarrassment, he decided to forgo teasing and led her to the bedroom next to his.

He opened the door, revealing a beautifully decorated guest bedroom. Soft, inviting colors adorned the walls, and a large, comfortable bed with plush pillows and silky sheets stood against one wall. A vintage dresser and a cozy reading nook added to the room’s charm.

“This used to be Cassie’s old bedroom. I finally converted it to a guest bedroom after she married Rage, my

VP,” Breaker explained. He set her duffel bag down before watching Riley explore the space.

“Thank you for doing all this for me,” she said, her voice genuine. “I’m not sure how I could ever repay you. No one’s ever shown me such kindness before.”

Breaker gently tipped her chin up with two fingers, studying her expression carefully. His heart skipped a beat as he looked into her eyes, drawn to the vulnerability and strength he saw in her.

“I know how you can repay me,” he said softly, his voice tinged with desire. “You can start by kissing me again.”

A seductive smile curved Riley’s lips, and without hesitation, she rested her hands on his shoulders and rose on tiptoes. Her lips met his with passion, and the world around them seemed to fade away.

Breaker’s arms instinctively wrapped around her waist, pulling her closer as they lost themselves in each other. The warmth of their bodies pressed together ignited a fire within them, and time seemed to stand still.

Riley’s heart pounded, her senses overwhelmed by the intoxicating closeness of Breaker. Her lips molded against his like they were meant to be together, and she savored every moment of the kiss.

“I can’t stop wanting to kiss you,” he said after they broke away.

“Me too,” she whispered.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Breaker edged her toward the bed and Riley didn't resist one bit. He couldn't seem to stop touching her and neither could she. "Raise your arms," he ordered and she did just that so he could pull her sweater off.

Riley kicked her sneakers off. Her pants came next, until she stood before him only in her underwear. She didn't know why she found it undeniably sexy that she stood wearing almost nothing while he kept all his clothes on.

"Everything off," he commanded and the order thrilled her to bits.

Riley dispensed with everything, until she was fully nude. Seeing the appreciation in his eyes made the effort worthwhile.

"Your turn," she said, reclining on the bed.

He looked at her like a hungry beast. Her heart raced with anticipation. Part of her couldn't believe this was really happening. Riley didn't think she was anything special and Breaker seemed to see her as something precious, someone worth his protection.

Her mouth watered as he took off his leather cut and shirt, exposing his muscular shoulders and chest. Riley could imagine running her fingers down his tight abdomen, tracing all his ink with her tongue. The dirty thoughts running in her head right now made her blush. Sex had always meant nothing to her, until now. She'd been with only two men in her life and

both experiences were disappointments. Being with Breaker would be different.

Finally, he took off his bottoms. She sucked in a breath, seeing his cock, already at half-mast for her. He then joined her in bed, crawling on top of her.

Breaker placed her hands above her head, twining his fingers with hers as he kissed her. He pressed his lips against the pulse point in her neck, licked his way down her collarbones.

He sucked her breasts reverently. Breaker released her hands. Needing something to hold onto, she gripped the bars of the headboard behind her. Then he slipped one hand between her legs and started caressing the folds of her slick pussy. She moaned as he closed his teeth over her left nipple and bit down, leaving his bite mark there. Right there and then, Riley came against his hand.

“That was so fucking hot,” he told her.

“I can’t wait to feel your cock inside me,” she whispered. Just who was this bold and seductive creature? Riley had never been one to take initiative, and yet being with Breaker lured something wild inside her.

“You unexpectedly have a dirty mouth, Riley Grayson. I like it,” Breaker said, grinning.

“How do you want me?” she asked him.

“On your hands and knees.” Breaker helped get her into position. Riley’s heart pounded in her chest. She’d only had

sex in missionary position this entire time. This was exciting, something new.

Breaker slipped out of bed. “One moment,” he said. He soon returned with a towel and condom. Breaker patted the edge of the bed and Riley got into the spot he desired. She felt incredibly turned on and exposed when he parted her thighs a little wider, further exposing her cunt and ass to him.

He slipped the towel underneath her. Riley heard him breaking off the condom wrapper. Moments later, she felt his tongue on her pussy and clit. She moaned, trying to remain in place as he ate her out.

Before she could climax again, Breaker pulled his mouth away and guided his cock into her pussy. Gripping her hips, Breaker entered her. Breaker took his time, making her feel every splendid inch of him. She was panting by the time Breaker buried himself to the hilt.

“You good?” he asked, and that was rather sweet of him.

“Fuck me,” she pleaded.

Breaker didn't ask her again. He started pumping in and out of her. Breaker started with slow and leisurely strokes, before taking her faster and harder. Pleas spilled from her lips as he reduced them to needy animals. Each time he entered her, it felt like he was drawing something out of her. Part of her soul, maybe. Sex with this man felt more intimate, more intense than anything she'd ever experienced. Breaker fucked her like he owned her, and that realization sat right with her.

Fate sent Breaker to her just when she needed him the most.

Breaker started brushing her clit with every stroke. Riley cried out in a paroxysm of pleasure. Breaker changed the angle of his thrusts, this time hitting her G-spot. Riley arched her back as he kept aiming for that spot over and over again, until the pressure building in her body crested. The room fell away from her line of sight as she gasped and came all over his cock.

Breaker pistoned in and out of her a few more times before letting out a triumphant growl. Then he pulled out of her. Riley lay facedown on the bed, completely satiated. Her limbs felt like jelly. She closed her eyes momentarily, felt Breaker wiping her with the towel. He left for the bathroom, probably to dispose of the condom and set the towel aside.

Soon enough, he returned to her, slipping right next to her in bed. Riley automatically moved toward him, loving the way he wrapped his limbs around her body. She rested her head against his chest, calmed by the steady beat of his heart.

“That was amazing,” she whispered. “I’ve never experienced anything like that before.”

“That’s because you’ve never had sex with me,” Breaker said.

*The ego of this man*, she thought with fondness. Then again, all that arrogance and confidence suited the President of the Death Seekers MC just fine.

“We should do that again, while I’m here,” she said, feeling bold. In fact, Riley felt like she could do anything right now.

“Definitely,” he agreed, kissing her on the mouth tenderly this time around.

She enjoyed his kiss and his company. Riley was falling dangerously fast and hard for this man and she didn’t even care.

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The harsh morning light streaming through the curtains woke Breaker up. Opening his eyes, Breaker saw the empty space Riley had occupied. Where had she gone to? He dragged himself out of bed and did some morning stretches.

As he put on a fresh pair of jeans and opened the bedroom door, the smell of pancakes wafted from downstairs. His stomach growled and he went in search of Riley. Breaker tracked her to the kitchen. Breaker smiled at the sight of his beautiful woman, standing by the stove, and skillfully flipping pancakes with ease. Well, technically, she wasn’t his woman yet but she would be soon.

Yesterday, when Breaker entered her sweet body, he knew without a doubt he had every intention of claiming Riley as his. Breaker elected to stand in the doorway, not announcing his presence yet. She was wearing one of his old shirts, and he couldn’t help but think she looked great in it. A wave of possessiveness filled his body.

Riley finally spotted him. She widened her eyes in momentary surprise, then flashed him a radiant smile. Right there and then, Breaker felt like the luckiest man alive.

“Good morning,” she said, setting a plate of pancakes down in front of him. “Have a seat. I hope you like them.”

Breaker sat at the kitchen counter, slightly taken aback by her thoughtfulness.

“Riley, you didn’t have to do this, but I appreciate it,” he replied, unable to stop the grin from spreading across his face.

“I wanted to do something special for you,” she said softly, sitting down beside him. “I wanted to thank you for everything you’ve done for me so far.”

Breaker reached for her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “You don’t need to make pancakes or anything else to prove that, Riley. You’re special to me.”

Her cheeks flushed, and she shyly looked away. “I feel the same way about you, Breaker. I know we’ve just met but ... you’re everything I’ve ever wanted.”

That hot little confession pleased Breaker a good deal. Riley assembled her own plate of pancakes while Breaker poured them both coffee. Today was a good day. Breaker could feel it in his bones.

As they ate, they discussed mundane topics. Breaker asked her questions about her everyday life. He wanted to know more about the woman who immediately captured his heart.

After they finished their meal, Breaker leaned closer to Riley, unable to resist the pull between them. He reached out, gently cupping her face in his hands, and leaned in to kiss her tenderly. She responded fiercely.

After he released her mouth he brushed a strand of hair away from her face. She shivered and Breaker's cock hardened. All he wanted to do was throw her over his shoulder and have his way with her again. Unfortunately, they had important matters to discuss.

"I can't believe how lucky I am to have you in my life, Breaker," she said.

"You know, after you saw me out the door of that bar and we had our first kiss, I couldn't stop thinking about you. Then when I saw you working at Snake's bar, I knew I had to have you."

