



*Desert*

# HEAT

ROYAL BASTARDS MC



# JAX HART

DESERT HEAT

**JAX HART**

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[Jxhart05@gmail.com](mailto:Jxhart05@gmail.com)

*To my number one side chick Z.*

*Thanks for always being there.*

*For C and our messed up love/hate friendship. Thanks for  
always pushing me to join shit like this. LMAO.*

*To my lounge ladies for sticking with me and my ups and  
downs.*

*For every lady looking for her ride or die... I hope you find  
them.*

*XXX,*

*JH*

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## BLURB



Our MC used to be fierce. We were legends. Now that our Prez got himself an old lady, he's more interested in babies and bottles. Our enemies have noticed. What started as a few missing items in a shipment has escalated into the OUTLAW MC encroaching into our turf. They want to snuff us out, take our territory. I'm not letting our crew go down without a fight. I'm hunting down the Outlaw Princess. The girl will be my pawn to play with. If and when I decide to let her go, it'll be on my terms.

He's the enemy. He climbed up the ranks earning the enforcer patch faster than anyone I've ever heard. My father's the Prez of the Outlaws, determined to run the Royal B's out of Santa Fe. He sent me away for safety to a small private college in Maine. But somehow the Desert Heat followed. He takes me as a pawn in this game. Fine. I won't go down without a fight. He thinks I'm a pawn in this MC war... so be it. I'll take his heart as collateral.

# ROYAL BASTARDS CODE



**PROTECT:** The club and your brothers come before anything else and must be protected at all costs. **CLUB** is **FAMILY**.

**RESPECT:** Earn it & give it. Respect club law. Respect the patch. Respect your brothers. Disrespect a member and there will be hell to pay.

**HONOR:** Being patched in is an honor, not a right. Your colors are sacred, not to be left alone, and **NEVER** let them touch the ground.

**OL' LADIES:** Never disrespect a member's or brother's Ol' Lady. **PERIOD.**

**CHURCH** is **MANDATORY.**

**LOYALTY:** Takes precedence overall, including well-being.

**HONESTY:** Never **LIE**, **CHEAT**, or **STEAL** from another member or the club.

**TERRITORY:** You are to respect your brother's property and follow their Chapter's club rules.

**TRUST:** Years to earn it...seconds to lose it.

**NEVER RIDE OFF:** Brothers do not abandon their family.



## PLAYLIST

“Where do Broken Hearts go?” Whitney Houston

“Didn’t We Almost Have it All?” Whitney Houston

“Going, Going, Gone.” Luke Combs

“Mind on You.” George Birge

“You Proof.” Morgan Allen

“You Set My World On Fire,” Nate Smith

## FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

I really enjoy writing MC romance and being part of the Royal Bastard family.

Typically, MC's can go very dark and graphic. My passion for writing stems from creating worlds and characters within those worlds.

If you have read me before you'll get where I'm coming from... for those that are new... here it goes... a little bit about me.

I have suffered from depression for over twenty years. It's hereditary. My uncle committed suicide when I was twelve. He battled painkiller, an opioid addiction, and got hooked on other things too.

Our family did all we could to get him therapy, detox programs, you name it. In the end his demons bested him.

I won't let the cycle continue. Some days are better than others. Months can go by great and then bam you wake up in a state of mental fog you out of your control.

Where am I going with this? One, to tell you you aren't alone if you suffer the same. Secondly, my books don't go to dark places as I'm trying not to live in one. I found that went I

wrote dark, my mind became a dark place too. So, I go medium rare on the grit front.

Lastly, please be patient with me as I don't pump books out like other authors. I need to be in the right mental space for things to happen.

I hope you enjoy Desert Heat...

As always, thanks for your support.

JH

**\*\*\*This is a work of fiction blending real and fictional places. The settings and geography are not meant to be accurate in real life. The settings in this novel are a hybrid blend of real and fictional landmarks and towns.\*\*\*  
Thank you! JH**

# INTRODUCTION

## **Royal Bastards Santa Fe**

Tarak, Amber/Mouse, Regan, Edge, River/Hunter,  
Rogan/Tank, Hacker

## **The Outlaws Alburque**

Savannah

Linc

## **The Devil's Glen MC**

Dean

# PROLOGUE SAVANNAH

FEBRUARY

IT WAS AN OMEN.

His name.

*River Cruz.*

Like a river he winded his way into my heart.

Turn by turn.

Slowly at first until the love hate game between us overflowed. My heart is torn. An ugly tear with jagged, bloody edges.

*Love and hate.*

Flipsides of a coin.

Love, I can handle.

But the way that fucker made his way into my soul is the part I can't.

My hand gripped the sides of my phone so hard; I thought the pressure alone would make it crack. My mole sent me a pic of River with some black-haired bimbo on his lap. Her blood-red nails rested on his pecs right above his heart.

The same pecs my lips knew were soft steel to kiss. The same heart that I used to lay my head against, listening to the steady rhythm until I fell asleep. His dark hair was a bit long in the front with the wavy locks falling just above his brow.

My eyes narrowed.

*This really is war.*



And not just between our MC's.

This war between us was ancient. The feelings he invoked in me were the kind that make women do crazy shit like burn their ex's clothes in the middle of the street, slash their tires, or stalk their new girlfriends so they can be confronted—and bitch slapped.

I couldn't help my smirk. I was going to smack the shit out of this hoe.

No doubt.

The only question was before or after I dealt with River?

The way he made his way so deep under my skin that I still feel the burn of his touch; am haunted by the ghost of his hips flexing right before he drove the tip of his heat into me. I shifted my weight, hating that I craved him still.

Needed his touch.

I slammed my phone down on the coffee table not caring my screen shattered, tiny bits of glass shards falling to the floor.

The thought of that bitch getting what was mine feeling what was mine was enough to make me lose any shred of self-control.

I knew where he was... *what he was*.

I still wanted him anyway.

But my loyalty to Papa and the Club came first. I could never have both. River and be the Outlaw Princess.

I could never betray my patch.

I hated traitors.

The ones who turned on us for money, drugs or jealousy. Hell, I watched when Papa took out Grease for snitching to the cops. I didn't even flinch once when he pulled the trigger and Grease fell back onto the rough desert strewn with dried rocks. His running blood was the only thing wet the soil had seen for months. It seeped right in. The fucker got what he deserved

when his snitching cost Papa two years behind bars. Two years I missed with him.

I padded around the wooden floors on bare feet.

The snow was still falling.

It always fucking snows here.

Last time I went out the drifts were as high as the front windows. Beams of light cut through them reaching across the room. A tall figure gets off his snowmobile. I opened the door wearing nothing but my oversized shirt, purposefully cocking one hip to make it ride up my thigh three inches.

Dean Smith was a fine fucking man at six three with a full beard the warm color of maple syrup and eyes as dark as a hot espresso. The son of the Devil's Glen Prez wanted me badly. He's been there for me during some of the worst times of life this past year. My father had called the MC that patrols the border between Canada and Maine to be my deFacto protectors. Dean was the one given the job.

"Hey little lady, wanna go for a ride?"

"That's the best line you got? Heard that one so many times." I faked a yawn, turning away.

"Come on Sav, I don't bite."

"I know you want to." He came closer. I moved my long hair off my neck, arcing it to the side. "Eeeek! Stop!" I giggle-screamed as the tip of his ice-cold nose ran alongside my skin.

"You wanna warm me up?" I stepped back, swatting his gloved hands away. "No worries. I'm already burning up for you anyway."

The image of River and that skank flashed again in my mind. "Where are we going?"

"Alpha Omega bonfire at the lake house."

"A frat party? Damn, I haven't been to one of those in forever."

"I know they are lame as fuck compared to an MC party but it's the best I got."

“I’ll be ready in five,” I replied as I disappeared into my bedroom to pull on a pair of fleece-lined skinny jeans and stuffed my feet into a pair of Sorel boots that cost as much as my first used Harley. My waterproof down, Canada Goose coat set my father back over a grand. “Nothing’s too good for my princess,” he had said.

Sighing, I stuffed a snow-white ski cap on my head complete with a faux-fur pompom on top. My skin was always tan after years soaking up the desert sun. A quick coat of gloss slicked on my lips and a check in the mirror confirmed what I already knew.

I was not an Outlaw Princess out here. I had transformed into a well-dressed, dare I say, hot as fuck college girl. But I still wore my beloved desert jewelry fashioned with chunky turquoise stones.

No hint of the wild that lived inside me showed in my designer winter clothes. No one would guess of the shit I’ve seen and lived. No preppy as fuck frat boy could ever get me. I swallowed hard.

*He got me.*

I climbed into the rear seat of Dean’s shiny snowmobile and wrapped my arms around his muscular back. Fuck River with his new piece.

I spent the rest of the night going shot for shot with Dean and his boys while frat boys and jocks competed for my attention. The girls narrowed their eyes all wondering what it was that I had. The answer was easy.

*Zero fucks.*

I downed the rest of my drink. My fingers were past numb. My cheeks, too. The alcohol burned as it went down. I threw my head back to gaze at the mid-winter sky.

The stars shone like diamonds just like they did above the desert. I missed home. Missed the fine silt of red dust that would somehow make its way through the cracks between doors. Missed the howl of a lone coyote wandering through the brush.

I missed the men—even the friggin pencil-necked pledge who annoyed me to no end. But going home to the dustbowl town somewhere between Vegas and Tijuana wasn't an option.

It was a war zone.

Little did Dad know the battle had followed me north. River left as suddenly as he had appeared.

He knew I'd never snitch on myself. Telling your father you lost your V-card to the young hotheaded Prez of our rival MC would wound him more than a bullet ever could.

River knew that.

River and his Bastard crew were gunning hard, trying to take back everything Dad and the Outlaws took from them while their Prez was on his babymoon.

Tarak was a legend.

Maybe he still is but love made him soft and I get that now. Never will I let my guard down again.

“Savvy? Are we going to do another round or am I taking you home?” Dean cocked a brow. I popped a shoulder. “How about a shot and then you take me home.”

“My place or yours?”

My boots crunched in the snow, stopping when their tips kissed his. Slowly I lifted my index finger, running it up the inside of his half-unzipped ski coat. “My old man would kill you and you know it.”

His eyes hooded as he bent his head. A breath away from my lips he groaned. “You just might be worth dying for.”

I wish I could melt for him. Truly I did. But someone else had beat him to it. Snaked his River way into my heart and soul then like a swift current, he vanished somewhere downstream with it.

The starlight reflected off the freshly fallen snow as Dean navigated through the woods back to my rental. I looked up through the barren limbs of tall trees finding the North star. I

laughed at myself for once believing stars could truly grant wishes.

“Night, Savvy.”

“Night, Dean.”

“I’m going to clear the inside and check the perimeter before I go. Two men will watch like always.”

I shrugged, gave him a peck on the cheek and took off my coat. What was there to say when the enemy had already been inside the gates?



## PROLOGUE RIVER

*River*

THE LEGGY BRUNETTE was a real pain in the ass. She kept wriggling on my lap as if that rookie move was enough to get me hard for her. Sighing I finished my whiskey, plunked the glass down on the table and turned my face. Her eyes widened, hot pink tongue slicking over her lower lip expecting mine any second.

“Newsflash, sweetheart. I don’t do Club skanks and you are at the top of that list.”

Her mouth parted in a shocked “O” as I stood dumping back on the chair as I left.

My best friend in the MC, Tank, lifted an eye and nodded toward the back door of the clubhouse. “What’s up?” I asked as we stepped out into the crisp desert night.

“She just updated her Instagram.” Tank handed me his phone. It took everything in me to keep my face impassive while my insides burned. Savannah had her arms wrapped around the Prez’s son from the Devil’s Glen MC. My fist curled before I could stop it. “She posted it thirty minutes ago.”

My eyes studied the rosy glow on her cheeks the cold Maine winter night put there. It was close to the glow she got when I put my hands on her.

The thought some other fucking man might be doing the same left me sucker punched. It wasn't supposed to be this way. It was almost comical how her old man thought stashing her away in Maine could keep her safe.

*I found her.*

*Took her.*

Made her mine before casting her to the wind. So why did it feel like I was the one who was taken?

“Fuck.” I tipped my head back, eyes caught up to the sky finding the North star shining bright like a beacon.

“Shit,” Tank groaned. “Please tell me we aren't going back. My nuts don't like the cold.” His real name was Rogan but ever since our short stint in Maine, his new road name, Tank stuck.

“Bullshit,” I snorted. You found plenty of college girls to keep them warm.”

He smirked. “I sure did. But now I only want one. Are we driving or flying?”

“I need to settle shit here before I make another move on her.”

“You should've just kidnapped her like we had planned. Now she's free fucking around while you're here wishing you had her chained up in your room.”

“You fucked up too! I saw you stalking Brandi's socials just twenty minutes ago.”

“I can't forget her.”

“I can't forget, Savvy either.”

I whistled between my teeth. “Taking her now will only escalate the war between the Clubs. Sure, I was with her under his nose and Savvy would die before confessing it to her old man and his Club. But taking her hostage isn't something to do lightly. We'll need to move our women and kids outta state to the safe houses at another Charter. We need to tell the other

Bastards it's on. I don't want their help though. We got this on our own. I don't need anyone to fight my wars."

"You need the other Chapter's blessing though."

"And we'll get it."

"Savannah?"

"I'm wifing that shit someday. Then, I'm taking his Club—disbanding it.

Everything The Outlaws have will be ours. I'm sick of their shit, thinking I'm soft just because Tarak stepped back."

"I'll make the calls. Set the meet in case the girls don't leave Bradbury willingly. I can't do this love torn shit anymore and I know Brandi still loves me. You think Savvy is gonna just let you show up at her door and pack her up?"

"No, Savvy is gonna fight like hell," I grinned. "And I wouldn't want to any other way. Good thing we have the Vegas chapter at our back with one being a Justice of the Peace. It'll be all buttoned up and legal with now way out for her. I'll marry her next week if that's what it takes to keep her with me."

"She's gonna leave scratches all over your back."

"Fucking, right," I nodded as Tank went back inside. Tipping my head up to the sky, I made my first vow to her. "I'm coming back for you, Savvy. This time there's no going back. You're the final chess piece on the board, baby girl and I only play to win."

The stars didn't respond. She was somewhere out there tonight and if I ever find out Dean touched her, I'd slay him too.

PART  
ONE

PREVIOUS SUMMER....

# CHAPTER

# 1

*River*

“WHERE’S TARAK?”

“The baby couldn’t sleep again he muttered something about reflux. He snapped her car seat in and took her on a desert drive.” Bean shrugged before lighting up his cig.

“No more smoking in the clubhouse, it’s not good for the babies.”

He rolled his eyes. “The pussies have made us pussies.”

“Fucking right,” I rolled my shoulders feeling the rising tension in me settle right between the blades.

“Everyone up! The warehouse was raided! We need to ride!”

“The fuck?!” I spun around as Wade, the Sergeant in Arms, and Blaze who’s the club’s Road Captain barge in. I grabbed my cut, checked my gun and started making my way down the hall using my fist to pound on the locked doors where my brothers were shackled up with Club girls to keep them warm.

It might be past midnight in the dead of a desert winter, but some are always lucky enough to find the desert heat.

I don’t fuck Club girls.

My dick is selective.



My old man had more STD's than a whore house outside Vegas and watching him die from them was enough to keep my junk tucked in my pants.