Riley blushed. "You have a way of making me feel like I'm the only girl in the world when you look at me like that," she said, her heart fluttering.

"Because you are," he replied. "Since I met you, you've been the only woman on my radar."

She leaned in and softly kissed him on the lips. Breaker pulled her into a warm embrace, holding her close and inhaling her sweet-smelling hair. She had used his shampoo.

"We never got the chance to talk about your situation," Breaker said.

Breakfast was finally over and it was time to bring up why she was staying over at his place temporarily. He told

Riley he'd take care of the problem and Breaker never backed down on his promises. He intended to protect her, no matter what happened.

“When I told you I won't let Snake, Rat, or anyone else from the Black Vipers hurt you, I meant it,” he said. “I thought of a solution while I was inside you.”

Riley's cheeks colored a little. “What did you come up with?”

“I'll arrange a private meeting with Snake. We have to hammer out the terms of our alliance but I also plan to discuss your brother's debt,” Breaker said.

Riley blinked at him. “Breaker, you don't have to do that. It's not your burden to bear.”

“But I want to,” he insisted, looking deep into her eyes. “You mean everything to me, and I want to take care of you. Let me pay off those debts, and you won't owe Snake anything anymore.”

“Breaker,” she whispered in shock. She considered his words with care. “If Rob's debts are transferred to your club, that means—”

“You can work as a bartender at my club,” Breaker interrupted. “It's a safer environment, and I won't let anything happen to you while you're there. Plus, I'll get to see you more often, and that's a bonus.”

“I'd love that, Breaker, but can it really be that easy?” Riley asked, nervously fiddling with the hem of her shirt.

“What about Rat? Do you think he’d complain to Snake about me?”

Breaker scoffed. Rat was really an appropriate name for Snake’s yellow-bellied associate. “If he has any semblance of pride, Rat won’t go crying to his president for help. If he went to Snake, then it doesn’t matter.”

“It doesn’t?” Riley asked him.

“Rat’s small fry in the grand scheme of things,” Breaker said. “Snake is many things but he’s smart. He won’t let one associate ruin his deal with my MC.”

If Snake was wise, he’d agree to the terms Breaker set without complaints.

Sure, he predicated Snake wouldn’t be happy with how Breaker would deal with Riley’s situation, but Breaker would leave Snake no other choice.

## CHAPTER SIX

Breaker stepped out of his house, about to head to the motorcycle parked in the driveway.

Riley had been waiting for him, and as soon as she saw him, she felt a mixture of relief and concern. She hurriedly walked up to him, her heart pounding in her chest.

“Breaker, is the meeting today?” Riley asked worriedly.

He turned to her and didn’t mince his words. “I’m meeting with Snake today.”

Riley placed a hand on his shoulder, her concern growing. “Please be careful, Breaker. I’ve seen how dangerous Snake can be, and I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

He chuckled, brushing her warning off. Arrogant man. Then again, he had every reason to be cocky. He gave her hand a reassuring squeeze, telling Riley he appreciated her concern.

“I promise I’ll be careful. You don’t need to worry about me,” Breaker reassured her.

Riley couldn’t help but worry. Snake was a formidable opponent, and she knew he wouldn’t hesitate to cause harm to Breaker or anyone associated with him.

“Don’t underestimate him,” she added.

“I won’t underestimate anything, Riley. I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you safe and protect my club,” Breaker said.

“I’ll send Cross, one of my men, to keep a close eye on you and the house.”

Tears welled up in her eyes as she held his gaze. Riley didn’t know why she was crying. She felt emotionally vulnerable today.

“I know you will, but I can’t help but worry about you. You’re my guardian angel. You mean so much to me, and the thought of something happening to you terrifies me,” she admitted.

He pulled her into a tight embrace, holding her close. “I promise you, Riley, I won’t do anything reckless. But Snake needs to know he no longer owns you.”

She buried her face in his chest. “Just come back to me safely, Breaker. That’s all I ask,” Riley pleaded.

He kissed the top of her head. “I will, I promise. Besides, I won’t go to that meeting alone. I have Rage and some of my associates to back me up.”

With a heavy heart, Riley watched as Breaker climbed onto his motorcycle. Anxiety and fear hadn’t left her. She stood there, watching him ride down the street.

As he disappeared from view, Riley couldn’t help but feel that someone was watching her. Breaker mentioned he was sending someone over so no harm would be done to her. She glanced around, but the street was quiet and empty, except for a few distant passing cars. Shivering slightly, she tried to dismiss the feeling as mere paranoia, but it persisted.

Riley quickly made her way back inside the house, locking the door behind her. The silence of the empty house only heightened her unease. Every creak and rustle seemed to amplify, sending shivers down her spine. Riley paced back and forth, trying to calm her nerves. She reached for her phone, considering calling Breaker, but then hesitated. She didn't want to worry him while he was dealing with Snake.

She decided to stay vigilant, checking every door and window, making sure they were securely locked. Her unease only grew, and she found herself constantly glancing over her shoulder, expecting to see someone lurking in the shadows.

As the minutes stretched into what felt like hours, Riley finally relaxed. After her recent run-in with Rat, Riley just wanted to keep her guard up.

"It's nothing," she whispered to herself, trying to convince her racing heart. "Just my imagination playing tricks on me."

She thought she heard faint footsteps outside, but when she looked out the window, there was no one there. Her heart pounded in her chest, and she couldn't shake the feeling that she was being targeted.

Unable to stay still any longer, Riley decided to take matters into her own hands. She looked for potential weapons. Riley grabbed a baseball bat from the closet, clutching it tightly as she walked through the house, searching for any sign of an intruder.

Suddenly, she heard a noise from the backyard. Her breath caught in her throat as she cautiously approached the

back door. When she peered outside, she saw a dark-haired man on a motorcycle. He spotted her and gave her a friendly wave. Riley set the bat down. This must be Cross, the bodyguard Breaker assigned to her.

Feeling foolish, Riley set her bat down and walked to Cross to greet him and perhaps invite him inside for some coffee.

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As Breaker dismounted from his Harley, he noticed the parking lot attached to the Black Vipers' clubhouse was mostly empty. At least Snake hadn't lied about keeping their meeting private.

Rage got off his motorcycle. Breaker lingered in the parking lot a little while longer, because he had something to discuss with Rage.

"Slight change of plans," he told his VP. Rage narrowed his eyes when Breaker mentioned the addition to their agreement with the Vipers.

"Breaker, is this woman really worth risking our alliance with the Vipers?" Rage asked him.

"I don't break my promises. You know that," Breaker told him.

Rage swore and finally grunted. "Fine, I'll back up your play but if this meeting goes south, it's all on you."

They entered the mostly empty clubhouse and found Snake seated at a table. Breaker studied their surroundings in case Rage and he needed to make a hasty exit.

Apart from Snake and the bartender, there were only two other associates seated at a nearby table. Rat, Breaker noticed with some satisfaction, was nowhere in sight. Good. That was one less complication.

“Breaker, Rage, welcome. Have a drink with me,” Snake said as a way of greeting.

Breaker and Rage warily sat down. The bartender dropped three cold beers on the table. Breaker picked up his and took a long pull.

“Let’s get on with business,” Rage said. “I’m sure you’re a busy man.”

“Fine with me,” Snake agreed.

They discussed the terms of their alliance at length. Finally, Breaker said, “There’s the issue of Riley.” He tried to keep the anger out of his voice. “You’ve forced her to work for you, and that has to stop. If we’re going to continue this temporary alliance between our clubs, you’ll have to let her go.”

Snake laughed, his gaze never leaving Breaker’s. “She’s my insurance, in case you decide to double-cross us. I can’t just let her walk away.”

Breaker nearly reached for the gun tucked in his belt, but at Rage’s warning look, Breaker forced himself to relax. He took another sip of his beer. Breaking his composure now wouldn’t help anyone.

“This alliance won’t work if you don’t trust us,” Breaker stated. “Riley has nothing to do with your disputes. She’s

innocent, and I won't let you use her."

Snake scoffed. "I can't believe you'd even bring that bitch up in an important discussion like this."

"You've heard what happened to the Devil's Kings MC?" Rage asked. Breaker was surprised and pleased his VP had decided to back him up.

Snake's expression darkened as he considered both Breaker and Rage seriously.

"After we killed off their president, the club disbanded," Rage pointed out.

"We don't want something like that to happen again, do we?" Breaker added.

Snake clenched his jaw. It wasn't wise, pressuring a man like Snake to comply with their demands but Breaker had no other cards.

"You dare threaten me in my own clubhouse?" Snake asked in a quiet and deadly voice.

Breaker noticed the bartender and the two associates had their hands on their guns. This wasn't looking good. Breaker had to diffuse the situation fast.

"Look," Breaker said, trying to reason with Snake. "Riley means nothing to you. This alliance, on the other hand, determines the future of our clubs. Together, we can crush the cartel and go merrily on our separate ways."

"Fine, let me think," Snake grumbled, "If I set her free, what about the debts her brother owes me?"

“I’m here to settle those debts,” he said. “One call from me and I’d tell my men to transfer the money into your bank account.”

Snake gave a jerky nod and Breaker made the call. Once the request was done, Breaker turned his attention back to Snake. “Consider them paid in full. You can check your bank account.”

Snake kept his gaze on him and Rage as he pulled out his phone to check his bank account. “You might have won this round, Breaker, but don’t think this is over,” Snake said quietly. “Once the cartel is dealt with, you’ll have us to contend with.”

“I understand. Just remember, this alliance only works if there’s trust and respect between us. Otherwise, it’s all off,” Breaker said, rising to his feet. “Oh, and another thing. If I see that bastard associate of yours, Rat, sniffing around my woman again, I’ll put a bullet in his head.”

Snake said nothing as Breaker and Rage left the Vipers’ clubhouse. Once in the parking lot again, Rage turned to him. “We need to be prepared, Breaker, not just with the war against the cartel but also the Vipers. Things will get messy.”

“Don’t worry, I don’t intend to keep this from the members. I’ll make sure they understand the risks,” Breaker replied. “We’ll be prepared for whatever comes our way.”

They mounted their motorcycles and rode back home. The encounter with Snake and the Vipers had been a high-stakes showdown, but Breaker knew the real battle was yet to come.

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Once back at their own clubhouse, Breaker called for an emergency club meeting. The members gathered in the dimly lit clubroom. Breaker stood at the front with Rage and considered his next words with care.

Breaker once asked Rage if he would consider taking over Breaker's position in the future. He wasn't getting any younger and Rage was cut out for the job, but Rage only shook his head and told Breaker he lacked one quality that Breaker possessed. He said Breaker had a way of convincing others to do things for him, even die for him.

"Brothers, we've just cemented our alliance with the Vipers to take down the cartel," Breaker began. "But we need to be prepared." He went on to explain the encounter with Snake and the Vipers. Breaker also stressed the importance of staying united and vigilant. He didn't hold back the dangers they faced, both from the cartel and the Vipers once their temporary alliance was over.

"But we're not backing down," Breaker declared. He looked each member in the eyes. "We're a brotherhood, and we will face whatever comes our way together. We've taken down tough opponents like the Devil's Kings MC before, and we'll do it again."

Most of the club members nodded, agreeing with him. They knew the risks, but they were willing to stand by their president and the club.

This war would be good for the club. Cross was telling him the other day that some of their MC brothers were

complaining that there wasn't much action these days.

Rage stepped forward. "We'll increase security, keep a close eye on our rivals, and be ready to strike when the time is right. We won't let anyone threaten us or our loved ones," Rage added.

"We won't go into this fight blind," Breaker added. "We'll arm ourselves with information about the cartel and the Vipers."

Breaker had a long day. Admittedly, he couldn't wait for the meeting to be over, so he could head back home and see Riley. He already sent a quick text to her once Rage and him had arrived at their clubhouse. She had messaged him back instantly. Breaker sent her another text once the meeting was over.

**Breaker: On my way back. Club meeting went fine.**

**Riley: Can't wait to see you. By the way, I hope you're hungry.**

**Breaker: For food or you?**

**Riley: I made dinner but I can be dessert if you want.**

Damn, but every day Breaker was grateful that Fate sent this gorgeous woman to him.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Riley had to reread Breaker's text message. He'd really done it. Riley no longer had to work at the Black Vipers MC clubhouse, fearing for her life and her brother's life every single day.

Feeling a little dizzy and overwhelmed, she had to sit on the living room couch to process everything. Riley had every intention of paying Breaker back every cent her brother owed, of course. She wasn't a freeloader.

Still, it felt like a burden had been lifted from her soul. As a bonus, with this new arrangement, she got to see Breaker every single day. Riley debated calling Rob or sending him an update, then decided that could wait. Whatever Rob was, he probably was wasted, too concerned with his own problems to care about what was happening with Riley. Riley still loved her brother, but sometimes all he thought about was himself.

"Good news?" Cross asked, coming out of Breaker's kitchen with a mug of coffee.

"The best," she whispered. "Oh, Breaker also mentioned he'd be home soon."

"That's my cue to leave. It was a pleasure meeting you, Riley," Cross said.

He finished his coffee, then exited the house. Wanting to surprise Breaker with dinner, Riley headed to the kitchen to whip up a meal. Riley could cook Breaker's favorites. Tonight seemed like a fine time for a mini-celebration.

She was bringing out the ingredients for a pot roast from the fridge and cabinets, when she heard the familiar sound of a motorcycle. Breaker was home early. It didn't matter. She'd persuade him to take a shower or watch some TV first while she cooked. Knowing Breaker, he'd probably insist on helping her. The thought brought a smile to her face. The doorbell rang.

"Coming!" she yelled.

She ran to the front door, anticipation bubbling inside her. Riley couldn't wait to see him after the intense day they had just gone through. Eagerly, she opened the door, expecting to see Breaker's face on the other side.

To her horror, it wasn't Breaker standing there. Instead, it was Rat, grinning at her. Riley's heart pounded in her chest as she stood face to face with her worst nightmare.

Fear paralyzed her for a moment, but the adrenaline coursing through her veins kicked her survival instinct into high gear. She tried to close the door, but Rat was too quick, forcing his way inside.

"Get out! Leave me alone!" she yelled, her voice quivering with both fear and defiance.

"Why would I do that, sweetheart? I finally have you all to myself," Rat said. His chilling words sent shivers down her spine. Rat licked his lips. "I have plans for you. Great plans."

"Breaker's on his way home," Riley pointed out.

"Then we best hurry," Rat said. It looked like he had zero intention of leaving.

He lunged at her, and Riley fought back with all her might, using every bit of strength she had to fend him off. She swung a nearby vase at him, but he managed to evade it, his sinister laughter filling the air.

Just as she felt herself losing ground, the door burst open again, and there he was—her savior. Breaker’s presence filled the room with an electrifying energy, and his eyes blazed with a fury that promised swift retribution.

“Get away from my woman,” Breaker said in a deadly, quiet voice.

Rat turned to face Breaker, his twisted grin faltering for a moment, but he quickly recovered. With a crazed look in his eyes, he charged at Breaker, fueled by his sick obsession with Riley.

The room erupted into chaos as Breaker and Rat clashed, their punches landing with bone-rattling force. Riley watched with bated breath, her heart torn between fear for Breaker and relief that he was there to defend her.

The fight was intense, and Riley wished she could do something. Anything. Rat didn’t look interested in giving up, despite the odds stacked against him. Riley caught the glint of metal in Rat’s hand.

*“Breaker, he has a gun!”* Riley yelled.

Rat whipped it out, but Breaker managed to disarm him just in time, sending the weapon clattering to the ground. With a final, powerful blow, Breaker sent Rat sprawling to the floor, defeated. But the danger wasn’t over yet.

Rat reached for the fallen gun, his eyes filled with madness and desperation. Before Rat could fire his weapon, Rage, Breaker's vice president, intercepted him, knocking the knife away with a brutal kick. Breaker picked up the gun and Riley averted her eyes as Breaker shot Rat in the head.

"Riley," Breaker said, turning to her. His eyes softened as she approached him. He pulled her into a tight embrace, and she clung to him. Unable to help herself, tears streamed down her face.

"It's all over," Breaker told her. "Where's Cross? He should be watching you."

"It's my fault," Riley said, gathering herself. "I told him you were on your way back. He left."

"Well, now's my cue to leave," Rage added.

"Thanks for having my back, brother," Breaker told Rage.

"Anytime," Rage said, then gave Riley a nod of acknowledgement. Rage seemed like a tough nut to crack but Riley suspected Rage was the sort of man who didn't trust people easily.

Once Breaker's vice president had taken his leave, Breaker pulled Riley into his arms, holding her close as they sank onto the plush leather couch. He stroked her hair gently, his touch soothing.

"You're safe now, Riley," he whispered, his voice a comforting rumble. "Rat can't hurt you ever again."

Riley buried her face in the crook of his neck, breathing in the familiar scent of leather and the faint hint of engine oil. She felt a sense of security and warmth enveloping her, knowing that Breaker would always be there to protect her.

“I was so scared,” she admitted, her voice trembling. “I don’t know what I would’ve done if you hadn’t come.”

Breaker tightened his hold on her, his arms forming a protective shield around her.

“You underestimate yourself. It looked like you were holding your own when I arrived,” Breaker said. “You’re stronger than you know, Riley.”

“Thank you, those words mean a lot to me,” she whispered.

Breaker brushed away her tears with his thumb, his touch gentle and reassuring. “I’ll always be here for you, Riley. No matter what happens, I promise you’ll never have to face anything alone.”

Without a word, they drew each other close, their lips meeting in a soft and tender kiss.