The Royal Bastards took me in when I was nothing but a dirty, homeless thirteen-year-old. Tarak became blood. I respect the fuck outta my Prez but ever since he married Amber, he spends more time in the bedroom than at Church.

Our enemies know he's buried balls deep in his lady. This is the third hit on our merc in months.

Something's gotta give but I know Tarak won't give up his new starring role as Baby Daddy.

My nostrils flared at the smoke curling up high into the desert sky. Whoever hit us didn't just steal hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of stolen cars and bikes.

They lit our shit up like the Fourth of July. It was a bold statement to make. Just the sight of the Royal Bastard patch used to be enough to guard our turf. Seems like those days are over. I rode my Harley right through the flames itching to get at my leather cut.

"Danny!" I screamed as smoke choked my lungs. Danny was in charge of the yard. I could barely see through the black smoke as I raised my head scarf in front of my face. Fire licked the tips of steel-toes boots. "DANNY!" I roared as parts of the interior roof collapsed. It began to rain fire. Specks of burning ash fell. This was hell. The smell of burned steal, the heat, flames of fire all around you that were unescapable. But Danny was my brother. I swore an oath.

"River?!" Strong steady hands grabbed my shoulders just as I was ready to sprint through the burning flames. "No."

"Tarak? 'Bout time you fucking got here!"

His eyes narrowed behind the cloth he held in front of his face. Tarak still had the Prez patch even if I thought he lost the right to it.

"I can't find Danny!"

“We can’t help him if he’s in there! Let’s search around back.”

I followed Tarak as we dogged falling debris to the back perimeter of the building. Some of our men were hauling what might be salvageable from annex buildings. It was my job to find Danny. Everyone trusted me to do it. *I couldn’t fail.*

My cell was burning to the touch, I was surprised the damn thing still functioned as I hit call.

“Fuck!” Tarak took off following the ringtone coming from the edge of the fence fifty feet away.

I saw his body lying in the desert.

A rage like I’ve never felt rose from the center inside me.

Blood trickled down the side of his head. His glazed eyes went right through me. Tarak knelt in the dirt; two fingers pressed to Danny’s throat.

He shook his head indicating what I already knew.

“They’ll fucking pay for this.”

His somber eyes agreed. Tarak took out his knife, cut his Prez patch right off his cut and tossed it at my feet. “I don’t deserve that anymore. I lost my right to wear it. This shit is all on me. But you’ll be the one to right it.”

Stunned, my fingers felt frozen despite the black burns on the tips as I picked up the patch from the ground. I held it as my free hand closed Danny’s eyes for the last time. “Rest in peace, brother.”

I felt my brothers at my back, having silently gathered. I knew there would be church.

A vote.

But not until we held a Club funeral for Danny. Sirens filled the distance. We didn’t call this in but smoke like this on a clear desert night would be seen a county over. Involving the authorities is something we never do. Standing, I gave my first command, “take him for one last ride. Razor and Sharpie you stay with me and deal with all that.” I gestured to the firetrucks

and police about a quarter mile away. “The rest of you clear out. I’ll text you for Church. Could be an all-nighter clean up.”

Wordlessly the men, headed out. Tarak’s stood behind me, hands on his hips. At his nod of approval, everyone did what I said.

Me.

River.

The kid-turned-man who might just be ready to step into the shoes of the once legend.



“You nervous?” Razor asked as we waited for the rest of the men to get to the Clubhouse. We buried Danny at the base of the mountain that’s visible from out back.

“Fuck, no. I was born for this shit.”

Razor raised a brow, saying no more. Ever since the fire three days ago, I had barely slept.

It was like an auto-pilot function I never knew I had, switched on. There was no vote but in my gut the role was already mine—*Prez of the Royal Bastards, Santa Fe*.

Tarak shuffled past, bleary and bloodshot eyed. The weight of all this was on his shoulders and he knew it. His brother-in-law, Edge’s crew temporarily had our backs as we took care of Danny and dealt with the fire marshal and cops.

No one would fuck with us while Edge and Tarak’s sister, Regan were on watch. Shit, Regan is just as fierce as Edge. If only we had a more formal alliance sooner, maybe Danny and our merc wouldn’t be ashes and dust. But you can’t live life thinking about maybe or should haves.

Once Tarak took his seat, he waited for the rest of us to take ours. The sound of the gavel had us raising our heads. “I’ve failed each and every one of you and I’ve failed this

Club. I've already made my calls to the other Chapters. It's time for me to give up my patch never the brotherhood.

I'll ride and die to the end for each and every one of you. But I failed Danny and this Club. My mind was on other things. Usually, a man thinks long and hard about succession plans. I didn't have to. My plan is a gut reaction but one I know is right. My vote is for River to replace me as head of this Chapter of the Bastards. Hugo?"

"Aye."

"Diego?"

"Aye."

"Jinx?"

"Aye."

"Razor?" His eyes briefly flicked to mine.

"Aye."

"Sharp?"

"Aye."

"Rogan"

"Aye," he muttered, raising his glass to Danny's empty seat.

"It's settled then." The gavel banged, sealing my new fate.

"He needs a new road name as Prez."

All eyes glanced at me. "Blade. 'Cause River here is about to stick one in the back of the Outlaws."

"Blade it is," I agreed, swallowing hard. The weight of what I know carry settling in low. I will not let my brothers down. I will see the Outlaws buried.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Savannah*

THE MEN DIDN'T CELEBRATE. They were as somber as death itself despite to be the ones bringing it.

I know my father hadn't slept for two days. Half the men slipped through the border with the cars and chrome they stole from the Bastards.

The Melendez Cartel owned it now while the Outlaws got paid in cash and drugs.

I bit my lip as my dad's second screeched into the yard.

This couldn't be good.

I swept my hair into a quick pony and slipped out my door. We lived in the Clubhouse. I occupied a generous room on the third floor above the sex and mayhem my father half-heartedly attempted to shield me from.

But hey, this was Club life. There's no sense shielding me from the ways of it. As soon as I got downstairs, I made my way behind the bar, wiped down bottles, tidied up all the while trying not to make too much noise so I could eavesdrop in on the men.

"It's official. River is the new Prez."

"Any word on other Chapters joining Santa Fe for the blowback?"



“No, River wants to go it alone.”

“Cocky kid. He can’t be over twenty. Shit can the kid even drink in a bar?” Linc, snickered causing the other men to join in. I think they were expecting Edge to join the Bastard’s or Tarak’s enforcer, Gunner to take the place at the head of the table, River was a mystery; an odd choice.

To me that made him dangerous. An unknown quantity was always trouble. The men wouldn’t listen to me anyway even if I was to voice an opinion. Women were for sex and making babies. For pouring drinks or mopping them up. At least that’s what my grandpop would always say.

Fuck that.

I might want the sex part, but no one would oblige me. Being the Prez’s one and only was often a curse. Who was I fooling, not one OUTLAW in this Chapter made me want something. The Canada Chapter was another story. But he’s a country full of miles away. The only way to get there is at night in my dreams.

“When do you think they’ll hit?”

“Probably by dawn. The kid will want to make a move. Prove his Prez patch by riding hard. We should lock n’ load. Three of us should set up out by the road and pick them off one by one with the long rifle. They’ll never make it to our front door.”

I kept wiping the counter. It sounded too easy. All of it. I knew they took out one of the Bastards. Linc even bragged about it when he was half a bottle in the other night. Death meant payback. That’s just how it goes. Everyone knew that. The only question is which one of the Outlaws will be taken down.

“It was a stupid move to kill just to prove a point.”

Linc jumped from his seat, his eyes narrowed as he glared at me. “What do you know about anything? Daddy’s princess,” he hissed as he came up to the bar.

My shoulders straightened. Linc was a huge, tatted up piece of muscular man meat but his attitude killed any appeal

he might've had.

“What do I know?” I cocked a hand on my hip, throwing the dish rag over one shoulder. “I know killing to make a point is stupid as shit. You took all their shit then blew up their building. Killing their man stationed there was fucking dumb! He was somebody's son or brother...” I broke off feeling my face heat. I had a brother. Once. A long time ago before this life in the MC ripped him from this world. His name was Jason and it hurt too much to think about him sometimes.

Linc leaned in close but whatever he was about to say was interrupted by my father opening the door so hard it smacked against the wall. “Church in twenty.” He strode to his back office without another word.

With a sigh, I took out his favorite bottle of tequila pouring three fingers neat. Drink in hand, I made my way to his shut office door, knocking three times.

“What is it, Savvy?”

“Just this.” I opened the door placing the drink down on his desk. My father is in his prime at fifty. Jacked. In shape. But the lines furrowing his brow seemed deeper today. His eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. He tipped his head, downing the drink in one long swallow.

“The warehouse hit wasn't my idea. Linc saw an opportunity and took it. He didn't wait for orders.”

I sucked in a breath. “He went outside the code?”

My father nodded. “And he's out there, cock strutting his shit like it don't stink?”

“Yep,” he sighed settling back in his cracked leather seat. “That's what happens when a man gets too comfortable. Tarak and the Bastards have been easy targets these last few years. At first, we took a nibble like a desert jack rabbit in a garden. A few nibbles turn into a daily meal and then Linc—he cannibalized their whole fucking operation. The cherry on top was taking out their man.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Sit.” He moved the picture hanging behind his desk, opened a safe and took out a manilla envelope. “I had hoped it would never come to this for you. But I’m your old man and planned for everything.”

“What’s this?” An Arizona driver’s license fell out with my face and a name I’d never seen before. Credit cards and cash followed. A thumb drive fell out last. He picked it up, handing it to me.

“This is your new life. Shit’s about to go sideways and I can’t have my baby girl near any of this. If anything happened to you after—” He broke off eyes glistening.

“... Ty.” I finished for him. My brother’s untimely death still stung after all these years as if it was fresh.

“I’m sending you north.”

“How far north?”

“As far as I can while staying in this country. You’ll be Savannah Graystone. No one will suspect an alias with your real first name or look for you in the bumfuck town I found. I’ve enrolled you in a small private university in Maine twenty minutes south of Canada in case you need a quick extraction by the Bastards.” Still too stunned by this, I processed everything he was saying while he booted up his laptop and printed an email before handing it to me. It was an acceptance letter to Bradbury College in Fort Kent, Maine. “No one can know about this. Not even my most trusted men. After what Linc pulled... some will take his side. Others mine. The Club’s loyalty is about to be tested at the worst time. River will strike and strike hard. Tarak’s no fool. He’d never hand over his patch to a man not worth it. Too much shit is blowing up at once. I need you to take all this. Don’t pack shit, it’d cause suspicion. Take your bike and the pledge. I’ll let it be known you are going to the safe house to get out of the line of fire. From there you give him the slip.” He handed me a burner phone next. “In there is a text from my new burner with instructions on where I stashed a car for you. It’s one we ripped from the Bastards before Linc torched the place. All the paperwork is legal and registered to you. Insured and all.”

“This is just happening all so fast. What’s my major?”

“Undeclared. This is the biggest gift I could give you girl. A blank slate. Freedom from all this...”

A hot tear slipped out before I even knew it. “I’m not sure I even want all that. My life’s here. My friends... all I know is this life. I’ll probably be shit at a new one.”

“You won’t know until you try one on.”

“That’s deep.”

“Yep. You deserve better, Savvy then this life. Then where your brother ended. I can’t risk Linc hurting you if he catches wind on what I have planned for him.”

“And what is that?”

“It’s best you don’t know. Go. Go girl and don’t look back. When things simmer down, we’ll discuss your return. Although by then you might not want to.”

“The desert heat is in my blood. I had plans to be the first female Prez.”

He cocked a brow. “You’re too good for this life, princess. I think you’ll like what you find in the back of the car I left. You better get a move on. Classes start in three days.”

“How did you even pull this off I never even applied to college?” I shook my head in disbelief that all these doors just opened.

“You deferred for a year to volunteer at an orphanage in Haiti according to your admission essay.”

“The fuck?”

“I paid twenty grand to get fudge your transcripts and SAT scores. Our Chapter in Boise has a lock on all this college pay for play shit. It’s a damn good business.”

“I was never a student.”

“Nope you weren’t, but you’re as smart as they come, Savvy.”

“Maybe my mouth?” I joked trying not to cry. He was home. Imperfect. Built like an Ox with bad manners, he was all I had ever known. My mom was a stripper in Albuquerque who left when I was about five. She left Dad for a drug lord in Mexico. He never talks about her. Hell, I don’t even know if she’s still alive.

“Come here.”

I walked into his open arms my hot tears falling on his shirt. “Ssh, don’t cry. It’s what’s best for my baby girl.”

Three hours later and I was sneaking out the window of the safe house under the watchful eye of moonlight and a thousand desert stars. The burner cell had an app with coordinates.

A mile down the dirt road from the safe house I found a Range Rover Sport. She was black with a beautiful light tan interior the color of my favorite foamy latte.

I popped the trunk finding literally at least five grand worth of new clothes. “What in the hell? Oh, hell no.” I lifted a pair of faux fur fuzzy boots with chunky heels. Everything had a label on it. I wondered if Dad bought all this shit or if it was part of the load of goods The Outlaws had taken from the Bastards.

“Well at least now I know where you went for three days. Doing all this shit.” I closed the trunk and turned on the engine. I had a full tank of gas, a new name and shit ton of faux fur trimmed clothes.

The car alerted me my destination was 37 hours away. “Fuck me,” I breathed. I’d never traveled much. Sometimes Dad would let me join the runs to California or Texas.

Never north.

I bit my lip wondering if I could squeeze in a pit stop to New York City. I mean I wasn’t wearing half that shit. A text on my burner had me pulling over.

**UNKNOWN:** *Remember, you’re a new person now. Change your hair. Dress different. Blend in. Don’t draw*

*attention to yourself. People will know I sent you into hiding. Don't let them find you.*

**Me: KK**

I put the phone down and put the Rover into reverse. I guess I'd have to trade in my snakeskin boots and turquoise rings for faux fur and Uggs. I'm not changing my hair though. F that. My long brown locks are my pride and joy. The one time I attempted to change them in junior high they turned orange instead of "sun-kissed" like the box advertised. \

Lost in my thought, I drove for eight hours straight before turning into an off-interstate dinner. I drank four cups of coffee black with sugar while passing on the pancakes I really wanted, choosing a breakfast sandwich instead. Carbs would make me sleepy, but protein might keep me awake. I opened the new Mac Pro that was also inside the car and hooked up to the free Wi-Fi so I could check out Bradbury. It looked sleek. Expensive. But I'd be lying if it was anything short of magical. The kind of magic you once believed as a kid when watching Christmas movies. Old stone buildings covered in snow with soft glowing lights were on every landing page. Students dressed in designer puffer coats sporting cheeks reddened from the wind. I never dreamed of stepping into a world like this. Nerves made my palms sweat just a bit. But I was the Outlaw Princess. I had survived so much shit living in the desert. Rattlers and scorpions the least of it. No, rich preppy as fuck private college was going to get the best of me. I left a twenty on the table and stood tall. "Ready or not motherfuckers, here I come." My turquoise sterling silver rings still adorned my fingers. I wasn't taking those babies off until I reached the border of Maine.

## CHAPTER 3

*River*

“THAT’S HER? THE PRINCESS?” My voice dripped disdain despite my quickening pulse. She was stunning. With a stubborn chin. Don’t fuck with me deep brown eyes. Whoever said brown wasn’t a beautiful color was a moron. Her hair was dark as the desert night, long and full.

“She’s tall for a girl.”

My response was a grunt as my gaze lowered to her curvy, tight body.

“The Outlaw Prez is a moron for having a daughter so fine.”

Some of my men snorted. They knew what I had in mind. But rape is against all MC codes. I wouldn’t go there. No, I’d have to be the honeypot for a change. She’d beg me to take her. And her and her father would be none the wiser. I had the whole fantasy cooked up in the five-seconds I stared at the picture my number three procured from the best underground private detective in three states.

“What are you thinking?” Jinx eyed the beauty I was still staring at.

“I have them right where I want them. The Outlaws think I’m hot-headed just because I’m young. I know some of you wanted to ride as soon as we buried Danny. I held you back. That’s what they were expecting, and I haven’t given it to

them. I don't want to just smash and grab. Burn them for burning us. I'm taking the whole fucking chapter out. The easiest way to release our anger is to hit them hard right now. Quick and fast. The rage I feel... they deserve the slow burn." I crossed my jean clad leg over the other, felt the warm smoke move into my lungs as I took a drag, pausing before I completed my thought. "The agonizing fall when your brain processes your death while your body frantically tries to hang on."

"I dunno, boss man. Patience and me never got along." Blade's knee was bouncing, his fist curled and uncurled. My men wanted blood. I did too. But I could wait for it. They couldn't.

I stood, paced the worn floor, stretched my neck left then right until I heard the bones crick, releasing the tension that's plagued me. I walked to the small window in the left corner of the room, looked out at the desert sky wondering what waited for me out there. Death, Vengeance, or maybe both. My lips thinned as I turned to face them.

"Fine. But we do this my way. It won't be what they're expecting. No bikes. No screaming engines. We're fucking ninjas. Got that? We're going hit them like Cobras. Fast and deadly, with nothing but fang marks as our calling cards."

"Shit. If Blade has no patience, I have no stealth?" Diego grunted. The corner of my mouth lifted. Diego is pushing three hundred pounds of muscle. He's too big to ride so he's out main driver. He had one hell of a shot though. Diego could hit a target with both eyes shut.

"All right, let's head out and do some recon. Not their Club. I want to scout their homes, their gyms, their favorite place to take a shit. They are a club of twenty-seven. We'll divide up the numbers and assign each of you a cluster. We'll have church in two days. I want reports with pictures, timestamps, stalk their asses. Pretend they were the first girl to dip your dick and dumped you cold after."

"That shit never happened to me."



I rolled my eyes. “I’m making a point Jinx. Stalker mode is on. We need a plan before we strike. Diego, you don’t blend in for shit.”

“I could be your eyes in ears in the gym, boss.”

My fingers stroked my chin. “Fine. But cover your Club tats if you get made alone, they’ll take a barbell to your head.”

Diego’s eyes darkened. “Like to see those fucks try.”

“Don’t start any shit. It’ll be hard. Bite your tongue, bide your time.” My eyes floated back over to the glossy photos of the girl whose heart I was gonna wreck. “Revenge can taste sweet.” I spoke the words more for myself.

“Who are you gonna tail, boss?”

I walked over to the bar and picked up a photo, “her.”



“There’s no way this will work.”

I shrugged. “Bet it does.”

“What’s the big crisis?” Tarak’s sister Regan blew into the clubhouse like a tornado. The woman has an energy about her. She scared the shit out of me. Only a man like Edge could tame her ass. Tarak’s wife, Amber, and another woman I recognized but couldn’t place, followed.

“Prez here thinks he’s gonna pass as some privileged college boy. Our Boston Chapter pulled some strings and managed to enroll him to some fancy-smancy ivy league college in Maine. Hacker falsified his records and got ‘em a new identity. Prez is now a preppy, rich boy with stellar high school transcripts.”

Regan’s eyes took me in from head to toe. A blush broke out before I could stop it. “Damn, woman you are making me feel naked. Edge is gonna kick my ass,” I teased.

“You’re a bit young for me.”

“Please. Youth just means stamina, babe.” I winked.

She slowly walked around me, getting a full 360 view. I flexed my ass and pecs. Made that shit dance.

“Well, you definitely have that dumb as fuck college boy shit eating grin.”

I folded my arms across my chest. “And?”

“You need a wardrobe change. Don’t get anymore ink. I brought the best hair and makeup artist in Santa Fe.

“The fuck?”

“Are you going undercover?”

“Something like that.”

“I’m thinking...broody jock?” Amber pursed her lips, cocking her head.

“Shy, genius. Nerd with glasses?” The makeup artist chimed in.

“I can play guitar and throw a football like a canon.”

“No. No sports. You’ll draw too much attention.”

Rogan shook his head. “I’ll join a Frat then.”

Jinx spewed out his beer.

“All right. Let’s get on with it.” I splayed my arms wide as the three women still eyed me.

“Sorry, but I think your beard needs to go.”

Sighing, I rubbed it. It took forever to get it just how I wanted. If I was gonna pull this off, I knew I had to morph from Prez of the Royal Bastards Santa Fe to college frat boy and I had less than three days. My intel told me she was already up there. Classes had already begun. I missed orientation week and the first week of class. Luckily for me, The Boston Chapter hooked me up with class notes, an excuse of a death in the family. Which happened to be true, and they had also managed to get me a furnished log cabin rental.

“Hunter. Hunter Northport.” That’s your new alias?

I grabbed the fake birth certificate from Rage. “... I am going hunting up North,” I muttered. *For a certain girl...* I

finished in my head.

“Come on we need to go shopping.” Regan snapped her fingers expecting me to follow.

“I’m not your dog, woman.” I growled, suddenly feeling irritated.

“Nope, but for the next two hours... you will be my bitch.”

“Damn that sounds kinda hot,” I admitted.

She winked as she opened the door. “Doesn’t it though?”

“What are you doing?” I tried closing the door in Jinx’s face.

“Somebody’s gotta load all them shoppin’ bags,” he drawled.

“I’m gonna make that girl pay,” I hissed as Regan got into her truck, making me ride bitch just like she said.

“Who?”

“Nobody,” I growled. “Let’s just get this over with.”

“You’ll need a laptop and crossbody bag.”

“Crossbody what?”

“Never mind,” Amber giggled. “This is going to be fun. I haven’t been out since the baby was born.”

“What like a day ago?” I rolled my eyes. The woman seemed to always be pregnant.

“Almost two weeks. My breasts hurt. Shit, I forgot to pump!”

Jinx’s eyes rounded as she began massaging her nips. “Somebody shoot me,” I groaned.

“Don’t worry mama, we’ll pump and dump at the mall.” Regan replied reassuringly.

“I don’t even want to know.” I shut my eyes.

“What’s wrong college boy? A little human anatomy gotcha all squeamish?”

“Shut up, Regan. Damn, I don’t know how Tarak ever put up with you.”

“He didn’t.” She flashed a grin as her foot hit the gas

“What do you know of The Outlaw Princess. You know the Prez’s girl?”

“He has an ol’ lady?” Regan shook her head. “I didn’t know that.”

“No. Not a woman. His little girl.”

“What? No! You can’t.” The woman all gasped at the thought I was breaking all MC code. The one that is an unspoken agreement between warring Clubs. The rule that our woman are sacred. Untouchable.

“Relax ladies. She won’t be able to resist me. All I’ll have to do is crook my finger and she crawl on her knees to be with me.”

“Ugh-huh,” Regan rolled her eyes.

“Danny. Her old man put the hit on him and torched over 800k worth of merchandise. I can’t just walk away from that. She’s daddy’s little sweetheart. The one chink in his armor. The thing that will end this war before it even begins.”

“I dated him. Danny. A few years back.” A lone tear trickled down the right cheek of the familiar girl who had been silent until now.

“Ah, that’s why you seemed familiar.”

“What are you going to do to her?” My eyes met Regan’s in the mirror.

“Besides pop her cherry and take pics of the nail marks she leavers across my back? Break his fucking heart. Tear it out and leave a trail of her tears in the desert dust? Not much more than that.”

“Asshole,” Mouse breathed.

“Don’t worry she’ll be plenty satisfied,” I winked as the truck rolled on.

“She doesn’t deserve to be caught up in this. Women and kids are off limits.”

“Not after Danny. They shot him at point blank. He was unarmed.”

“Leave her high and dry then. Just make sure you get yours.” Regan’s mouth hardened into a fine line. Damn that woman was fierce. I shook my head imagining all the different ways Edge tried to tame her. My hands flexed on the wheel as I thought about taming the enemy. “Don’t blow my cover ladies. If any of you leak this shit... I won’t have any protection up North. I’m going completely off the grid with this.”

“Please. We might not wear a patch on a leather cut but we’re as ride or die as they come.”

“Just take me shopping, don’t hurt me and do your magic.”

“Why are you turning here? The mall is straight.”

“Shut up and go with it.”

“I might be young but I’m still your new Prez. Show some friggin’ respect. Don’t speak to me like that again.” I growled.

Her eyes cut over to me. “Damn that was kind of hot. I love an alpha bossing me around. Relax, Prez we need to get you cleaned up first.”

“This is my salon. I’m closed today so no one will know you were even here.” The cute woman sitting next to Jinx finally spoke.

Ten minutes later I had a very warm towel wrapped like a turban around my head and over my face while she worked getting the tools, she need to shave my beard.

I shut my eyes, while my fists clenched. My beard was like my dick. I need them both to feel like a man... fuck I hated this girl from the Outlaws something fierce. I kept losing shit because of that crew. Pieces of myself scattered all across the desert. Maybe that’s just MC life though. You gain a brotherhood but at what cost?

Five hours later, I walked back into the Clubhouse a different man. I raised a finger, “Not one word. Not one out of any of you. I’m doing this shit for Danny and The Club.”

The door to my back office slammed shut behind me.

I needed to maintain my street cred even if I looked like a punk ass bitch frat boy after my mini makeover.

“Fuck,” I swiped a hand down my cleanly shaven face, feeling the smooth skin. A growl erupted from my throat as I caught my reflection in the cheap wall mirror.

I looked young.

The skin on my face was paler than the rest of me once I was shaved so the woman made me go into a frigging tanning bed. I smelled like coconut cream and perfume since the three of them all had their hands on me in one way or another while they held up clothes against my frame to see if the fabric colors were ‘good with my skin tone’ or some shit.

“Yeah?” I turned my head at the knock. “The fuck did you do?” My eyes widen as Rogan ducks in.

He’s dressed in all athletic apparel with a ball cap turned backwards on his head. He didn’t shave off his beard but trimmed it short. “I’m playing football. You didn’t think I was gonna let your ass crack all those college girls without a wingman?”

“No. We’re too exposed if you go to.”

“I’ve got to watch my Prez’s back.” He tossed me a set of keys. “Look out the back.”

I whistled. “No shit.” A perfectly restored Ford Bronco sat proud. The chrome glistening under the fading sun. “What year?”

“1990, I rebuilt her from scratch. Took me about five years and lots of fucking sweat. She busted my balls but rides like a good bitch. My bags already in the back.”

“Fuck, bro. You really want to go to Maine?”

“I’ve never left the desert. Never had much until the Club. I figure it’ll expand my mind and all that shit those teachers promised in school before I dropped out.”

“You realize you need to go to class and learn and shit.”

He shrugged. “I’m on the football team we get tutored and the tests in advance.”

“Fine. You can come as long as your ass does my assignments too.”

“Shit.”

I grinned for the first time in hours. “I’m still your Prez, whether we’re undercover or not. Got it?” He nodded. “Good lets fucking ride.”

# CHAPTER 4

MID SEPTEMBER

*Savannah*

“STOP IT!” I hissed through my teeth. “Can you just sit still?” My fist clenched in annoyance as I tried to continue typing my notes. It’s my fourth classic lit lecture and there’s no way I would’ve missed the huge asshole sitting next to me if he’d been in the first two.

He keeps bouncing his left leg completely ignoring me. The movement causes the back of his seat to keep bumping into my leg, jostling the laptop, causing me to misspell words as my fingers hit the wrong keys.

He’s so big the tiny seat won’t fit his body. It’s cold as shit here in the morning and I’m already sporting a goose downed coat to my classes but the body heat radiating from this oaf next to me has me almost in a sweat.

His gray sport hoody is over his head but every now and then when he breathes in deeply, I catch a glimpse of his dark chiseled jaw and patrician nose.

He’s slouched in his seat filming the lecture with his iPhone in one hand while tapping his fingers on the back of the seat in front of him. Even his smell is getting on my nerves; warm cotton, fresh pine, and vanilla.

My eyes lower to his bare knee.



Of course, he's in shorts. His body temperature must naturally be over 98 degrees.

"Stop checking me out. I'm not into all that." He gestures to me without even turning his head.

"Excuse me?" Miffed, my shoulders straighten, and I flip my hair.

"You heard me."

"Neanderthal," I breathe low as several students look over, annoyed we are distracting them from their copious note taking. "I think it's stupid to record lectures when you'll have to just sit and watch them again to learn anything. Note taking is still the way to go."

He ignores me, yawns and stretches his free hand. "I have learning disabilities. I can't type fast or spell." He finally turns to look me in the face and my breath stops as my brain short circuits.

His eyes are as dark as a starless desert sky. One ebony lock had fallen across his tanned forehead.

He's male perfection.

A Greek God sent from the past just to piss me off with his gorgeousness. He's the opposite of the bearded, tatted up types from back home. He's fucking perfect and I feel like such a bitch for calling him out by having assumptions.

With that class is over and I keep staring stunned as he turns and leaves not even looking back once.

Burned.

He burned me and the taste in my mouth is dry ash.

"Who is that?" A girl from the next row asks her friend.

"Hunter Northport. He's pledging Beta Pi. I saw him at the party Sunday night. He's broody as fuck. Every girl tried something with him... he just sat by the fire, drinking tequila straight while ignoring them all."

The other girls sighed while I finally snapped out of it to slide my MacBook into its protective carrying case.

I needed coffee.

The strong, hot, Mexican blend from home.

The kind I couldn't find once I drove north of Florida on I-95. I should've brought some with me, but I was in too much of a daze to think about it.

"I haven't seen him in class before..." The girls are still chattering about Hunter as I roll my eyes behind them.

"He had a death in his family, so he arrived on campus late."

"Ohhh, the poor thing..."

The group puts hands over their hearts. Hunter Northport just became elevated even more in their minds.

A broody, dark hero in pain that each daydreamed their soft touch could heal.

Me?

I didn't want to ease his pain or think I am some fucking good girl with soft hands and honey words to heal his bruised soul.

I'm the anti.

The villainess with dark hair and nails that'll rip your back to shreds.

*No.*

I'm not a healer.

*I'm the girl who'll just fuck you up even more.*

The guys on campus already sense that about me. Makes them want me even more. I don't throw myself at any of them.

If anything, I ice them all out.

The few parties I've gone to I drank for free, smoked a joint and rebuffed the captain of the football team before turning on my high-heeled leather boots walking out.

I heard the boys made bets on who could be the first to make out with me. I yelled over my shoulder that I was more

into women.

That backfired. The bets only went higher.

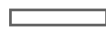
Whenever I see the football team, I flip them the bird and keep going. Two weeks in, I was the baddest bitch on campus and everyone knew it. I just wish I could make a friend or two but even the girls steer clear of me.

I always wanted a man.

Someone to kiss and spoon deep into the night. Someone to wake me up with soft kisses on a bare shoulder, filling me deep to relieve the ache that never seems to go away.