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Feeling a gentle weight on his chest, Breaker found Riley curled up beside him, her head resting on his shoulder and a soft smile on her lips. Breaker couldn’t help but smile. This beautiful woman was his and he was truly one lucky bastard. He needed to remind himself of that fact every single morning.

Yesterday had been a close call. If Breaker hadn't arrived in time, he would have come home to a corpse. When he fought Rat yesterday, there was no reason left in the biker's eyes. He was utterly obsessed with his Riley. Word would get out to Snake sooner or later that one of his associates was dead, but Breaker had warned Snake. He had a feeling Snake would still take the news badly, a blow to his ego and to the reputation of the club. Whatever. Breaker would deal with Snake when the time came. For now, their two clubs had a fragile alliance. He focused all his attention on Riley.

"Good morning," she whispered, her voice soft and sweet.

"Morning, beautiful," Breaker replied, his voice still husky with sleep. He brushed a strand of hair away from her face.

Riley sat up, stretching her arms above her head, and Breaker couldn't help but admire her sexy body. Under the morning light, she even looked more perfect.

"I have a surprise for you," she said, excitement dancing in her eyes.

Curious, Breaker propped himself up on his elbows. "Oh, really? What's the surprise?"

Riley's smile widened, and she leaned in to place a soft kiss on his lips. "Breakfast in bed," she whispered.

Breaker chuckled, touched by her thoughtfulness. "You didn't have to do that, but I'm not going to complain."

With a mischievous glint in her eyes, Riley hopped out of bed. She exited the bedroom and headed downstairs. Breaker heard the clinking of dishes and the wonderful scents of cooking, and he couldn't help but feel a rush of anticipation.

Moments later, Riley emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray laden with a feast of breakfast delights—fluffy pancakes, crispy bacon, fresh fruit, and a steaming cup of coffee. Breaker's eyes widened in surprise and delight as she placed the tray in front of him on the bed.

“Wow, baby. You really went all out,” he said, his heart swelling with gratitude.

“I wanted to do something special for you,” Riley said, sitting down beside him. “You took good care of me yesterday. I figure it's only fair I make you breakfast.”

Breaker reached for her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Thank you. This is wonderful.”

As they ate together in bed, Breaker couldn't help but be transported back in time. He had enjoyed quiet moments like these with Marie as well. That felt like a lifetime ago.

Riley wasn't Marie, of course, but Breaker knew when something special landed on his lap. He had every intention of keeping Riley.

“This was the best breakfast I've ever had,” he told her.

Riley snuggled against him, resting her head on his chest.

“You're welcome,” she murmured. “I just wanted to show you how much I care about you.”

Breaker set his tray aside, smiling when Riley trailed her fingers down his bare chest. At her simple touch, his cock hardened.

Breaker touched her shoulder and flipped their positions so she was underneath him. He pinned her arms above her head, then leaned down and kissed her, rough and deep. Riley responded with fierce passion, sucking down on his tongue when he deepened the kiss. Breaker left more kisses down her neck, her breasts. He ran his hands possessively down her curves.

His dick felt like a steel pipe between his legs by now. Breaker momentarily got off his woman to peel down his boxers. Riley wore a little smile on her face when she saw how ready he was for her.

Breaker resumed his position, pleased she wrapped her legs around his waist. He rubbed her between her legs and found her pussy was slick with juices.

“So wet for me already?” Breaker asked.

“Always,” she whispered. “Fuck me, Breaker.”

Of course he couldn't say no to that.

“Condom,” he said.

Riley shook her head. “I'm clean. I had myself tested recently,” she said.

“Same here,” Breaker said, pleased by the turn of events.

Taking her without a thin piece of plastic between them would feel like heaven. Breaker entered her in one sure thrust.

She cried out, digging her nails into his shoulders. Breaker pumped in and out of her, starting with slow and careful strokes at first. As moans and pleas spilled from her lips, Breaker revved it up. He entered her, faster and deeper, loving the way her breasts rubbed against his chest.

Breaker switched the angle of his entries and Riley cried out, arching her back. He kept going for her sensitive spot until she came all over his dick. He pumped in and out of her a few more times before hitting climax.

With a growl, Breaker emptied his seed inside her. She leaned up, kissed him, and he savored the sweet and addictive taste of her. He was still inside her as his cock softened. Breaker could stay right here, in bed with her forever. That was just how obsessed and in love he was with this woman.

*Love.* That was a crazy word, but then again, Breaker knew he'd go to the ends of the world for his woman if she asked.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

“Snake, bad news,” Razor, Snake’s vice president said, as he entered Snake’s run-down office.

Snake didn’t like the grim look on Razor’s face. Razor gave a nod to the naked woman perched on Snake’s desk. She sighed, grabbed her clothes, and left. Snake glared at him, then zipped his pants up. He poured himself another shot of whisky.

“What now?” Snake asked.

He didn’t even offer Razor a drink. Snake wanted all the whiskey for himself.

“Rat’s dead,” Razor simply said.

Snake gripped the whiskey bottle hard, his anger simmering. “Let me guess. Breaker delivered on his threat.”

“According to the Death Seekers who dropped his body off at the club, Rat apparently broke into Breaker’s house with a gun. He had every intention of killing Breaker’s woman,” Razor said. “Rat never amounted to much, and it was a stupid move, invading Breaker’s home, but this incident ... will make us seem weak.”

“Don’t I know it,” Snake muttered darkly.

Even now, he could hear his men grumbling and talking amongst themselves. They were beginning to question Snake’s leadership and he couldn’t have that.

This alliance had been a good idea at the beginning, but that bitch had to ruin everything. He drummed his fingers on

his desk and started thinking of the best way to get back at Breaker and Riley.

No one made ridiculous demands from him and got away with it. The money no longer mattered, not when Breaker took a chunk of Snake's pride with him after their last meeting. Snake suddenly remembered Riley's good-for-nothing drug-addicted brother.

"Her brother," Snake said.

"Whose brother?" Razor asked, looking confused. "Oh, Rob Grayson?"

"We'll send someone to look for Rob Grayson while both clubs are focused on the joint operation against the cartel," Snake said, pleased with his sudden idea.

Razor laughed. "It shouldn't be that hard, finding a drug addict. We'll need Sledge. He was Rob's dealer. Sledge should know how to find the bastard."

"He's home, isn't he? Bring him down here," Snake said.

"I'll be right back," Razor said.

Razor left the office, leaving Snake to brood in his thoughts. The sound of the club's activities outside seemed to amplify his frustration. He took another swig of whiskey, hoping to drown out the feeling of powerlessness that had crept into his mind.

A few minutes later, Razor returned with Sledge in tow. Seeing the tall, imposing enforcer made Snake agree with his VP. Sledge was in fact the best man for this job.

“What do you need, President?” Sledge asked. Snake didn’t miss the respect in his eyes. Sledge was one of his members who still trusted him without question.

Snake leaned back in his chair, eyeing Sledge intently.

“We have a job for you,” he said. “We need you to find Rob Grayson. You should remember him. He was one of your best customers.”

“Why him? What’s the deal?” Sledge asked. “Rob’s no one. A complete waste of space.”

“Let’s just say he’s become a thorn in our side,” Snake replied cryptically. “We need to send Breaker and his bitch a message. No one messes with us and gets away with it.”

Sledge chuckled. “Consider it done, President. I’ll find the bastard and make sure he regrets ever crossing us.”

“You can mess him up a little but I need him alive,” Snake told Sledge.

“Understood. I’ll begin the search immediately. Won’t take long. I know the losers Rob usually hangs out with,” Sledge said, eagerly rubbing his hands.

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Rob sat on his friend’s expensive couch with his cell phone pressed against his ear. He was sober enough to process what his little sister was telling him. Relief washed over him as she told him about the close call with Rat and Breaker saving her.

Rob should be the one there for her, not some strange biker she just met. Then again, Rob hadn't been there for Riley since their parents' death. Guilt hit him deep.

"Rob, you don't have to worry about Snake and the Vipers," Riley was telling him. "Please come back home, so we can get you some help."

"I'll think about it," he replied, his voice choking with emotion.

As he ended the call, Rob felt a surge of anger welling up inside him. He was angry at himself for succumbing to his addiction, for becoming a burden to his family, and for putting Riley in danger because of his own mistakes.

"This has to stop," he muttered to himself, clenching his fists. "I can't keep living like this."

Determined to turn his life around, Rob got up from the couch and began packing his meager belongings. He wanted to go home, to apologize to Riley, meet this Breaker guy, and start fresh. He knew it wouldn't be easy, but he was willing to try.

As he carefully folded his clothes, he caught sight of a small photo of him and Riley from happier times, before his life had spiraled out of control. The sight of her smiling face brought a pang of guilt to his heart. Ever since their parents' death, Rob's mind felt covered in fog. Losing himself to drugs was easier than facing reality. That had to change.

"I'm so sorry, Riley," he whispered, tears welling up in his eyes. "I promise I'll be better."