Loneliness.

As much as I front, deep down I've never gotten close to another human soul. I attempt to push my guilty thoughts of how I treated Hunter to the side. Maybe I'll just apologize next time I see him and leave it at that while making it clear I'm not another campus chic trying to fawn all over him.



“You’ve got to be shitting me,” I muttered as None other than Hunter Northport walked into my poly sci class wearing a smirk with three girls giggling in his wake.

It was my last class of the day before I could get the fuck off campus and back to my cozy cabin in the woods. I’d been fantasizing about unwinding with a glass of red, maybe lighting a fire while completing a few assignments.

I turn my head, refusing to make eye contact.

*Don't you fucking dare. Keep going.*

The bastard sits down right in front of me, bypassing dozens of empty seats.

“Can you please move?”

No reaction.

“Excuse me, I can't see the front of the classroom past your shoulders and thick... I mean big head.”

I resort to tapping his shoulder with my pen.

He turns, taking out an ear bud. But by the way his lips try not to curve I can tell the bastard heard me the whole time.

“Can I help you, princess?”

“Yes. By moving. I can’t see around you.”

“But I’m comfortable right where I am.”

My eyes narrowed. I itched to say something snarky. But he clearly had issues besides a learning disability.

I picked up my things, moving a few rows further back and to his left. My eyes strained to read the smart board.

I never realized my vision wasn’t perfect. But then again, wiping down the bar in the clubhouse hardly required perfect eyesight.

I felt his eyes on me, assessing me as I resettled before class started. I turned my head, pretending to glance out the window.

He was watching me.

Intently.

I can’t decipher the look in his eyes. Not quite want. Or hate... it’s something else. Something I can’t place.

I felt as if a target was on my back for the entire sixty minutes. As soon as class was over, I wanted to bolt but got stuck behind ten other students getting out of the same row.

“Mr. Northport, stay a minute.”

I pretended to be preoccupied on my phone while listening to every word...

“...the University is affording you several accommodations. You won’t need to record class as notes will be typed and emailed directly to you. There is also an option to take your tests through an audible app.”

Shame filled me.

He might be an arrogant ass but his learning issues were real.

I meant to apologize but he slipped out the door.

Next time I see him I'll be nice.

Maybe I'll even smile.

Except he avoided me for the rest of the week, slipping into class thirty-seconds before the doors shut and sitting in the farthest free seat from me.

*Whatever.*

F-him.

He got the message just like everyone else. I'm not interested in anyone for anything.

So why does my eyes keep looking for the broody, silent, arrogant, giant everywhere I go?

## CHAPTER 5

*River*

“...YEAH?” I rolled my eyes while cutting through the quad on my way to the next class. Regan’s been lighting up my burner phone since I arrived in Maine. But I needed time to settle in, establish my street cred here. She was on the back-burner of my to-do lists. Something Regan’s not used to.

“Ghosting us already? How’s the Outlaw Princess?”

“She hates me.”

“Good. You listened. I want details. Don’t leave a thing out.”

“I ignored her. Froze her out, refused to give her even one glance while invading her space. Then I lied and told her I was dyslexic... that I had a learning disability when she called me out for not taking notes. I even remembered to spritz on that woodsy cologne you and Mouse went cross-eyed for on my clothes. Now I’m purposefully avoiding her. I think I’m getting under her skin.”

“Nice. But you do have a disability. It’s called being a dumbass.”

“Cute,” I pinch the bridge of my nose as another cluster of girls with fake eyelashes and nails giggled as I passed by.

“Trust me. Keep up the bad boy act and she’ll be yours in no time. Reel her in nice and slow. She’ll be caught in your net

before she even realizes she should've given more of a fight.”

“I was livid. My jaw almost cracked just sitting next to her. I kept seeing Danny’s face. I had to clench my free hand just to stop it from wrapping around her neck. Space from her has been good.”

“A good hate fuck might help.”

“Maybe I should just bail on this plan and kidnap her. I’m not an actor. How am I going to fake falling for her when all I can think about is avenging Danny?”

“You have the patch now. Do whatever it takes. Film that shit and send it to everyone in every fucking MC if you need. Think about bringing them to their knees before you cut their balls off.”

“Maybe I’ll blow their clubhouse up, burn everything and leave them all out back like they did to Danny. After I take their princess prisoner.”

“Good. Mouse and I are handling your social media... Hunter Northport. Just text us pics of you partying and shit. She can stalk you like you’re stalking her.”

“All right. Rogan and I are pledging to a Frat. There’s a rush party later. He also made the football team. Walked on during tryouts. They nicknamed him, ‘Tank.’ It’s a fucking joke up here.”

“Trust me. Keep the hot-hole vibe going and she’ll be creeping you on social media trying to bump into you...”

“I’ve never dated anyone. Never mind fake dating or whatever.”

I practically felt her eye roll through the phone. “Just keep being broody like you are, and she’ll fall on your lap like a bitch in heat.”

I instantly recalled the fire in her eyes, her huff of annoyance at my presence. The way her lip curled as my knee banged into hers. “Doubtful.”

I spent the rest of my day broody as fuck as thoughts swirled in my head of a certain brunette’s plump lips on mine

as I fisted my hands in her hair. Revenge just might be sweet if I can get through the seduction without strangling her first.

She has bitch written all over her.

Her ice queen rep was earned.

At least there's zero chance I'd ever catch feelings.

"Hunter? Hey, I'm Vivi. You're in my Poly sci class."

I'm about to blow her off with an 'I don't give a fuck' response when ice princess comes into view. She doesn't see me yet. I need to change that.

"That's right," I grin, talking a bit too loud, purposefully stopping in the middle of the sidewalk, causing a bit of a jam.

I angled closer, "Do you want to meet up sometime to... ah... catch me up since I missed the first two weeks of class?"

"I'd love to help," she licked her lips.

"I'd love it too," I smirked, laughing low as she giggle flirted right back. Over Vivi's head, I caught ice princesses cold stare. Her brow was scrunched up as she studied the two of us.

She didn't do jack to hide her emotions.

She hated what she was watching. So, I gave her more of a show.

The tips of my sneakers touches Vivi's. "I'm going to a rush party this weekend. Maybe I'll see you there?" My fingers lifted a lock of her hair to twirl around my fingers.

Vivi's hand rested on my forearm, "It's a date."

I grinned as she went in the opposite direction, purposefully waiting until she was out of sight.

"Oops, excuse me," ice princess snarled as her shoulder purposefully checked me.

"I'll see you later, too."

She didn't turn her head but by the way her back straightened I knew she heard. What she didn't know was just how much she was going to be seeing of me.



## CHAPTER 6

*River*

“NOT INTERESTED,” I took a pull from whatever cheap shit beer was on ice at the party, sat back in the chair while continuing to watch the flames. Whoever the girl was, she was pissed. I could give a fuck.

My first keg party.

These stupid shits think it’s all that. I take another pull from my beer missing home, wishing I was with my brothers in the Clubhouse doing shots before going on our Friday night ride.

I’m here in bum-fuck Maine, instead.

“Hey,” Vivi sat on my lap, making herself quite cozy. I was about to brush her off make an excuse I had to take a leak when the sexiest woman alive walked out the backdoor. The stacked silver cuffs at her wrists jingling in time with the bounce of her breasts as she walks in thigh high leather boots.

*Fuck me.*

Her long hair flows down her back. She’s every inch a fucking princess—no a queen.

Vivi’s fingertips turned my chin. “Here, let me wipe up that drool,” she played.

“Nah, it’s not like that.”

“She’s watching us. Should I kiss you?”

“I’m tempted. But it’s all good.”

“My ex is here. I don’t mind making a few people’s hearts wonder.”

“Is he gonna kick my ass?”

“Doubtful,” she snorts, climbing off. “Enjoy the rest of your night. I’ll still give you the class notes.”

“You better,” I winked as she walked off. I was still playing it cool, like my nemesis goddess wasn’t still watching.

“Incoming,” Rogan, who here is called Tank, stands next to me; both our eyes glued to our target. Mine dart away before she notices she’s effecting me.

My mood darkens.

She’s a mark nothing more. So, what if the curve of her ass makes me want to put my hands on it?

“Hey.”

Ignoring her, I continue to stare into the fire.

“I-I uh, I’m sorry for being rude to you in class.”

Still refusing to look at her, I hold out my empty. “I could use another.”

Her anger wraps around me. I guess princess isn’t used to taking drink orders. She must be biting her tongue as she snatches my empty drink, stomping off in her boots.

“That was such a dick move.”

“I’m just getting started.”

“Mind if I go find some cute college ass?”

“Just don’t blow our cover, Tank. No pillow talk.”

He’s as big as a bear but from what I’ve heard has a heart full of gooey chocolate when it comes to the ladies.

Savannah comes back, handing me the drink so fast, cold beer sloshes over the rim, spilling on my hands.

Bringing it to my lips, I sniff then cock an eyebrow. “Did you put drugs in it?”

“Please. You’re hardly my type.”

“I’m everyone’s type. I didn’t catch your name.” The cool foam of the beer slides down easy. This shit was fucking good, making me wonder where she had found it.

“I didn’t give it.”

My brow rose. “High maintenance much?” I coughed into my hands. My beautiful beer was snatched from my hands before I could blink.

“Give it back,” I warned.

The light from the fire danced in her eyes as she dangled it just out of reach. I was transfixed. Helpless as I watched her take the cup to her mouth, placing her lips where mine just were and finishing the cold brew.

*Damn.*

This woman could twist me in more ways than an F-5 in Oklahoma. Lust was a powerful punch in my gut. I was playing right into her hands when I had come here to get her to play into mine.

I rose with a scowl, my eyes fixed straight ahead not even daring a side glance as I brushed past her.

“Hey! Wait... oh, fuck.”

“Chasing me already, darling?” I looked down at her hand on my bare forearm. Her skin the same familiar shade of light coffee as mine.

The reminder of home and desert skies releases the dam of anger that fueled my reasons for being here.

Closing my eyes, I remember Danny and the job I need to do. With Regan’s words in my mind, I turn myself back from King of Santa Fe and back into college boy mode.

“Please,” she snorted. “I’ll never chase a man. I’m Savannah.”

“Never say never. Where you from, *Savannah*?”

“Texas.” She blew out a breath. “I was a real bitch in class. I wanted to apologize. The fresh keg I brought was for you. Where are you from?”

“You brought me an ice-cold keg as an apology gift... ?” This time I did look her straight in the face. “I grew up in a hellhole I prefer not to speak about.” *Truth*.

Her weight shifted in her boots; her teeth sink into those pretty plump lips.

“Sorry,” she winces, “I should’ve brought you two kegs.”

My eyes darkened as we stood close. The smell of her skin enveloping me in spiced vanilla; sweetness with a punch.

“A woman who apologizes like this is a keeper. Too bad you aren’t my type. I prefer big blondes. You see I have big hands. Huge ones.” I hold them up to her face, spreading my palms and fingers wide.

“No shit.”

“Blonde. Big. Get it? Not you. What a shame. Thanks for the apology though...”

“Are you walking away from me?”

“Not used to it?”

Her face turned red under her tan. “I take it back. My apology. You are an asshole.”

“Never said I wasn’t.”

I smirked as I walked away.

I found my keg, refilled and surveyed the scene. This was preschool shit compared to how we partied in Santa Fe.

“Here she comes. Oh yeah, baby.” Tank waggled his fingers in a wave like a fucking fool.

“What are you doing?” I swatted his hand down.

“Look at her. She’s my wet dream.”

Groaning, I took in the big, blonde walking toward us with a determined gleam in her eyes, Savannah whispering to her as they both giggled.

“Here, I found your dream girl and delivered.”

“Oh sweetheart, you shouldn’t have.”

She left me with this monstrosity of boobs, spray tanned skin, glitter makeup topped off with fake talon nails grazing my skin.

“Help,” I mouthed to Tank as she clung to my side.

“Hi, I’m Brandi.”

“And I’m out of here.”

“What?”

“He’s all yours. His name is Tank.”

“But... she said...”

“She got it wrong. Confused me with my buddy here. He’s the one who wanted to meet you. In fact,” I leaned closer. “He told me you were his dream girl. He’s already picturing you in a huge house driving his babies around in a Range Rover Sport. Then taking you upstairs so he can spank you while you scream Big Daddy.”

“Oh,” her eye glazed over. Just like that I was free from her predatory gaze as it switched to focus on Tank. “Do you play football?” She squeezed his flexed pec.

“Sure, do darling. You’d look damn fine in my game jersey.” His eyes devoured her chest.

“Hunter!” A few ballers wave me over to the table where they are playing cups. I shrugged and left Tank with Brandi.

I purposely kept my eyes on the game. Won round after round. I felt her eyes on me more than a few times. But I never met them.

Hands found my shoulders, lips almost brushed against my ear. I shrugged every female off. Drunk and stupid were never turn ons for me.

After cups I played corn hole.

After that I did a few shots.

Tank and Brandi's tongues were now very well acquainted. I needed to take a piss. Instead of fighting my way through a small house stuffed with drunks to find a bathroom, I headed for the large path cutting through the back of the property.

I walked further than I needed. The thick evergreens deafened the noise of the party. The stars were out in huge numbers. It almost reminded me of home.

*Of the desert.*

The quiet only nature can bring; a balm to my soul.

“Get the fuck off me! I'm not into you!”

The hairs on the back of my neck rose. My boots sunk in the worn path as I ran forward.

The roar that ripped from my throat was as primal as a coyote hunting at night.

Some motherfucker had Savannah up against a tree as she struggled. I lifted him from her with my fists, threw him to the icy ground and started pummeling his face.

“No means no, mother fucker!”

Splatters of warm blood fell across my fists. Soon puddles of it formed beneath my feet.

“Enough, you'll kill him.” Her tiny hands at my back had me pause.

Tank and a dozen others broke through the snowbank. “The fuck?”

“He had his hands on her. Against her wishes. Is he your boy?”

“The rest of the fraternity next to Tank nodded.”

“Are you coming at me?”

“Call an ambulance. Party's over. Fuck. Next time don't hit him until he's almost braindead.”

“Pussies. All of you.” I motioned to Tank that we were out, while grabbing Savannah by the elbow.

“I was on my way home. That way.” She pointed behind us.

“Through the woods?”

“Yeah. I came by four-wheeler, strapped the keg to the boat trailer hitched up. The snowmobile paths run through and butts up to my rental.

“Too bad. We are taking you home.”

“I’m fine.”

“Were you? The way I saw it he was minutes away from having you on the ground.”

“I would’ve bit his ear then his dick off.”

“I don’t doubt it. But we’ll still see you home.” She fought but it was useless. My grip on her elbow moved to her waist. “I’m taking you home. Period,” I whispered into her hair.

“Cock tease,” someone coughed as they circled around their boy still down on the ground.

“What was that?” My head whipped around. The stared blankly at me while others attended to the ass wipe on the ground. “Anyone else want a shot?” I threw my left arm wide.

“Easy,” Tank stepped in between me and the rest of the frat boy crew. She was silent as I led our small group to the Bronco. I clicked the remote start button from my key ring. The car’s old and not made for the cold. Something Tank and I didn’t think of until after we experienced cold as fuck mornings as we rode to class.

“Nice ride,” Savannah whistled as I held open the passenger door.

“It’s Tank’s. We’ll come back tomorrow for your four wheeler.”

“Yet you have the keys?”

“I’m the more responsible one.”