Just as he was about to zip up his bag, a loud knock on the apartment door startled him. It was probably his friend Jack, with more crack.

The temptation to have just a little bit arose, but he thought of Riley and their recent call. Rob took a deep breath before opening the door. It would be difficult to tell Jack he wanted to quit. Heck, all his friends might just end up laughing at him, but he had to try. He opened the door.

“Jack, hey, I got to tell you something important,” Rob began, then forgot the rest of his words. It wasn’t his friend on the doorstep but his old dealer, Sledge.

“Hey, Rob,” Sledge said with a smirk. “Long time no see.”

## CHAPTER NINE

Riley made Breaker a hearty breakfast on the big day of the operation. She didn't know what else to do. Part of her didn't want him to go.

Facing off the cartel with a rival club was dangerous, but Riley knew she couldn't stand in his way. The Los Sombros Cartel threatened the Death Seekers MC's way of life, and the people living in the territory the bikers protected.

The smell of sizzling bacon and brewing coffee filled the air as she bustled around the kitchen, focusing on the task at hand, trying to keep her thoughts from spiraling into a whirlwind of worry. A mixture of emotions swirled within Riley's heart, the overwhelming fear of what could happen warring with the determination to stand by Breaker's side.

"Hey," Breaker said, interrupting her thoughts.

He gently took the plate she was washing. Riley could've used the dishwasher but she needed a distraction. Breaker set the plate down and unthinkingly, Riley used her fingers to trace the familiar and rugged contours of his face. She loved this man so much. Riley couldn't even conceive of what would happen if she lost him.

"You're gonna be all right, Breaker," Riley whispered. She was trying to reassure herself as much as him.

Breaker curved his lips to a half-smile. He reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze.

“Don’t you worry about me, sweetheart,” he replied, using her affectionate nickname. “I’ve got Rage, the best crew at my side, and we’re in this together.”

She nodded, acknowledging his words.

“I know,” she murmured, her fingers tightening around his. “But I can’t help feeling like a sitting duck. I need to do something, anything, to help you face whatever’s out there.”

With a gentle yet insistent tug, Breaker drew Riley into his embrace, their bodies fitting together as if they were two halves of a whole. His eyes bore into hers with an intensity that sent a shiver down her spine.

“You’ve already done more than you know,” Breaker said.

Riley’s heart raced as his lips descended upon hers once again, a slow and tender kiss that spoke volumes of their unspoken promises. She welcomed the warmth of his embrace, her fingers curling into his shirt as if to anchor him to her.

Reluctantly, Breaker pulled away, his eyes lingering on Riley’s face as if memorizing every detail. He brushed a strand of hair away from her cheek, his thumb tracing the curve of her jaw. “Come back to me, Breaker,” she whispered, her voice raw with emotion.

“I promise,” Breaker answered, his words a silent vow. “I’ll be back before you know it.”

As Breaker walked outside to join his waiting crew, Riley followed, her heart heavy with a mix of longing and

apprehension. The hum of the engines mingled with the laughter of the bikers.

Riley's eyes met those of two prospects who had been assigned to watch over her, a silent understanding passing between them. Since Rat's break-in, she was never to be left alone—a protective measure that weighed as a necessity and a reminder of the dangers that lurked.

A shiver ran down Riley's spine as she watched Breaker give the signal to depart. The roar of engines grew louder, the vibrations echoing through her bones. She wrapped her arms around herself, a sudden chill settling over her. She remained rooted to the spot until the last biker disappeared from view.

Once every biker was gone, she headed back inside the house. The house felt emptier in Breaker's absence, a void that echoed the uncertainties that clouded Riley's thoughts.

She glanced around the silent interior, her mind restless and searching for an outlet. Her bartending services wouldn't be needed tonight, with most of the club involved in the operation.

Riley wandered through the rooms, her fingers trailing along familiar surfaces as if seeking solace in the touch of the familiar. A book caught her eye and Riley picked it up. Settling onto the couch, she nestled into its soft cushions, ready to get lost in the pages of the book.

Her phone beeped, a jarring interruption to the calm she had sought. Riley's brows furrowed as she retrieved the device from the pocket of her jeans, her heart fluttering with a

mixture of expectation and anxiety. Swiping the screen, she anticipated a text from Breaker.

However, her eyes widened in surprise as she read the message. It wasn't Breaker, it was Rob, her brother.

**Rob: I've booked a bus back home. I'll arrive tomorrow. Can I see you?**

Her fingers hovered over the keyboard as she considered her response. Rob's recent attempts to reconnect with her had been different, marked by a change that gave her a glimmer of hope. Yet, experience had taught her to tread cautiously

After their last phone call, Rob had sounded different, more sober, but she never expected him to turn over a new leaf right away. Riley knew his pattern. He'd make promises he would never keep. The next time he'd contact her, it would be to ask for money to keep his drug addiction going. But maybe not. Hope flared in her chest. Things were finally looking up for her family.

Breaker said the operation might take two to three days at the most. He told her to stay put but Riley didn't think he'd mind if she met up with her brother. Riley would tell Breaker that she'd bring the two prospects along for extra security. That would ease his mind.

Riley immediately replied to her brother.

**Riley: Let's have dinner. I can't wait to see you. What time are you arriving?**

Rob texted back a time and place. Riley hugged her phone to her chest, a mix of anticipation and apprehension coursing through her veins. She wanted desperately to believe that this time things could be different, that the cycle of broken promises might finally be stopped.

In her mind's eye, Riley envisioned a version of her brother that was healthy, vibrant, and free from the grip of addiction. She imagined introducing him to Breaker, the man who had become the steadfast anchor in her own life. A smile tugged at her lips as she pictured the two men navigating their differences, slowly forming a bond rooted in mutual respect and understanding.

But the reality of the impending operation against the cartel loomed large, a stark reminder that the future was uncertain and unpredictable. She had faith in Breaker and his brothers, Riley reminded herself, then turned her attention to her book.

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It took two days for Breaker and his crew to travel to their destination. In the heart of the desert, a makeshift camp had been set up as their base of operations. Tents flapped in the evening breeze, and the flickering light of campfires danced across apprehensive faces.

Everyone was on edge, which was understandable. Both clubs had their guards up. They knew any wrong move or word could make the other group turn on them. Breaker, backed by Rage and Cross, made his way to the center of the camp.

Snake was already there, along with Razor, his VP. Snake and Breaker silently sized each other up. Breaker knew they weren't on friendly terms, especially after he paid off Riley's debts. Snake spoke up first.

"We ain't exactly drinkin' buddies, Breaker. I'll never forget what you did to Rat or the way you took that woman from me," Snake drawled. He pitched his voice louder, so everyone could hear him. "But these cartel bastards are a different kind of poison. We need to take 'em down, or we're all gonna end up buried in the same desert."

"You're right. Los Sombros needs to be wiped out, and I'd rather see them bleed before I do," Breaker said. It was best to avoid straying from the main topic. To play nice, so the operation would run smoothly.

"Let's go over the plan," Snake said.

"Tonight, we hit their drug manufacturing facility. They've got it hidden deep in the canyons, heavily guarded. We roll in fast, catch 'em off guard, and burn the whole damn place to the ground," Breaker said.

Snake glanced at the members of both clubs and finally traded nods with his lieutenants. This was really going to work, Breaker thought with some surprise.

"Sounds like a plan. Our MC will ride with yours. But once this is over, don't think this makes us pals," Snake pointed out.

Snake held his gaze and Breaker saw lingering distrust there but also ... a faint hint of respect?

“After this, we go back to being enemies. But tonight, we’re two clubs united against a common prey.”

Their groups waited until night deepened. Once it was time, the Death Seekers and Black Vipers mounted their motorcycles, side by side. Breaker looked up at the night sky and saw the stars weren’t out tonight. Darkness was their ally. It was a good night for violence.

They thundered through the desert and Breaker gave up on the prospect of being quiet. The drug facility loomed up ahead, a fortress of concrete and steel nestled in the rugged terrain.

Breaker’s gaze shifted to the guards stationed at the gate, their forms mere shadows in the dim light. Security was lax, an arrogant underestimation of their adversaries. It was a fatal miscalculation.

The guards barely had time to react as the combined force of the motorcycle clubs descended upon them like a storm.

Security inside was tighter. Someone must have sounded the alarm, because more guards started pouring out. The guards, jolted from their slumber, stumbled into action, their grogginess no match for the calculated precision of the bikers.

Breaker rode straight for the facility. He got off his motorcycle, noticing Rage and Snake were right on his heels. Rage would have his back, Breaker knew, in case Snake decided to stab him in the back.

In the end, Snake seemed too focused on their task to even think about betrayal

Breaker's eyes locked onto Rage, an unspoken understanding passing between them. They had trained for this moment, rehearsed every move, and analyzed every contingency.

Explosives were distributed, each biker a cog in the intricate machinery of destruction. Breaker's fingers closed around the cold metal of the detonator, his heart pounding.

"Time to finish this," Breaker said.

Everyone knew what to do. They split up and entered the facility. The workday was over and the staff had gone home. An empty factory greeted them.

Breaker and the others had gone over the blueprints of the factory beforehand. He knew which section he and Rage should cover. They planted their explosives. Once everyone did their part, Breaker yelled at the bikers to exit the factory.

Breaker and Snake pushed the detonators after everyone had exited the factory. The facility erupted into a cataclysmic explosion, flames and debris soaring into the sky.

It was dangerous to linger, but the two clubs did exactly that when it was obvious the cartel had no intentions of sending backup.

Finally, as the last echoes of the explosion faded into silence, Breaker surveyed the aftermath. Smoke hung like a heavy shroud, the scent of scorched earth and victory intermingling in the air. The factory lay in ruins.

His eyes met those of Snake and a subtle acknowledgment passed between them. The fatigue that painted their faces mirrored the weariness of their men. The lines of animosity had blurred, if only temporarily, under the weight of a shared purpose. Breaker imagined the men, once adversaries, now standing side by side with one thought in mind—to return to their loved ones, embrace the warmth of their families, and leave the battlefield behind.

“We did it,” Snake murmured, his voice tinged with a mixture of disbelief and satisfaction.

Breaker’s lips curved into a tired yet triumphant smile. He thought of Riley, anxiously waiting for news. Once they exited the facility, texting her—no, *calling* her—would be his number one priority.

“Yeah,” he agreed. “For now.”

## CHAPTER TEN

Riley's heart hammered in her chest as she stood before the nondescript apartment building. Breaker had texted her a few hours before, telling her the operation was a success.

She, in turn, told him about her meeting with Rob today. Breaker didn't want her to go, but she convinced him she'd be safe, especially with her escorts.

"I won't take long," Riley told the two prospects. Chris, the younger of the prospects, shared a reluctant look with his brother Daniel.

"We'll go with you," Daniel insisted, glancing around the quiet neighborhood.

"I won't take long," she said. "And you guys will just be downstairs if anything happens."

"Listen, Riley, can't this meeting wait?" Daniel argued. "Breaker will be home soon."

Riley shook her head. "I have to meet my brother now or he might change his mind."

After a few more arguments, she finally convinced them to let her go alone. If Rob saw her with the two bikers, he'd freak out. That was the last thing she wanted. As Riley took the elevator to the third floor, she wondered why Rob chose this location.

Sure, Rob explained he was crashing at his friend's place, but most of Rob's friends were addicts like him. It was

hard to believe any of them could afford a place like this. Maybe it was just paranoia speaking.

Finally, she arrived at the front door. She rapped her knuckles against the wooden door and wondered what she should say to Rob first. Riley decided she'd leave the topic of rehab for last. She'd soften him up first, get him to trust her a little.

The door opened and a jolt of surprise coursed through Riley's veins when she realized Rob wasn't alone. Standing before her was her brother, Rob, his weary face etched with a mixture of emotions that mirrored her own. By his side stood a figure that Riley hadn't expected—a large, inked biker with a Black Vipers patch on his cut.

The chill in the air seemed to intensify, the atmosphere growing taut with unspoken tension. She had convinced Breaker she would be safe, but now, facing the unexpected reality of the situation, doubt gnawed at the edges of her resolve.

Riley's heart raced as she studied the man beside her brother, the inked biker with the Black Vipers patch on his cut. The weight of betrayal settled heavily upon her shoulders, memories of past deceptions mingling with the cold dread that gripped her chest.

The parallels between this moment and the time Snake had infiltrated their apartment seemed uncanny, a chilling reminder that danger often wore the face of those who were supposed to be trusted.

“Riley,” Rob’s voice cracked with desperation. “This isn’t what it looks like.”

Rob looked like he’d been through the wringer. He was covered in bruises and looked utterly defeated. The biker’s gaze shifted to her, his eyes dark and unreadable.

“Rob,” Riley finally managed to say. Her voice was a mere whisper, her heart a turbulent sea of emotions. “How could you do this to me again?”

“Riley, I swear, it should’ve been different this time around. This is ... Sledge. Snake sent him to find me,” Rob whispered.

Sledge curled his lips to a cruel smile and Riley avoided a shudder. This man, Sledge, was nothing like Rat, who was desperate and cowardly. Sledge was dangerous. Riley’s instinct screamed at her to be cautious, to tread carefully in the midst of this volatile situation.

She recognized the calculating gleam in Sledge’s eyes, a predator assessing its prey.

“Nice to meet you again, Riley,” Sledge drawled, his tone pocketing.

Again? The familiarity in his tone sent a shiver down her spine. She had overheard some of Snake’s men talking about him. He was the guy Snake sent whenever he wanted something awful done.

“Riley,” Rob said, a hidden plea in his voice.

Riley took a deep breath. She knew she had to act, to find a way out of this perilous situation without raising

Sledge's suspicions. The two prospects were still downstairs but she'd definitely raise Sledge's suspicions if she reached for her cell phone.

"All right," she said to Sledge. "Let's talk."

Sledge's cruel smile widened, revealing a glint of something darker beneath the surface.

"The talking part is long over, missy," he sneered. His movements were deliberate as he revealed the gun concealed within his leather jacket.

Riley's pulse quickened, her mind racing to find a way out of this mess. Her instincts screamed at her to act, to find a way to turn the tables in her favor. Sooner or later, the prospects would check up on her. One of them had probably called Breaker as well. Rob and she would no longer be at a disadvantage.

She held Sledge's gaze, her expression a mix of apprehension and steely determination.

"Listen, Sledge, whatever problems you have with my brother, I'm not part of this. Let's talk, figure something out," she urged.

Sledge's laughter was a cold and humorless sound that echoed through the room, sending shivers down Riley's spine. "You think you can just talk your way out of this? This isn't some negotiation table, sweetheart. You're in way over your head."

Anger made Riley curl her fists by her sides. Only Breaker could call her *sweetheart*.

“Riley, I promise you, I never wanted any of this to happen. I really thought I could get a fresh start with you,” Rob whispered.

Riley’s heart ached for her brother. Rob really did sound genuine for once.

“I get it, Rob,” Riley said. “I forgive you.”

Sledge’s grip on the gun tightened, his expression shifting from amusement to impatience. “You’re wasting my time, and time is something you’re quickly running out of.”

Sledge pointed his gun at her. Riley couldn’t breathe, couldn’t think. This was it. She felt so silly for asking the two prospects to let her come alone. Riley should’ve been more careful but she always let her guard down when it came to her brother.

“*No!*” Rob yelled as Sledge fired. Rob tackled her to the ground, taking the shot in her place.

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“You let her do what?” Breaker demanded. His grip on the phone tightened as he listened to Daniel explain the perilous situation. Every word stoked the fires of his anger.

“If something happens to my woman, there will be hell to pay,” Breaker warned.

He could almost envision the two prospects on the other end of the line wincing involuntarily, their confidence faltering like fragile glass.

“We’ll go check on her right away,” Daniel began. The prospect was attempting to assert control over the situation but Breaker would have none of it.

“No, I’ll do it myself. I’m almost there,” Breaker snapped.

The line went dead with an abrupt click as Breaker ended the call, his simmering anger refusing to let him waste any more time on idle words. Besides, in a scenario like this, those two prospects wouldn’t know how to handle themselves.

He mounted his motorcycle. Tires screeched as he tore through the streets, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions.

Time seemed to distort, seconds stretching and contracting as his heart pounded in his chest. Dang it. He should’ve assigned someone more capable to watch Riley but he needed all capable hands on deck for the cartel operation.

Less than ten minutes later, Breaker skidded to a halt outside the location Daniel had described. The two prospects stood nearby, their faces pale and eyes wide as saucers. Breaker ignored them, his gaze laser-focused on the building ahead. Every nerve in his body was electrified, his senses heightened to a fever pitch.

Riley’s face flashed before his mind’s eye, her smile, her laughter, the touch of her hand. Breaker’s jaw clenched as he pushed down the tendrils of fear that threatened to creep into his thoughts. Anguish battled with resolve within him, his determination fueling his every step.

As he entered the building, Breaker's instincts guided him like a compass. He took the elevator, each floor ascending with agonizing slowness.

His grip on the revolver was unwavering, his fingers caressing the cold metal like a lover's touch.

He hadn't been given a specific unit number, but he didn't need one. The sound of raised voices filtered through the hallway, an unsettling symphony that quickened his pulse. Three distinct voices reached his ears, an eerie harmony of emotions colliding in the air. Riley's voice, a mixture of fear and unwavering determination, was intertwined with a second man's frightened tone, and a third, sinister voice that radiated malevolence.

Breaker's jaw tightened, his muscles coiling like a predator ready to strike.