Our heads turn together. Tanka and Brandi are kissing as they walk, talking all kinds of cutesy nonsense. After they settle in the back, I round to the driver's side.

“Just direct me. Tank never installed Nav.”

“Just pull out and turn left. My road is about three miles down.”

“You have roommates?”

“I don't play well in the sandbox.”

“No shit.”

“Just let me out this is ridiculous,” she huffs.

“I wish I could. But then when those drunk pencil dicks decide to surprise you at three a.m. with payback...”

“They wouldn't dare.”

“Do you have a badass boyfriend hiding somewhere? There's nothing out here but moose and rustling leaves. You want to chance it?”

“I know people,” she grumbles.

I cut my eyes from the road to glance at her. Her nails are digging into her palms, the bracelets at her wrists jingle as she brushes the hair from her face. The turquoise stones at her wrist another reminder of home. My Apache blood heats wanting revenge. I might run in a warring Club, but I have honor.

The only thing I want to damage is her heart... I wouldn't mark on her skin.

“People?”

“Never mind, my turn is up ahead. It's the dirt road past that rusty mailbox.”

I pulled down the bumpy road, cutting the engine.

“I'm good. Thanks.”

My arm reached across her body, clamping on the door handle she tried to open.



“Wait here until Tank and I check things out.”

Her eyes rolled. “The big, bad wolf isn’t inside waiting for me.”

“I know. Because he’s right here with you, princess.”

Our heads were close. Her eyes dilated. I’m flirting but dead serious. A warning if you will... I figure it’s only fair to speak in parables because this girl has no idea I will eat and devour every inch of her until there is nothing left.

She is my prize.

My vengeance.

And it will be sweet.

“Wait. Here.”

I pulled back instead of kissing her.

“Tank. It’s time to roll.”

My friend’s hands were under Brandi’s sweater, his large palms full of her plump breasts, the bra on the back floor. His mouth clung to her neck making marks.

She had her hand inside his jeans stroking him in return.

“Maybe I should clear the house instead of him?”

My eyes cut to Savannah’s as she looked over from the passenger seat.

“They aren’t turning you on, either?”

“Nope.”

A snort escaped us both marking our first moment of mutual agreement.

“Where are your roommates?” I scanned the darkened windows.

“I live alone.”

In seconds my fist pounded on the Bronco’s roof. “Tank. We’re going in.”

He mumbled curses through kisses before finally tearing his lips off his girl. "I'll be right back baby."

"Bring her in."

"Keys?" I held out my palm.

"I punch in a code."

"Were you going to say anything?"

"No, I was just going to watch you freeze your ass off while figuring it out."

My lips turned up at the corners. I rounded the Bronco to open her door. "Stay behind me, princess."

"Why are you so protective? We hate each other, remember?"

I shrug. "It's in my D.N.A."

"Neanderthal D.N.A." She mutters under her breath as I push her behind me.

The cabin is cozy. The porch creaks under my weight. It's quiet. My forehead presses against the cool, glass window as I peer in.

Savannah deftly punches in a code unlocking the door. My arm snakes around her waist before she can step one foot inside.

"No alarm?"

"Out here? Who is going to come save me? You have to save yourself."

My eyes narrowed as I stared down at her. She's tougher than I realized. The MC life has already touched her in some way. I felt it.

"You don't leave any lights on?"

"Why, when I'm not afraid of the dark?"

"Sweet set up." Tank plunked down on the couch, using the remote to turn on her fifty inch smart tv. "Babe grab us some drinks."

“Did I invite you to stay?” Savannah cocked a hip.

Turning away from her pissed off face, I kneel at the fireplace adding kindling and striking a match. In minutes a fire is blazing.

“Get out of my house.”

“I’m tired. The drive back to my pledge house feels so far. Besides, you owe me.”

“I do? For what?”

“You know what, princess.”

“Stop calling me that. It’s annoying as fuck.”

I sink on the oversized club chair, stretching my long legs out in front. “Babe, grab me an ice water and some snacks.”

Her face turns redder than the flames. “I’m not your bitch, Northport. Get the fuck out of my house.”

“What? You don’t like Babe, either?” I stretch my arms wide as I yawn. “Make me pancakes in the morning.”

“I just ordered a movie…” Tank informs her as he hit purchase on a new release.

“Fuck. Me.” Savannah stomps into her adjoining kitchen as Tank starts kissing his girl again.

Ignoring them, I decide to follow Sass. The tips of her nails tap on the counter. She shuts her eyes, breathes deeply while counting to ten.

“Is it working?”

“Nope.”

Opening her fridge, I help myself to a bottled water. I cross my ankles, leaning against her counter, continuing to watch her attempts to calm down.

“Let’s watch the movie.” Opening a cupboard, I rummage in search of snacks.

“I’m going to bed. You and that circus out there are leaving.”

“That circus? The one you introduced me to? That’s all on you, sweetheart.”

“Just get out of my house.” Her palms land on my pecs, shoving me.

Placing my water down, I snatch her wrists, wrapping her hands around my neck.

“That’s better.” Before she can process what the fuck is going on, my lips land on hers.

*Big fucking mistake.*

Who knew that cherry chapstick tasted so fucking good or that her lips were perfect poison?

All I knew is I wanted more.

Felt like dying just to deepen the kiss so I could find out how much sweeter she could taste.

“Whaatt?”

“Shh, sweetheart... it’s just an experiment.”

My mouth coaxed hers open, I backed her up against the opposite counter, my hand moving up her back, pressing her closer.

She feels damn good in my arms. My hate for the Club she belonged to fueled my passion even more.

Before I lose my head and forget exactly why I’m kissing her, I pull back.

“...not your type?” She smirks at me with lips swollen from our kiss.

I shrug. “Definitely not, I just had to be sure.”

“I’m going to shower. You and that animal better be gone when I’m done.”

I waved my hand in the air. Waited for her to leave before raiding her fridge. I might not feast on her just yet, but I was going to go to town on her food. A big man like me needs to consume at least five thousand calories a day. Tank eats about six.

“Thanks, bro.” Tank plows down the club sandwich I made him before eating the entire bag of Cape Cod chips I found.

“We staying?”

I nod, stretching my arms wide with a yawn.

“Come on sugar, Papa says it’s bed time.”

“You going to tuck me in, daddy?”

“All night long,” he pulls Brandi up.

“There’s an empty room with a futon past the kitchen. Try not to bust it.”

“A futon won’t hold my weight. Or what I’m about to do to her...”

“Savvy is gonna kick your ass.”

“Mine or yours?” He retorts. “Savvy?”

I shrug. “I kind of like the girl.”

His eyes darken as he pulls Brandi into his arms. “Don’t get played by your own game.”

“Not gonna happen.”

He stared at me long and hard while Brandi hung on him. Danny was why we were both here and we both couldn’t afford to forget it.

Her couch was surprisingly comfy. I feigned sleep when she marched downstairs.

“What the fuck?” she hissed.

I added a snore or two for affect.

“Tank?” She rapped a knuckle on the door he had shut after walking away from me.

My body relaxed as I was tensed ready for her tiny fists to make a jab at my ribs.

“We are busy in here.”

“No fucking in my house!”

“That go for you, too darlin’.”

“Ugh!” She pounded on the door as she worked the locked handle.

“Fuck,” she kicked the door, one last time retreating.

My eyes shut as she came back over me; hovering.

I felt the heat of her stare watching me.

“Fuck,” she whispered. Seconds later, I felt a thick blanket drip over me and damn if that didn’t just melt a few chips of ice around my heart.



“I fucking knew it,” I muttered, checking the time on my cell. Three a.m.

Nothing good ever happens at this hour.

Tank’s shadow filled the hall.

“They’re here.”

“Like clockwork,” I muttered, keeping low as I got off the couch. I had dimmed all the inside lights, and drawn her drapes, but I was careful the same.

“How many?” He asked, cranking his neck.

My back pressed to the wall next to her window as I carefully looked out.

“Ten, plus the driver.”

“Fuck. They are surrounding the Bronco.”

“They better not fucking touch my truck. River, I don’t have the restraint for this shit. I wanna do this the way we would handle it in the Club.”

“We can’t. This isn’t New Mexico. There’s no desert canyons to hide bodies in. We gotta do this old school with fists.”

He shrugs. “Fine. But if my truck has one mark on it, I’m taking the bat out.”

I stuffed my feet into my boots, shoved my hands in my jean pockets and opened the door like I didn’t have a fuck to

give.

“Sup?”

Tank stood guard behind me as I approached the group. Some were sloppy drunk, swaying while they mouthed off. Others watched with dark eyes and clenched fists.

“You put our boy in the hospital. That’s what’s up.”

“He had his hands where they weren’t welcome.”

“That bitch is a cock tease. Everyone knows it.”

“So what? You planned to show up here, find her alone and finish the job?”

Their silence was all the confirmation I needed.

“She’s not yours to break motherfuckers.”

“What? Is she... yours?”

“Damn straight, she is.”

They came fast and all at once after that. It’s a good thing the snow hadn’t come yet or it would’ve turned bright red.

Bellows, grunts with the sound of crunching bones was a melody I missed. They kept coming.

But Tank and I still stood.

When they all were down on the ground, the first hint of pain broke through the animal rage that had taken over me.

“You good?” I hollered over to Tank.

“Yep, just starting clean up.”

One by one, Tank started looking for cell phones, taking out the Sim cards and cracking them. Then he smashed the phones for extra insurance so none of this would blow back on us.

I sauntered over to one of the SUV’s, motioned for the shell-shocked driver to lower his window.

“Unlock the car, and help us load your boys in. Don’t ever come back here again.”

“You-you won’t hurt me?”

I stared at the kid in disgust. “I don’t beat a boy who pisses his pants at the thought of a fight. You are way out of your league coming here tonight. Do yourself a favor and don’t join, pledge.” My eyes had cut to the stupid ‘Hello my name is...’ label stuck to his chest.

I shook my head before smiling. “Tank!”

“Yeah?”

I motioned for him to come over then pointed at the sticker. “We are so doing that shit when we get home.”

“Fuck yeah,” he snickered.

“I can’t believe the woman slept through this shit.”

“I do. I took care of mine before tucking her in like a baby.”

I rolled my eyes, wincing as I tasted blood. “Shit. I forgot someone landed a cheap shot as I was pummeling his friend.”

“Did you lose a tooth?”

I checked. “Nope, all good. Get the fuck out of here,” I tapped on the hood of the pledges car after we hauled five guys in by the back of their shirts and slammed the door.

The rest of them stumbled into the other SUV before speeding away.

“This is like old times... eh?”

“I’m so damn glad you’re here with me, brutha.”

“Me, too. I’m going back in to drink some Brandi.”

I stayed out in the cold, dark, autumn night until the rest of my adrenalin wore off.

Sassy was going to be a problem.

She made enemies.

The kind that break the MC code.

I had a duty to protect her from the threat.



Even if she is my enemy's daughter.

“I'm the real threat to you, baby girl. But somehow, I think you might be the biggest threat to me too.” I stared up at the night sky, realizing the stars look the same way here as they do at home.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Savannah*

“PANCAKES. Make me some, woman. Coffee, too. Stong and dark.”

“I’m not your damn waitress.” I slam the cupboards, ignoring the giant on the couch in my living room.

“Eggs, bacon...”

“I’ll take a stack with a side of toast,” another deep voice rumbles.

“The fuck?” I spun around as Tank ambles in my kitchen, bleary-eyed, wearing only his boxers.

“Put some clothes on,” I gestured, spatula in hand.

“Admit it. You like my bear-like body.” He winked, making a muscle pop in his right arm.

I rolled my eyes. “Clothes on. You have too much body hair to be near the food in my kitchen.”

“What? Women love my manly chest hair...”

“We sure do.” Brandi, wraps an arm around his waist, smacking his lips with a hungry kiss.

“Well, at least now I know where your shirt is.” His T hangs past Brandi’s knees.

“I’ll help,” she smiles politely at me, looking way better than I thought she would after last night. Brandi is the type of

girl I pegged who only looks good before midnight and like shit after.

“I thought you’s have raccoon eyes with splotchy skin.”

“Lash extensions and my spray tan. They both last well past beer goggles.”

“I’m hitting the shower.” Tank announces, scratching his six pack.

“You might want to go wake up sleeping beauty,” I reply cracking an egg in the hot frying pan. The sound of it sizzling fails to drown out Hunter’s voice from the other room.

“Did she just call me beautiful? I knew it.”

I felt his presence at my back a few minutes later but I couldn’t turn around. Something is changing between us. Something I’m not sure I’m ready for.

“You’re going to need more eggs.”

“I never said any of this was for you.”

“Feed me woman. After all I did save you twice last night.”

“Twice?” I finished scrambling the eggs before turning to face him.

“When did this happen?” Without meaning to, my fingers grazed the bruise on his right cheek.

“Oh this? Just two cars of drunk Beta Phi’s showing up after three ready to show you their version of a good time.”

I felt my face pale. Despite my bravado, I knew if he and Tank hadn’t stayed a woman’s worst fears could’ve happened to me. I live so far out in the woods the police would’ve been too late. That’s assuming I even got the chance to call.

“Thanks. I was a bit pissed last night. I took pills to help me sleep.”

“What?”

He moves fast for a big man, high-tailing it out of my kitchen, taking my stairs two at a time with me hot on his

heels.”

“Stop! You can’t just tear through my home and into my personal space!”

“Watch me!” he growls, barreling into the master bedroom.

I try to stop him but he has my pills, charges into the bathroom and dumps them into the toilet.

“Never,” he grasps my chin. “...no matter how hard life gets... ever get hooked o that shit.”

“I’m not hooked on anything. I barely take it.”

His nostrils flared. He glared at me hard before chucking the empty pill bottle in the trash.

“I hate you.”

“Whatever, one day you’ll hate me even more.”

“I don’t doubt it.”

We stared at each other for a beat. I swear they way he looked at me as if some secret was about to spill out of his lips.

“Nice stuffie.” His gaze finally moves past me to my squishmellow cat on the bed.

“My dad snuck it in with my things. I didn’t even know it was... there.”

The change in him iced the room.

Was it something I said?

“I’m hungry,” he growled moving past.

“The absolute fucking nerve...,” I muttered, making my bed. “To storm in my home uninvited, eat everything, play fucking superhero and assume I’m addicted to pills? Hunter Northport can take his swaggering, muscular, sexy ass back to his dorm room right mother-fucking now.”

“Uh..., I came to see if you were okay?”

“Just peachy, Brandi.”

“Hey, no need to be a bitch to me.”

“You had sex on my futon. So yeah, I can.”

“We-he... took care of me. I’m not that type of girl and we slept on the floor. Tank didn’t want to chance breaking your futon.”

“How chivalirous.”

“They kicked major ass for you. The least you could do is thank them.”

*Fuck she was right.*

“It’s just hard for me.”

“Saying thank you?”

“Needing anyone for anything... I’m a loner and I’ve gotten comfortable being this way.”

“It shows. You have a mega bitch rep on campus.”

“After last night, I’m sure it’ll only get worse.”

“That’s why you need two bad ass boys having your back, yeah?”

“Yeah,” I smiled, “coffee, first and maybe an apology after.”



I tried studying but when the sound of the floors creaking under my feet were the only thing breaking the silence, loneliness crept in.

It was unfamiliar.

I enjoyed being a loner.

Right?