A gunshot shattered the fragile calm, a jolt of adrenaline surging through Breaker's veins. Time seemed to stretch as his caution ebbed away, replaced by an overwhelming need to protect what was his. He hurtled toward the door, his boots pounding against the floor like the beat of a war drum.

Breaker's mind raced, calculating possibilities and risks in the span of a heartbeat. His knuckles rapped against the door, a staccato rhythm that matched the pounding of his heart.

He raised his revolver, the metal glinting in the dim light as he prepared for the confrontation ahead. With a burst of raw power, Breaker's foot connected with the door, the wood splintering and cracking under the force. It swung open, revealing chaos.

Riley's face, usually radiant, was a mask of terror as she stood frozen in place. Her brother Rob lay crumpled on the floor, blood seeping from a gunshot wound that stained the floor crimson.

A biker, wearing the insignia of the Black Vipers MC, loomed over Riley, a malevolent grin playing on his lips as he aimed a gun at her trembling form.

The air crackled with tension as Breaker stepped forward, announcing his presence. The biker's triumphant expression wavered, replaced by a flicker of uncertainty as his gaze locked onto Breaker's eyes.

Time seemed to stand still. With a growl, Breaker surged forward, his body a blur of motion. The biker's fingers tightened on the trigger, but before he could react, Breaker's iron grip clamped onto the man's wrist with bone-crushing force. The gun discharged harmlessly into the air, the deafening sound echoing off the walls.

The biker's eyes widened in shock and pain, his fingers instinctively releasing their hold on the weapon. Breaker's other hand shot out like lightning, connecting with the biker's jaw in a devastating punch. The impact sent the biker stumbling backward, his body crashing against a nearby table with a resounding crash.

Objects clattered to the ground as the table collapsed under the force, and the biker lay dazed and disoriented amidst the debris.

Riley's wide eyes flickered between Breaker and her fallen assailant, her breath coming in ragged gasps. Breaker

spared her a quick glance, his expression a mix of relief and determination, before his attention snapped back to the biker.

The room crackled with tension as the wounded man struggled to rise, his face contorted in a mixture of pain and rage. The biker lunged at Breaker, his movements fueled by desperation. But Breaker sidestepped the attack thanks to reflexes honed by years of dangerous encounters.

In one fluid motion, Breaker grabbed the biker's arm and twisted it behind his back, forcing him to his knees with a guttural grunt of pain. The biker's struggles were futile against Breaker's unyielding strength, and he found himself trapped in a vicelike grip that left him immobilized.

"You thought you could mess with me and mine?" Breaker demanded. "You thought you could threaten the woman I love?"

His grip on the biker's arm tightened, eliciting a strangled cry of pain.

"You're about to learn just how big a mistake you've made," Breaker said.

He shoved the biker to the ground and before he could recover, Breaker reached for his gun and shot him in the head. The biker's body slumped on the floor, unmoving. He would send this biker's body to Snake, as a warning to what happened to those who screwed with him and his club.

Snake would no doubt retaliate but by then, Breaker would be ready to face whatever Snake and the Black Vipers MC threw at him.

Breaker's expression softened as he caught sight of his woman. Riley naturally looked shocked. The first thing he did was call an ambulance for Rob. After a quick examination, he could tell Rob had fainted but his shoulder wound wasn't serious. Riley's brother would make a swift recovery.

With that task taken care of, Breaker crossed the room, closing the distance between them. He reached out, brushing his fingers gently against Riley's cheek.

"Shouldn't have left you alone with two prospects," Breaker told her. "Sorry about that. I won't make that mistake ever again.

"I insisted on meeting with Rob. You saved me like always. That's all that matters," Riley said, burying her face into his chest.

She leaned against him. Breaker cradled the back of her head, spearing his fingers through her soft and silky hair. The day's events had been a stark reminder of the fragility of life, of how quickly circumstances could change.

Breaker had nearly lost her again, and the thought was unbearable. He couldn't fathom a world without her, and the realization had ignited a fierce determination within him.

"Marry me," he said.

He couldn't imagine waiting any longer to make her his forever. Today had shown him just how precious and fleeting time could be, and he refused to let another moment slip through his grasp.

Riley peered up at him and nodded. "I'm yours, Breaker, now and forever."

Breaker tightened his grip on her. He lowered his lips to hers, sealing their promise with a tender kiss. As they pulled back, their foreheads rested against each other, their breaths mingling in the sweet air between them.

Breaker's lips curved into a soft smile, his eyes never leaving hers.

"I love you, Riley," he told her.

"And I love you, Breaker," Riley responded without hesitation.

## EPILOGUE

### *One Year Later*

Breaker felt a wave of relief as he entered the driveway of his house. The day had been a mix of business and negotiations, but as he swung a leg over the bike, the weight of the world seemed to lift from his shoulders.

The thought of Riley waiting for him inside brought a genuine smile to his lips. His heart raced with anticipation as he walked up the front path, his steps quickening at the thought of the evening ahead.

The tantalizing aroma of his favorite dishes wafted through the air. Breaker drew closer to the source. Breaker stepped into the kitchen, and he smiled at the sight of his gorgeous wife, standing at the stove.

The table was set with meticulous care, adorned with delicate china and a bouquet of fresh flowers that added a touch of vibrant color to the scene. All his favorite dishes were there. Riley had also lit up candles to set the mood.

“Hey,” Breaker said. Riley turned and her eyes lit up at the sight of him.

“Hey, you’re home,” she replied.

Breaker crossed the room and enveloped her in a loving embrace. He pressed a tender kiss to her lips.

“You’ve been cooking up a storm, I see.” Breaker grinned, his stomach rumbling in anticipation.

Riley chuckled, her eyes twinkling with mischief. “Well, it’s a special occasion, after all.”

Breaker arched an eyebrow, a playful glint in his eyes. “And what’s the occasion, exactly?”

Riley’s smile widened, her fingers reaching out to trace his jawline with a loving touch. “It’s our one-year wedding anniversary, silly.”

He hadn’t forgotten, of course, but the thought that Riley had gone to such lengths to celebrate warmed his heart even more.

“Ah, right.” Breaker feigned innocence, a twinkle of amusement in his eyes. “So, you’ve gone all out to celebrate, huh?”

Riley nodded, a mischievous gleam in her gaze. “Oh, you have no idea.”

Riley took off her apron and they sat down for dinner. During dessert, Breaker reached into his pocket, pulling out a small velvet box. He placed it on the table before Riley.

“I didn’t forget, you know,” Breaker admitted. “I have something for you.”

Riley’s eyes widened with curiosity as she opened the box, revealing a delicate necklace adorned with a sparkling diamond. Tears shimmered in her eyes as she looked up at Breaker, her voice catching in her throat.

“It’s beautiful,” she whispered, her fingers tracing the intricate design.

Breaker smiled, his heart swelling with pride. “Just like you.”

As Riley leaned in to kiss him, a radiant smile played upon her lips.

“I have something for you too,” she said, her voice barely more than a whisper.

Breaker’s curiosity piqued as Riley reached into her pocket, withdrawing a small envelope. She placed it in his hand, her eyes locking onto his with a mixture of nervousness and joy.

Breaker opened the envelope, his gaze falling upon the ultrasound image nestled inside. His heart skipped a beat as realization dawned upon him, his eyes lifting to meet Riley’s.

“You’re pregnant...” Breaker breathed, his voice tinged with awe and wonder.

Riley nodded, tears streaming down her cheeks as she beamed at him. “We’re going to be parents, Breaker.”

Overwhelmed by emotion, Breaker pulled Riley into a tight embrace, his heart pounding.

“Wow,” Breaker murmured. “We’re really going to be parents.”

Riley nodded. “I took the test this morning. It’s real, Breaker. We’re going to have a baby.”

Breaker’s lips curved a smile. They’d been trying for a few months now. This was the second time Breaker was going

to be parent. Good thing he had prior experience. He could just avoid the mistakes he made with Cassie with this little one.

“I can’t believe it,” Breaker murmured. “We’re going to be a family. Rage and Cassie are going to be over the moon with the news.”

“A family,” she echoed. “Our own little family.”

“You know, I really thought I would surprise you with that necklace,” Breaker said.

Riley chuckled. “I think your gift just got trumped by mine.”

Breaker grinned. “Yeah, you definitely win this round.”

**The End**

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## **BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER**

### **BENDING IRON**

*Fallen Saints MC, 5*

**Winter Sloane**

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**Sample Chapter**

*I can't fall asleep,* Amber Chase reminded herself. She peered over the bus seats, heart racing. Amber half expected David to climb up the steps to the bus, wearing one of his expensive business suits and a Cheshire grin on his face. Her hands started shaking. David should still be at work at his fancy Manhattan office. He liked to drink with his lawyer buddies on Friday nights, she remembered.