What the fuck was this new feeling of loss that crept in since Hunter, Tanka, and Brandi departed hours ago leaving both my house and food supply empty.

I grabbed my coat and keys. It was a forty-five minute drive to the Super Walmart which had the best prices while being a fortune in gas. Maybe the drive will clear my head and house. This restless stillness better be gone when I get back.

My cell dings where it rests next to my laptop.

**Brandi:** You and Hunter?

**Me:** Definitely not.

**Brandi:** Tank ribbed him about you the entire ride back campus.

**Me:** *Nothing happened.*

**Brandi:** That's not what he said... ☐☐☐

**Me:** It was a hate kiss.

**Brandi:** Sounds sexy.

**Me:** \*\*\*eye roll\*\*\*

**Brandi:** Thanks again for letting us stay over. Coffee on campus next week?

**Me:** Sure.

“Shit, did I just make a friend? With Brandi?” This time I eye roll at myself. I hate girls like her. Right? What the hell am I becoming here in the backwoods of Maine? What happened to the badass girl who needed nobody?

Despite the growl that escapes, a smile breaks out on my lips seconds later.

Maybe, my father was right.

This is what he wanted for me.

A whole new life away from the Club.

If I'm being honest, Hunter is sexy, athletic, clean cut nothing like the MC guys in Santa Fe.

Maybe I should give him a chance.

This time my burner phone rings.

“Savannah?”

“Hey Dad, I was just thinking about you. Abut home.”

“Everything going all right up there.”

“Yep,” the lie came out fast. I didn’t want him to yank me from here which he would if he sniffed out trouble from a fraternity.

“I’m glad you are safe, tucked away up there. Things... are about to get hot.”

“Hotter than it normal?”

“I might not be able to call you for a while. I’m smashing this phone and the SIM when we hang up.”

I swallow hard.

“I hate the Club life. Is it worth it?”

“I’m in too deep to every get out. So I did the next best thing. Get you out. Don’t ever come back, Savvy. There’s money in an account that’s being accruing since 1975. It’s where I hid all. my money before the digital age. No one asked questions and nothing was ever tracked.

After we hang up I want you to check where the spare tire is in the Rover. Inside you’ll find all the docs.”

“What happened?” I gasp, processing.

“Linc. The other chapter of the Outlaws are blaming me for not getting him under control. I might get voted out as Prez. The Royal Bastards are getting payback on the whole Club by hitting up other charters. A war that started in Santa Fe has spread to the entire West Coast. I have to own it. It lands on my shoulders and I want you far from any blowback.”

“I’m worried about you. I wanted to maybe come home for Christmas.”

“I’ll be fine. I have loyal soldiers guarding my back. I have old allies. The Prez of The Devil’s Glen MCs. You are in their territory. I called in an ancient favor. The Prez is sending his son to keep an eye out. He’s a bit older than you but young enough to blend in.”

“I don’t need anyone.” Hunters face flashed in my head.

“Do this for me. I have enough to worry about. Linc went on the lam. He’s dead. It’s just a matter of who finds him first: us or the Bastards. He killed one of them in cold blood. Something ain’t right. They haven’t taken one of us out yet as payback. That new Prez, River is playing cat and mouse with me. It don’t feel right.”

A shiver raced up my spine. My father was rarely unflappable. I needed him to feel reassured. “I’m fine. Nothing exciting ever happens up here. It’s just cold.”

“Good. That’s good. I like to hear that.”

“I even had some friends stay over last night.”

“Boys?” he growled.

“Yes, but not like that. My new friend, Brandi, her boyfriend Tank and his buddy.”

“Where did the buddy sleep?”

“On the couch. I think he might be non-binary or something. Honestly, he’s a pretty boy. Not my thing.”

“Good,” he grunted. “Keep your head in the books. Get a degree. Get a normal job and don’t look back.”

“I’m Savannah Graystone forever now, huh?” Dread weaved heavily on my heart.

“You’re better off. Remember... don’t look back.”

“I love you, Dad.”

“I love you too,” his voice was gruff. We both hung on, not speaking, for there was nothing else to say. We each wanted to cling to the goodbye, drawing it out. Finally, I swiped a tear as my thumb ended the call.

I had shit to do. No time to mope.

Four hours later, I came back home to stocked groceries and cameras everywhere.

“What the fuck?” I hissed, stomping my feet at the full fridge and pantry.



“FUCK!” I bellowed into the woods as my four wheeler sat out back, where more cameras pointed down from new floodlights.

**Me:** I need Hunter’s digits. Now. Right fucking now.

**Brandi:** ... Tank says you must say ‘please’.

**Me:** Middle finger coming his way...

**Brandi:** here you go:) p.s. I knew you and him... were a thing...

508-767-2675

**Me:** The only thing we are is at war.

After clearing my throat, I hit call.

“Sup, baby?”

“How did you get in my house?”

“Savvy? Shit, I thought you were someone else.”

My eyes widened. Anger had me boiling. How many girls did he have on his line?

“Sorry to dissappoint you. HOW THE FUCK DID YOU GET IN MY HOUSE?”

“Relax, I paid attention when you punched in your code. 4444 is hardly original.”

“I hate you.”

“I know we’ve already discussed. You’re pretty hot when you’re pissed though.”

My boots stopped pacing across my deck, I looked up at the camera. “It was you?!”

“Smile. Give me a wave? How about a little midriff?”

I flipped him the bird, stalked to the shed to grab a shovel, intent on smashing the shit out of every camera I could find.

“Damn girl, slow your roll. I was going to come over later to set up your phone with the app and hand it all over to you. Do you really want to be alone out there with a target on your back and no surveillance?”

“I don’t need you or your help,” I hissed.

“So, the little lady keeps saying.”

“Get the fuck out of my life.”

“I’ll pick you up at seven. Chow, babe.”

“Chow, babe?! ARRRGHHHHH!”

My hands heaved the shovel over the side of the deck. Fuck Hunter Northport and his grocery buying, camera spying — fucking good guy ways.

He makes me burn so hot I don’t know which I want more: to grab his ass and lock it down or kick it the hell out of my life.



“You look good tonight, baby.”

“Stop it,” I hissed, yanking my hand away from his. He retaliated by putting his arm my head rest. “I swear if you’re fingers start playing with the ends of my hair, I’ll cut you with the knife I have inside my boot.”

Our gazes lock.

Mine silently begging him to push me.

Somehow I ended up on a double date with Tank and Brandi. Now I’m stuck sitting next to Hunter at the drive in while the other two make out in the bed of the truck Tank borrowed from a teammate.

Hunter leans closer, while his arm still rests behind me. “You... like this... all this tough talk turns me on. Maybe I am into you...”

I feel my eyes glaze over.

*Shit.*

He smells so fucking good. Like pine, lemons and ....  
*peppermint mocha...?*

*Damn.*

My fists fly to the collar of his shirt. Grabbing him I pull him to me as my mouth attacks his. I'm not sure who growls first as we fight kiss.

Hands roam.

Our breathes tangle as we momentarily pull apart only to crash back together again.

Like a comet shooting across the desert sky— we fly, holding on both knowing it's only a matter of time before the crash followed by the burn.

But right now I don't care.

He makes me forget everything.

He makes me feel so alive.

Everything he does, gets under my skin.

Lights me afire.

"You drive me, insane." He peppers hot, opened mouth kisses against my neck as my eyes close.

This feels so fucking good.

My hands roam under the back of his shirt. His skin; warm steel, flexing beneath my touch.

Hands brush my hair off my shoulder, my sweater moved to the side, exposing more skin for him to graze on.

Everything in me vibrates. Nerves sing, sizzle, beg for more.

No wonder all Tank and Brandi so is touch.

I've witnessed so much at the MC's clubhouse while never being a participant.

Now, I'm the star of his show.

"Gotcha," I snag his cell from the back pocket of his jeans.

While he's still drunk on my skin, I grab his hand, pressing his finger to unlock the phone.

"No, I got you," he rasps, moving lightning fast. Before I know it, both my hands are pinned over my head and he's half

on me with his phone tucked back in his pocket.

“You promised you’d delete the app on your phone and install it on mine.”

“I will. I just never said when.”

“You are really into me, aren’t you?” I let my teeth sink into my lower lip. Loving watching his reaction to it, I licked my lips for added effect, but ended up only tasting him.

“I’m definately on you..,”

“No fair,” I gasped as he buried his head in the shadow on my chest where my sweater was pulled away. His tongue tracing every inch it could.

“Admit it. You are the one into me.”

“Never. Not happening.”

“We’ll see about that,” he answers between kisses on my collarbone.

We fog up the windows, only pulling apart when Tank raps his thick fist on the driver’s side.

“Movies over. Let’s roll.”

I try to break free from Hunter’s embrace when his hand gently cups my face. “I’m staying over tonight.”

“Me too.” Tank opens the rear door for Brandi.

“Um, did I invite either of you?”

“What’s the problem? We bought ya’ food.”

Sighing, I sink back against the seat while the tip of my boots rubs a hole in the car mat. I’ve never spent the night with a guy.

“I’m not sleeping with you,” I hiss under my breath to Hunter as he buckles up.

He just winks. “Who said I’m sleeping with you? You’re going to have to earn all this...,” he gestured to his body.

I rolled my eyes, took a deep sip of the fountain soda Brandi handed over from the back seat and prayed I had some

self control left. I was back to either kissing the heck out of him or smacking him senseless again.

“You really know how to push all my buttons.”

“Baby, I haven’t even gotten started yet.”

I opened my window letting the cold, fall air cool over my overheated body. I needed to slow this thing down. But this thing with Hunter was a train going full steam ahead. I could stay on for the ride or attempt to jump out the car.

“I need to pee, Savvy let’s go.”

I was out of the truck before Hunter could out it in gear. “Wait. Dammit! I said wait!” He called out as I sauntered off with Brandi.

“I thought Tank was overprotective but damn girl he won’t even let you off his leash to go to the ladies’?”

“Please. By the time I’m done with him he’ll realize I’m the one holding the leash and he’s the one collared.”

She giggles, as we fist bump. “Ugh the line is out the door.”

“You wanna try in the woods?”

The horrified look she gives me has me cracking up. “It’s what we do in the desert...,” I stopped catching myself. “... when I used to go RVing cross country we just had to make do,” I shrugged. Her eyes widened, too distracted by whoever was behind me.

“Savannah fucking Graystone.”

I popped a shoulder, lifting my chin at the slim, blonde three inches taller than me in her heeled boots.

“You have a problem?” I confronted her head on.

“Just your skank ass trying to get with my boyfriend last night and when he said “no” you lied and said he was the one making advances. When it was you.”

“The fuck? I’m not afraid of you or his bullshit.” My spine straightened as my fingers itched to grab the blade strapped

right inside my right boot. The wiggled just before they were grabbed and laced with stronger ones.

“Easy babe,” Hunter pulled me into his chest from behind, his big arms protectively going around me. Brandi’s eyes darted back and forth as the line cleared paving the way for her to head inside.

“Just go,” I mouthed. Tank had Brandi, not letting her go into the ladies’ alone.

“What’s going on?”

“Your girl is a lying slut.”

“Hello, my name is Mirror. You must be looking at your own reflection.” Snickers erupted around as. “Let’s go, babe.”

Taking me by the hand he pulled me behind his back before turning back to blonde bitch and her girls. “Your boy had her pinned against the tree trying to rip her shirt off while she was yelling for him to get off her. You’re lucky she didn’t press charges.”

“And you’re lucky he didn’t.”

“Keep him away from her. Do yourself a favor and ditch him too.”

“Savvy, baby, I can’t leave you for three minutes and trouble finds you,” his lips brush against my ear, causing my heart to beat all kind of crazy.

I stop in the midst of honking horns, kids spilling popcorn as they run, and groups of haters watching the two of us.

Some with envy.

I don’t care if they stare or decide to take videos to watch later.

On my tiptoes I go, brushing my lips against his. ‘Thanks, babe.’ My palms lands on his firm ass with a loud smack. The look in his dark eyes promise payback.

But hey, I had to keep the big hero in check. I’m an independent woman who can handle my own shit.

Most of the time anyway.

“Thanks, I had fun tonight.”

“I bet you did,” Brandi snickered.

“Shut up you slut.”

“Hoe.” I unclicked my seatbelt; tried crawling over to get to her, my hand going for her fake hair.

“Easy!” Tank, pushes me back.

“Relax, we were just fucking around. Thanks for the ride.”

Hunter didn’t say a word as he shut off the engine. I rolled my eyes. “Not again.”

“But we stocked you up with food. I’m hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” Hunter replied climbing out.

And just like that, I found myself with a house full of company for the second night in a row.



After the four of us split two bottles of wine and polished off the cheese platter Tank put together, I announced I was going to bed.

“Correction. We are going to bed,” Hunter announced, following me up the stairs. My palms sweat with each step I take. “You can have the bathroom first.”

“It’s my house. Of course I’m going first. You... are going back down to the couch.”

“Scared of my mad love making skills?”

“Ugh, I’m so no sleeping with you.”

“I just came up here for this,” he swooped past me, grabbing my squishmellow.

“Hey!”

“Nope, it’s mine. My neck hurt from the lack of pillows last night.”

“You aren’t taking that,” we played tug-of-war over my one stuffie.

“How about a compromise?” His brow rose. “We could share?”

I grabbed my squishmellow, hugging it to my chest. “You better be back downstairs when I get out.” I slammed the bathroom door, locking it for good measure.

“Fuck me,” I whispered to myself five minutes later when I opened the door.

Hunter Northport was in my bed with the covers turned down naked from the waist up. His chest was smooth, tan and tatted. Swirls of ink I couldn’t make out in the dim light. His abs are cut, his waist and hips defined by the deep V of thick muscle. He patted the open spot next to him.

“Come here. It’s time to tuck you in.”

I bit my lip. Everything was new to me. Everything except his kiss. Kisses were something I snuck around doing places the MC couldn’t crash like school trips and stolen moments at summer camps.

“Did you keep your pants on?”

He crossed his arms behind his head, watching me with a smirk on those sexy lips. “Why don’t you come here and find out?”

“You better not snore,” I huffed, fluffing my pillow with a fist as I gingerly got in beside him, placing the stuffie between us.

“You want to sleep or so you want to come.”

“Excuse me?” My back practically shot off the bed.

“Don’t be shy, princess.” He rolled in one swift movement, bracing his weight on his elbows as he hovered above. “Either you tell me what you like or I’ll find out for myself.”

“One, I don’t remember inviting you to stay over much less get into my bed. What makes you think I want...,” The



rest of my words were but off by his mouth. The only thing I said after that was “yes,” “oh god,” “more” and “I’m dying.”

I felt boneless and numb as he got up to shower, sometime later nudging me over to the other side of the bed as he slipped in behind me.

“I sleep on the side closest to the door.” His arm curled around my waist hauling me back against him as my eyes drifted shut.

I woke to the sight of softly falling snow accompanied with the smell of percolating coffee and frying bacon.

Hunter’s warmth was still wrapped around me.

Was this peace? Happiness? The concrete blocks I had locked in around my heart got jostled out of place these past few days.

I just laid there studying the swirling flakes dancing to the ground, feeling so content. I didn’t even know much about Hunter. Well, besides the fact he’s an arrogant sexy pain in my ass with very talented hands. And he does have an overbearing alpha personality which thankfully, I’m strong enough to push back against it.

“You awake?”

“I’m just watching the snow. There’s something about it... it’s peaceful. The way the flakes dance to an invisible melody as they fall.”

“It is peaceful. Quiet here. I like your place.”

“Don’t get any ideas... I like my solitude.”

“Me too. Tank has practice soon. I need to go. You have class today?”

“Yeah, at one.”

“Stay in bed then. Stay warm.” He gets up, moving the comforter around me. I snuggle in deeper, smelling him.

Five minutes later, the floorboards creak as he comes back. “Here.”

“You brought me coffee, in bed? Damn, Northport you are upping your game.”

“I made it just how you like it.”

I took the warm mug from him, testing it.

“You did.”

“Breakfast is up,” Tank bellows from downstairs, breaking the moment.

“Better get out of bed, princess,” he seals my fate with a quick, hard kiss and a slap on my ass as I get up.

“Neanderthal.” I return the smack with a wink as I enter the bathroom. “And by the way... I hate PDA. Keep your hands and lips off me in public. I have a rep to maintain.”

“Well, see about that, Savvy...”

“What the hell, *Savvy*?” I check myself out in the mirror. My eyes are sparkling. My skin has a rosy glow.

My heart feels giddy and light, like a balloon going up and up in the sky. I want to float on this high and never come back down to Earth.

## CHAPTER 8

*River*

“WHAT? You obviously wanna say something. Let’s have it out?” I growled, dropping the two fifty pound barbells in my hands.

Tank grunts as he finishes his squats.

Our eyes lock in the gym mirror.

“It doesn’t feel right. We need another angle. That girl is too nice for this MC shit.” His thick finger pikes me in the chest.

“She’s lying her ass off right back. She told me she’s from Texas. I grunt,” towering over him. He might have more meat but I have the height advantage.

We’d both been dating Brandi and Savvy for a few weeks. Lines were past burry. I’d lie my ass off if asked directly by my men, but Savvy was beginning to feel like my legit girl, not just revenge.

I slept in her bed more than mine.

My tongue’s tasted every square inch of her body and yet... I haven’t claimed her as mine.

“What happened to Danny needs to be answered. Period. But not like this... with you toying with her like that.”

“I like her, too. A lot. But she’s still our enemies blood. Her father my rival. I will find out exactly what she knows about her father’s Club... when the time is right. “What’s up with Brandi anyway... you gonna hit it and split it when we go back home?”

“Are you?”

“I haven’t slept with Savannah... yet. We’ve just mess around.”

Tank’s eyes widen in disbelief.

“I’m still not sure how to play things. Once I cross that line...”

“Brandi... she’s the woman I wish I met back home. She thinks she’s with someone with real prospects. I feel kinda bad about lying about well everything, too. I know how ya’ feel. But I’m fucking her good.”

“Nah, bro. She’s using you right back.”

“Yeah, probably. Maybe someday when you get your head out of your ass I’ll tell her what’s up before we go back to Santa Fe. She can decide then if we’re still hooking up if she wants to come with.”

“It’s kind of hard to hate Savvy. Especially when her fire is so damn sexy. I forget what it’s like to have a woman just like you for you... the Club girls are just patch chasers.”

“She’s gonna kill you when you tell her who you are.”

“Probably,” I catch my smirk in the mirror. “I think that might be half the fun.”

Tank moved to the chest press. “What’s the plan then? We have church later... our brothers will demand an update.”

“Virtual church.” I shook my head. “Sassy will still be mine. I need her heart as collateral. Her father’s still the Prez of the MC trying to take us down.

“So she’s still a pawn.”

“Better than a prisoner. I’m not gonna break her into pieces like I had planned. I’m just gonna make her fall in love with

me and make sure it sticks.”

“Love? That’s a trap brother. One with two doors in and no way out.”

I shrug. “I’m good. Never been in love. Don’t plan doing that now.”

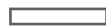
“Good luck brother. You’re gonna need it.”

We continued our workout in silence as the football team entered the weight lifting room.

“Northport you joining the team?”

“Fuck no. I just spot Tank better than you pussies.”

I left, feeling all kinds of twisted inside. She was supposed to be my vengeance not the thing I can’t stop thinking about or itching to touch again.



“The Outlaws are gonna do him in from the inside. The blowback is all on him. He failed his Club. They already voted.” Blaze is matte rof fact as he relays the news.

I stare at the tiny screen on my new burner. Facetiming Church is a first. Tank scowls with his hands in his pockets. I lean back against the sturdy trunk of a thick evergreen. “I need a minute to process this. Who did the hit on Danny? Have you found out?”

“Linc. He betrayed his Prez met with the Vegas Chapter behind his back and blamed his Prez. Linc’s been paying one of the girls at the strip club extra. The more she works him the more he talks. He left the Outlaws and joined a new MC.”

“That’s why we keep them on our payroll,” I rolled my eyes. “Find out where he’s pledging.”

“When you coming back to the desert? How much more intel do you need?”

“I’ll be home for Christmas, fuckface. So, you can stop your worrying. If you nab this guy, Linc. I’ll be back sooner. Keep his life for me to snuff out.”

“The boys are restless. It’s getting hard to control our urge to burn the Outlaws down.” Wade’s clenched fists turned white.

“Payback will be ours.”

“Yeah? You’re the only one whose getting paid back in pussy.”

Church was silent after Shorty’s outburst. Even Tank’s eyes turned flat and cold.

“If I wasn’t standing on the top of a fucking mountain right now... I’d lay your ass out. In person or remote, I’m still the fucking Prez.” My palm smack the patch on the cut I put on. “If you want to challenge me for it. I’ll fly out tonight.”

Our eyes lock through the phone screen. He doesn’t utter another word as we move on to the next order of business which is dealing with the fentanyl and coyotes smuggling human cargo through the border.

“If you catch them... put down the coyotes, send back the cargo. The Fen-fen our policy stays the same. Burn it.”

“That’s burning cash. We could re-build with that shit.”

“Some things ain’t worth using to get there. Drugs is one of them.” I feel my face turning red, at the disrespect I’m getting. “If any of you decide to take your own cut and sell it on your own... I’ll take a finger off each of your hands. We need clear heads and hearts. I can’t risk any of you becoming users. It’ll fuck up the Club. Are we clear?”

One by one the men all nodded.

“One more thing... Rogan’s new road name is Tank. We’ll explain at Christmas.”

I took out the hammer from the inside of my cut, pounded it on a rock next to me. “Church is over.” I ended the call, took out the SIM, smashing both into thousands of pieces with a trail rock.

“You good?”

“Never better,” I replied, handing Logan my cut to put back in the backpack with his before we trekked back down the mountain trail. “I think I might keep calling you Tank when we get home.”

He shrugs. “We’ve been here a week but it feels longer. It was so easy to just slip into another life.”

“I know. She is supposed to me my mark but it’s like she marked me without even trying.”

“She’s special. Different. You might wanna rethink things. The sooner the better...”

“I can’t ever tell her. Her loyalty is to the Outlaws. Mine the Bastards.”

“Then leave things alone. Cut and run. Find another way.”

“I think I did. His own charter is turning against him. If our intel is correct, they are going to take him out themselves for fucking things up with how far his man went. Get in touch with Diesel on the down low. Have him track down her father... we’ll snatch and grab his ass before he gets to his meet in Vegas. You know there’s plenty of open road in the desert... we need to get to Linc. Maybe set up the girl he’s fucking to trap him in bed for a pick up crew.”

“Instead of taking her prisoner... you’re gonna jack her old man?”

“Better me take him and hold him some where then him being killed by his own. She’ll thank me for it.”

“They’ll never accept her as your old lady.”

“Never said I wanted to make her one. Fuck, maybe I should just end things now. Break up with her and go my separate way. I thought...,” I stopped in the middle of the hiking trail to face Tank. “...that by taking the queen off the chessboard... we could win. Get leverage without shedding anymore of our brother’s blood. I wanted to rule differently, Tank.

Any Prez can pick up a Glock and order his men to ride. I have this,” I tap a finger to my head. “I’m actually gifted. My

I.Q. is over 170. I got tested in school. This, here in Maine... could've been my real life if my parents weren't so fucked up."

"But they were, River. Fuck, I'm caught in the same fantasy, wonderin' if I had given a shit about school and tried out for football... I could be living a different life too. But we aren't. This is the fairytale we're gonna wake up from and realize it was just a dream. Our real life is the MC."

"...it's just shaking me up that I'm living my double life. The one that could've been and the one that is on the same timeline."

"Shiiiiittt, sounds like a screenplay we should shop to Netflix. imagine that? The new revenue pipeline for the Club? What re you doing now?"

I stop again, pulling out my cell. "Texting Savannah. I'm going to cool things off a bit until I figure things out."

He raises his brows but doesn't utter a word.

**Me:** Hey, something came up. I'll catch you in class.

**Princess:** All ok? Should I come over?

**Me:** TTYL Just have some assignments I need to complete.

**Princess:** I got used to sleeping next to you :(

"Me too. It happened way too fast."

I'd never admit it to her though.

She's the quicksand I'm sinking in. I need a clear head to handle Club business first before I make her mine as Hunter Northport, waking her up to River Cruz.

A smirk flirts on my face as I picture her coming at me. She's going to go into a blind rage when she finds out the guy she's falling for is the Prez of the Royal Bastards. That girl is all fire and ice. She's hot as fuck when she's mad. I can only imagine what a rage will do to me. Turn me on, like nothing else.



Getting away from her for a few days to handle Club business will be a good thing.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” my throat was tight as I stared down at Savvy laid out on the back of the wagon with straw clinging to the silky strands of her hair.

She closed her eyes. “This feels so good. Almost like home.”

“I know what you mean. I miss the heat of the sun.”

“It’s what they call an Indian summer up here. A surprise, warm and sunny day during the thick of fall.”

The farmer driving the John Deere our wagon is hitched to ambled over a rut in the pasture causing me to fall on top her.

“Oops,” I breathed, picking straw from her hair. She opened her eyes; so close to mine.

“Hunter, “ she breathed, placing her arms behind my neck.

I swallowed hard.

There was nothing the clarity of want in her gaze. Want for a man who doesn’t truly exist. Me backing off only fed her desire. It was working, just like Regan said it would.

Guilt was a mother fucker kicking me in the gut. She moved her head up to fuse our lips, but I pulled away.

“I’m not a good guy, Savannah.”

Her brow furrowed as she contemplated my words. “... we all have secrets. A past.”

“I’m not who you think I am...”

“An overprotective, alpha, jerk with marginal cooking skills?” She teases not understanding the gravity of my guilt.

“... I’ve done bad things.”

“I figured. The way you laid those assholes from the rush party out. Picking them off one by one, using the hidden rage burning inside... I saw what you keep hidden. You don’t have

to tell me. It's okay. Whatever happened in your past... I won't wake it up. I trust you."

My throat worked. She was offering her heart and body on a platter to me exactly how I wanted.

But I wished it were real. That she was giving her all to River Cruz not Hunter Northport...

"Don't trust me. I've never been committed to a girl. Never had to answer to anyone that way or compromise. I want everything my way."

"I noticed. I'm still here. Hoping we can try this... I've been lonely for so long, hiding behind this tough girl persona... having you, Tank and Brandi in my life is filling it with so much friendship and fun... I never had those things."

"At least I gave you that."

"Give me more," she breathes a second before her lips come up to meet mine.

"Savvy," I groaned, fusing our lips. "Baby, I wish we could be everything..."

Words were lost after that as we melted into one another. I'd never been to a pumpkin patch... saw changing leaves... or smelled the crispness of fall in the air.

My world was becoming a kaleidoscope of new things weaving together with her at the center of it all.

And I was a bastard through and through, Enough of one to take everything under a lie just to feel like I could live a different life. I grasp my chance at my "what if" with both hands. I took from her, knowing she was in my arms on borrowed time.

Savvy growled as we kissed again, the little minx reversing our positions as she took what she wanted from our kiss while rubbing her sweet spot against the bulge in my jeans.

"Easy girl," she rides almost over.

“I haven’y even got on yet,” she pouted as I smacked her ass. I made sure to scowl hard at the old farmer, watching her instead of where he was driving through the maze of pumpkins.

“Tonight,” she whispered against my lips. “You are all mine.” I stood up, scooped her onto my lap, letting her ass settle against my semi. “So, you think you can handle me, princess?”

“Are you worried that won’t fit in me?” She opened her eyes wide in feigned innocence as her ass slowly rubbed in my lap.

“I am huge. Titanic.”

“Maybe, buy my battery operated cock is pretty big, too.”

“That shit is going in the trash. Only my cock gets inside this sweet pussy you hear me?” I growled, clenching a fist as I dragged my open palm down the front of her. The only thing separating my hand from her are thin spandex leggings.

Images of her pleasuring herself filled my head.

“Fuck the pumpkin patch. I’m taking you home. Now.”

“The fuck?” Tank gestured to the pile of pumpkins he and Brandi had picked out.

With Savvy’s hand tucked in mine, we raced to the Bronco. “Uber it to campus.” I called out before taking off.

“Are we doing this?” She looked over at me as I ignited the engine.

“Backing out on me already?” I cocked a brow, resting my arms over the wheel.

“Never.” She pulled her hoodie over her head.

I almost ran off the road when she started taking off her tank, pleasuring herself by rubbing her pebbled nipples dying to escape from her bra.

I shook my head. So far she has managed to surprise me at every turn.



## CHAPTER 9

### *Savannah*

HE'S MADE me come a million different ways but hasn't made me his.

My hand slams the brush down on the counter. I turn in the mirror checking out my own ass to make sure it still looks good.

“What the fuck? Why is he holding back?”

“I still can't believe that man has so willpower.” Brandi shook her head.

“I can't believe I'm resorting to letting you put that shit on my face.”

“Do you want to get laid or not? Tank can't keep his hands off me. I think I know what I'm doing.” She rolls her eyes at me as my hand swats at the pearlescent cream in her hand.

“What's that gonna do?”

“Besides make your eyes pop?” She dabs some on my brow bone before dabbing some between my breasts.

“My eyes? I want him wanting my body.”

“We'll get to that. Here.”

“What now?” I took the jar from her hand. “Edible sugar vanilla body butter?”

“Rub some of that on your tits, especially the nips. Make a trail down... you hear me? He’ll be a goner. Then you grab his ... and line that shit up, girlie.”

“Ugh, I ‘ve tried that. I know he wants me. I just don’t get it.”

“Maybe he’s still in love with someone else. Has he talked about his past?”

I pause mid dab of body cream. “No-actually he hasn’t.” Her eyes fill with sympathy as I place the jar down. “This is stupid. The last thing I want to be is his somebody else. I don’t want the leftover pieces of Hunters heart. If that’s what is going on.”

“Well, she ain’t here and you are. Make him yours. Burn away her memories. You gotta make that man yours. Tonight. If you want him , take him.”

I bite my lip, “Until fall break? When he goes home?”

“From what Tank tells me which is not much, Hunter has no family left he speaks to. Invite him home with you.”

“I can’t.” I look away.

“It’s like that for you, too?”

“Something like that.” I open her drawer, taking out a few condoms placing them in my mini backpack purse.

“He’s into you. Everyone can see that.”

“But there’s something between us. I feel it. Something making him pull back.”

“You want him as your man?”

“I do.”

“Then you know what to do,” she breaks off at the Bronco’s familiar honk outside the parking lot of her apartment on campus.

The boys are taking us to the pumpkin patch on the outskirts of town. Remaking eye contact with her, I shoot her a

toothy grin as my hands unzip my jeans and more body butter gets rubbed in my skin,

“This better work.”