A man entered the bus. Same height and muscular build as her ex-boyfriend. A woman, probably his girlfriend, said something in his ear that made him laugh. Not David. Amber checked the watch on her wrist. The watch with the big circular display and worn leather strap used to belong to her dad. She'd left behind the gold Rolex David gave her for their first-month anniversary. She had zero regrets. That Rolex felt heavy like shackles. David only showered her with gifts when he felt guilty about hurting her.

The bus was supposed to leave five minutes ago. Was there going to be a delay?

Her most valuable possessions were stuffed in the packed backpack at her feet. An elderly black woman in her early fifties made her way to the seat next to her. She gave Amber a warm smile, then sat down. Amber was too full shot of nerves to return her smile.

She pulled out her cell phone from the pocket of her jeans, then stared blankly at the black screen for a few seconds. Right. Amber had forgotten she turned the dratted thing off to avoid receiving any more calls and messages from David. Once she arrived at her destination, she'd block his number. Redemption, Illinois. Population? Less than two thousand. Amber had chosen Redemption at random.

Amber was a born and bred city girl. Small towns freaked her out, or maybe she read too many thrillers which were often set in small towns. Either way, David would never think to look for her in Redemption. It would just be a pit stop. A place to lay low for a few weeks before moving on to

greener pastures. Hopefully, by then, David would have forgotten all about her. In a month or two, David would have a new girl on his arm. She didn't envy that woman. Amber pitied her because she would have to live through the same nightmare Amber did.

Her panic subsided a little when the bus started to move. Finally, they were leaving the station. She leaned against her seat. The woman next to her busted out her knitting needles and yarn. Amber envied her. She wished she knew how to knit. She heard it was a calming hobby.

"I have an extra pair of knitting needles if you're interested, dear," the woman said, noticing her stare.

"No thanks, I'm good. I don't even know how to knit," she admitted.

"It's a four-hour journey. I can teach you," she offered. "I'm Mary, by the way. I own the Cherrywood Inn in Redemption."

"Amber," she said, not willing to offer more information about herself. David didn't like her talking to random strangers, but she was no longer under his control. "And I'd like that. Thank you."

Needles and yarn kept her mind occupied for the entirety of the drive. Mary turned out to be a patient and great teacher. By the end of her journey, she made a simple baby blanket. She held out the piece of bright red cloth. Emotions clogged in her throat. Memories she locked in a box weeks ago threatened to spill out.

What was she thinking, making something like this? Maybe her subconscious mind wanted her to remember what she had lost. Amber briefly touched her flat stomach, then she decided to tuck the ugly blanket away.

“Are you visiting relatives?” It was the first real question Mary asked her. The bus was pulling into the station.

“Taking a vacation actually,” Amber replied. Lies usually didn’t come smoothly to her. *I learned from the best*, she thought sardonically. As a criminal defense lawyer, David had a knack for convincing juries his very guilty clients were guilt-free. Nothing innocent about them or David.

“Vacations are good. A nice and bright young woman like you must be weighed down by a busy job in the city. Here in Redemption, we take things real slow.”

“Actually, I made this decision on a whim. I haven’t had the chance to make a booking. You mentioned you owned an inn?” Amber asked, recalling Mary’s introduction.

The big smile Mary flashed her seemed genuine. Her father, back when he was alive, always said she had good instincts about people. Amber had been terribly wrong about David, but she had a good feeling about Mary.

“Right this way, dear. We’ve just been newly renovated. I’m on my way right there,” Mary said as they got off the bus.

Amber shouldered her heavy pack, grunting softly at the weight. “It’s okay, I can make my way there. What was the name again? I can use Google Maps for directions.”

“Nonsense. It’s a short walk there. I can show you some of the town’s sights,” Mary said.

How could Amber say no? She’d worked out a plan during the bus ride. Once she reached Redemption, she’d go to a café and search for a place to stay. Staying at Mary’s inn would save her loads of research time. She only hoped the inn was as nice as Mary described.

They left the bus stop and emerged onto Redemption’s Main Street. Charming two-story shops lined either side of her. Mary seemed to know a good number of locals because they were stopped a couple of times. Amber couldn’t imagine living in a place like this. Back before she moved in with David and lived in her own apartment, she barely knew her neighbors. She noticed some of the locals giving her curious stares. Mary introduced her as a friend, and they warmed up to her a little.

“Sorry for the delay,” Mary said.

“This town seems charming,” she murmured.

“It does, doesn’t it? You just have to watch out for the bikers.” Mary stopped in front of a charming, two-story cottage-style home that had been converted into an inn.

Amber’s mouth went dry. Did Mary just make a joke? “Bikers?” she pressed.

“The Fallen Saints MC. They own this town.”

Amber stared at her. Mary had sounded so matter-of-fact, like a town controlled by a bunch of rough bikers was a

perfectly acceptable thing. Mary walked her to the reception area.

“What about the local authorities?” she asked.

Mary paused, as if she regretted saying anything at all. “Some folks here would say the MC taking control of the town is the best thing that ever happened to Redemption. Before they came along, Redemption was riddled with gangs and drug dealers.”

“But you believe otherwise?” she asked.

“Those who stay in power, abuse that power. Please, just forget what I’ve told you. Enjoy the town as much as you can. Candy here will tell you all about the activities you can sign up for while you’re here,” Mary said.

“One room?” the twenty-something brunette manning the reception desk asked her.

After receiving her key, Amber went to the second floor, where her room was located. Candy had given her a room with a fantastic view. Dropping her backpack by the bed, Amber walked to the opened window facing the rest of the town. She started to wonder if coming here was a bad idea after all. It had taken her weeks to gather her courage to leave David. Then she made the awful decision of coming to a place governed by controlling and ruthless men just like David.

Despite the generously sized room and all the opened windows—Amber counted three total—she began to feel a little claustrophobic. The walls seemed to close down on her, and she needed to get some air. She planned on taking it easy

today. Soak in the bath, stay in, order room service, and eat dinner on the bed in her bathrobe. Those plans went out the window right this instant. What Amber needed was a drink or two. God. She could practically taste the cold beer in her mouth.

She hadn't been able to drink for months.

Amber settled for a quick shower. She felt refreshed afterward. The urge to go out and let her hair down was still there. After she moved in with David, he seldom let her out of the apartment. It didn't help that as a freelance graphic designer, Amber worked from home. For the past year, she felt like a prisoner. Now she was free to do whatever she wanted.

She left her room and asked Candy where the closest bar was.

“O'Riley's,” Candy answered. “It's just two streets down from here. I overheard Mrs. Thompson warning you about the bikers. They're not as bad as she makes them out to be.”

“Really?” Amber doubted it. She wanted to avoid a run-in with any of these bikers tonight. Have a drink, a couple of dances, and some dinner. That was all she wanted. Then she'd head back to her room and try not to think about what she was going to do next. Amber had planned on staying here for a week, but maybe that wasn't a wise idea.

“Yeah, she's still a little bitter because one of her nephews got into a car accident with one of the Fallen Saints MC members,” Candy told her.

Amber would be a little angry if she was in Mary's position, too. She thanked Candy and headed to O'Riley's. Before David, she had a few girlfriends she went out for drinks with. That ended when the controlling bastard decided he wanted her all to himself. He didn't allow her to meet anyone. It was only later Amber realized David had slowly but surely isolated her from everyone she once knew.

"I can do this," she whispered to herself. Amber took deep breaths. She waded through the crowd and somehow managed to find an empty seat at the bar. She ordered a local beer. The cool amber liquid tasted heavenly on her tongue.

"Never seen you in these parts before, sweetheart," slurred a voice.

A portly man wearing a dirty cowboy hat occupied the seat next to her. Her skin crawled when he looked her up and down. He took his hat off, revealing a balding patch of hair. He flashed her a mouthful of cigarette-stained teeth.

"Daryl McGibson," he said, offering her a hand, which she didn't shake. Amber took a sip of her beer. "You a tourist?"

"Amber," she said. "Yeah, I'm just passing by."

"Another drink for the pretty lady!" Daryl yelled to the bartender.

"You don't have to do that," Amber said quickly. "Sorry, but I just want to be alone tonight. I just came from a bad breakup."

Another lie. David wouldn't let her go. She wondered what he was doing now. It was only 8:00 in New York. Was he working late in the office? Or was he already roaring drunk with his colleagues at his favorite sports bar?

Maybe she would luck out, and David would choose to hook up with some random woman at the bar. It certainly wouldn't be the first time he brought another woman to their apartment. It always seemed strange to her that David seemed to think it was completely fine that he cheated on her all the time and yet refused to let her have a little bit of freedom.

“Then I'll keep you company,” Daryl said. “Tell me about yourself.”

This wasn't good. She had forgotten how to say no, to stand up for herself. Living with a monster like David for months had beaten all the fight out of her. She noticed her hand on her glass bottle beginning to tremble. What was she thinking? After leaving the nightmare that was her life, did she think she could just forget about the past and start anew?

End of sample chapter

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