“Girl, I bag my man every time.”

“I bet you do,” I smirk. “But the trick is keeping them bagged, right.”

“Yeah, I haven’t figured that part out yet,” she fluffs her hair one last time while looking in the mirror.

“Yeah, well I’m planning on bagging and tagging my first and last.”

She locked up as we entered the hall, “Be careful, Savvy. The first ones are the ones you never get over.”

“That’s why I’m planning on keeping him.”

“It’s only been a few weeks...”

I shrug. “If I get sick of him, I’ll be the one dumping him. I won’t let it be the other way around. You’re right. I don’t care if some other girls name got inked in his heart first as long as my name replaces hers.”

“I’m in love with someone who betrayed me. Maybe we betrayed each other,” I shrug.

## CHAPTER 10

*River*

“IS EVERYTHING OKAY?”

“Yeah,” my throat was tight as I stared down at Savvy laid out on the back of the wagon with straw clinging to the silky strands of her hair.

She closed her eyes. “This feels so good. Almost like home.”

“I know what you mean. I miss the heat of the sun.”

“It’s what they call an Indian summer up here. A surprise, warm and sunny day during the thick of fall.”

The farmer driving the John Deere our wagon is hitched to ambled over a rut in the pasture causing me to fall on top her.

“Oops,” I breathed, picking straw from her hair. She opened her eyes; so close to mine.

“Hunter,” she breathed, placing her arms behind my neck.

I swallowed hard.

There was nothing the clarity of want in her gaze. Want for a man who doesn’t truly exist. Me backing off only fed her desire. It was working, just like Regan said it would.

Guilt was a mother fucker kicking me in the gut. She moved her head up to fuse our lips, but I pulled away.

“I’m not a good guy, Savannah.”



Her brow furrowed as she contemplated my words. "... we all have secrets. A past."

"I'm not who you think I am..."

"An overprotective, alpha, jerk with marginal cooking skills?" She teases not understanding the gravity of my guilt.

"... I've done bad things."

"I figured. The way you laid those assholes from the rush party out. Picking them off one by one, using the hidden rage burning inside... I saw what you keep hidden. You don't have to tell me. It's okay. Whatever happened in your past... I won't wake it up. I trust you."

My throat worked. She was offering her heart and body on a platter to me exactly how I wanted.

But I wished it were real. That she was giving her all to River Cruz not Hunter Northport...

"Don't trust me. I've never been committed to a girl. Never had to answer to anyone that way or compromise. I want everything my way."

"I noticed. I'm still here. Hoping we can try this... I've been lonely for so long, hiding behind this tough girl persona... having you, Tank and Brandi in my life is filling it with so much friendship and fun... I never had those things."

"At least I gave you that."

"Give me more," she breathes a second before her lips come up to meet mine.

"Savvy," I groaned, fusing our lips. "Baby, I wish we could be everything..."

Words were lost after that as we melted into one another. I'd never been to a pumpkin patch... saw changing leaves... or smelled the crispness of fall in the air.

My world was becoming a kaleidoscope of new things weaving together with her at the center of it all.

And I was a bastard through and through, Enough of one to take everything under a lie just to feel like I could live a

different life. I grasp my chance at my “what if” with both hands. I took from her, knowing she was in my arms on borrowed time.

Savvy growled as we kissed again, the little minx reversing our positions as she took what she wanted from our kiss while rubbing her sweet spot against the bulge in my jeans.

“Easy girl,” the rides almost over.

“I haven’y even got on yet,” she pouted as I smacked her ass. I made sure to scowl hard at the old farmer, watching her instead of where he was driving through the maze of pumpkins.

“Tonight,” she whispered against my lips. “You are all mine.” I stood up, scooped her onto my lap, letting her ass settle against my semi. “So, you think you can handle me, princess?”

“Are you worried that won’t fit in me?” She opened her eyes wide in feigned innocence as her ass slowly rubbed in my lap.

“I am huge. Titanic.”

“Maybe, buy my battery operated cock is pretty big, too.”

“That shit is going in the trash. Only my cock gets inside this sweet pussy you hear me?” I growled, clenching a fist as I dragged my open palm down the front of her. The only thing separating my hand from her are thin spandex leggings.

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I almost ran off the road when she started taking off her tank, pleasuring herself by rubbing her pebbled nipples dying to escape from her bra.

I shook my head. So far she has managed to surprise me at every turn.

“Slow down, baby. I’m gonna savor you...”

“Can you drive a bit faster?”

“Put your shirt back on before I get road rage... you want big daddy?” I teased, enjoying the easiness between us.

She rolled her eyes. “I’ve been wanting him in me for days... you know that. He tastes good and all... but I need him right here,” she finished with color in her cheeks as she cups herself.

“Fuck, baby. I’m so hard already. I never pictured you as a dirty, little princess.”

“I’ve never pictured so many things in my life and yet here they are.”

With my foot heavy on the gas, I rounded turns leaving rubber on the road. Tank would curse me out at how I’m handling his Bronco right about now but senses only want one thing: Savannah naked and under me.

I don’t even remember getting up into her house or climbing the stairs to her bedroom.

She slowly peeled off her shirt as I walked her back to the bed. Her pupils dilated as I lifted my own shirt.

“If we do this—there’s no turning back.”

“I know,” she whispered as her hands ran up my chest causing my abs to clench.

I shut my mind off.

This moment wasn't the revenge I'd been seeking. It was just me and my girl coming together even if I knew it was just a matter of time before we'd blow apart.

"Savvy," I breathed as I nuzzled her hair, closing my eyes as my body shuddered with how much I wanted this woman.

"Hunter," she breathed, raking the tips of her nails down my chest. My fist clenched in her hair. I so badly want her saying my real name when I come inside her.

But I can't let that happen.

*Not yet.*

My head fall back, my breath coming out with a hiss when her hands unbuckled my belt, my jeans dropping to the floor with a clank from the buckle.

"Savvy, baby, you, don't—," the rest of my words a garbled mess of curses as she took my shaft in her mouth, letting the kong, wide tip of my hit the back of her throat. "Baby, sweet princess, no more," I groaned feeling my balls tighten and the base of my spine tingle. "I wanna come on you sweetheart."

She peeled her leggings off those luscious curves and laid back on her bed; a buffet spread before me for me to do whatever I wished.

I grabbed her by the ankles, pulling her ass down on the bed, throwing a leg over each of my wide shoulders. I bit and kissed a trail to the center of her.

"Fuck baby, you taste so good." i moaned as my tongue spread her folds and my two front teeth lightly bit down on her clit before my tongue soothed away the sting by rolling her tiny pearl back and forth.

"Fuck! That hurt! But it feels so fucking good! Don't stop!"

"Never, baby." I promised, nipping a bit harder this time but then adding two fingers in her tight channel, rubbing back and forth as my mouth blew then hummed on her clit.

“FUUUUCCKKKKKK” she screamed, coming up off the bed as she came, my mouth never pausing its battle to coax every last bit she had to give.

She was beautiful. All coming apart in my arms. Her golden skin glistened in the fading fall light with a light coat of sweat. I licked my way up her body as the head of my thick cock settled between the honeypot between her legs.

“Last chance, princess.”

“If you don’t put your fat cock in my right now...,” she warned, her eyes narrowing to slits as her hands tried to push my ass forward.

“Ready or not, here I come.”

We both moaned in pleasure I slid home bare.

“You okay, baby?” I panted, when I was full seated inside her. My dick already twitching at how tight she is.

Her dark eyes stared into mine. One of my hands gripped hers, fingers entwined on the pillow above her head. Moisture leaked from the corner of her left eye. “Baby?”

“It’s too much. You. This. Us. It feels so good. It feels like everything I’ve been missing.” She hissed as I began to move slowly. The pleasure my body was feeling from her body had me letting go of her hand to fist the sheets. My cock wanted to ram up in there, getting tight stroke after tight stroke until he exploded, coating her womb in hot waves of my seed.

Instead I held back, somehow whispered tender words of sweet nothings while my cock held a steady pace and one hand dropped to find that tiny bud of hers again.

Her hot breath was in my ear, coaxing me on as I moved in and out of her tight, little body.

She was mine.

All mine.

Enemy’s daughter or not, I knew I’d never want another man hands roaming on this body. This shit was all mine. The rest we’d figure out.

When I felt her clench around my cock, I knew she was close. ‘Come for me, princess. Come on daddy’s cock like a good girl.’

“Fuck,” she moaned, as my mouth took a nipple in and my tongue rolled it like a lollipop.

“That’s it, almost there, sugar.”

“Hunter! Yes! I’m so close!” She yelled, her hands on my ass, her legs hooked around me, holding me deep.

“Savvy, baby, you feel incredible.” I kissed her hard, letting her body coax mine to come. I pulled out as soon as I felt the first wave of my release about to crash. Kneeling over her, I took my cock in one hand, my mouth hanging open not caring she watched, mesmerized as my seed spurted onto her stomach, coating it in hot, milky cum.

“Baby,” I moaned, collapsing on the bed next to her while my dick still twitched with afterglow. My arm draped around her waist. My eyes flick down to my cum on her skin making my lips curve in a satisfied smile at the mess I made.

She’s silent in my embrace.

“Regrets already?”

“No,” she whispered, kissing my bicep.

“I didn’t use a condom...?”

“I’m clean. You’re my first.”

My heart picked up speed at her admission. I suspected she could be a virgin but dismissed it. Her father would kick any member’s ass for even thinking about touching his baby girl but Savvy’s a rebel. I wouldn’t put it past her to fuck the VP if she wanted.

*Clearly she didn’t.*

“Are you good or do you need me to get you something at the pharmacy?”

“You didn’t put a baby in me.”

*But I want to. Someday maybe I will.*

My cock started hardening again at the thought.

“I might. Someday...”

“How about you clean me up first?”

“...Savvy... I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“Not doing this right. For not lighting the candles, sipping some wine...”

“Shut up. Just stop. It was perfect. The slow burn... I’m glad I waited. I’m glad it was you.”

I looked away, got off the bed, hiding the guilt of the moment. I found a clean washcloth, let warm water run over it. Took a few deep breaths to recover myself before returning.

My eyes move to the ink across my left pec. More runs down between my shoulder blades. I didn’t wear as much on my skin as most. My Apache blood runs deep even generations my ancestors ran the plains.

Mostly tribal symbols are inked on my skin. My royal bastard ink was done over in black before I came here. If Savvy thought it was suspect that a preppy athletic type had ink she hasn’t said a word yet.

I feel guilty as fuck for what I’m doing. Letting her fall in love with a lie. I turn away from the mirror .

This time I kissed her long and slow. Let my hands do the talking as I fell on the bed again.

Darkness descended, covering us.

There were no more words. Our language became kisses and sighs.

I’d steal every moment I could with her and regret not one.

She’s going to hate me someday.

But in this sweet moment, all she’s giving me is pure loving.

“

## CHAPTER 11

*Savannah*

“ARE YOU OKAY? YOU SEEM DISTRACTED.”

“I’m good. I just needed to get some assignments finished. Are you coming to the game tonight?”

“Are you inviting me?”

“I’ll pick you up at four.”

“I’ll meet you there. Brandi is coming over to pre-game and get ready... Tank gave her his practice jersey to wear.”

“I’ll pick you both up then. I don’t like you driving if you’ll be drinking with her.”

“Please,” I rolled eyes, “I don’t need another daddy.”

“You’ll call me daddy again, real soon,” he growled into the phone, making my face heat.

“I’ll pre game at Brandi’s instead. We can walk from her apartment, okay... *daddy?*”

I heard him suck in his breath on the other end. “Brandi and Tank aren’t invited to stay over your place tonight. Make sure she knows that.”

“Why not? Tank makes better coffee than you do.”

“Because, baby... next time you call me Daddy, it’ll be so loud, it’ll echo through the woods.”



“You think you’re scoring tonight, huh?”

“I know I am. Especially since I have about a dozen marks on my back still stinging from the way your nails dug in when I went down on your before sliding my big daddy cock all up in you after class yesterday.

I sucked in my breath, wanting him again.

*Right now.*

It’s been a few weeks since the night after the hayride. Being with Hunter is better than anything I’d ever fantasized about. The man is hung, jacked, attentive and sexy smart.

Every girl on campus shoots me serious jealous side eye. Especially since Hunter’s always touching me, whether it be brushing a lock of hair off my face as we sit side by side in lecture hall. Or lacing our fingers together as we walk through campus.

The man has hardly ever left my side.

Not that I’m complaining.

Tank and Brandi have privacy at his dorm room with Hunter always at my place.

It’s working out for us all.

*So far.*

If I don’t screw it up by telling him the truth—that I’m not some smart, elegantly dressed collegiate girl.

I’m the daughter of a drop out who is the Prez of an MC out in the desert. My dad buries bodies for a living. I’m hardly the type of girl you bring home to meet your mother. Not that Hunter ever mentions his own family.

“Hey.”

“Hey,” I smile back at Brandi, looking up from my laptop. “I was just going to text you. Hunter wants to meet up at the game later. Mind if we pregame at your place since it’s closer to the stadium?”

“Sure,” she waggles her brows. “Haven’t seen much of you since you and your big guy finally started getting it on.”

“Yeah, he’s pretty awesome.”

“They both are. Tank’s coming home with me for Thanksgiving break.”

My brow rose. “You’re already at the meet the family stage?”

She shrugs. “I’m not letting this one off my line. I finally reeled in the big one. Babies and ballers, eh?”

“Tank is so talented, I totally see him getting drafted...”

“I hate to dim the stars in your eyes, Brandi. But we are hardly a D1 powerhouse football school.”

“I know,” she sighs. “But have you seen him in his tight football pants? I just want to run out on the field and grab his buns.”

My eyes roll. Twice. “I’ll pay you \$200 just to watch you do that. He’d be so pissed. The stadium would go crazy, though.”

“I’m so happy. He’s good to me, too. Did I tell you he came over, took all my laundry back to his rental and did it all. He even folded my underwear.”

“Damn, Tank’s totally a keeper.”

“If any of those prissy sorority types even call out his number tonight, I swear I’ll cut a bitch.”

“Well, I have the knife.” I took out the blade I keep in my boot.

Her eyes widened. “You are a tough bitch. Glad you are on my side.”

“Damn, straight,” I grinned, tucking my knife back in as my favorite turquoise and silver bracelets jangled on my wrist. “By the way, thank you for the edible body butter. Hunter can’t keep his hands or mouth off of me.”

“Works every time,” she winked, snapping her purse shut. “You ready to roll?”

“Sure, grab us a few roadies?”

“Shots first, they’ll keep us warm for the walk over.”

“We better slam down two.”

She pours us two shots of spiced rum, followed by two more. The burning heat slides down my throat easily. “Let’s just take the bottle,” I suggested, feeling good really good. My new life fitting better than I thought it ever could.

We talked, laughed, taking our sweet ass time walking through campus to the fields on the far side housing the athletic complex and beyond that the small football stadium.

The lights lit up the late fall sky. My head and hips grooved to the snare drums beat as the marching band did their pre-game thing.

The distant buzz startled me for a moment. Like hornets swarming, thick, beefy men on motorcycles buzzed by us. I kept my head down, knowing my father was having my back watched by Devil’s Glen.

“Fuck they are hot. All that tatted up muscle in leather...”

I rolled my eyes. “Um, hello? Tank?”

“So? I can still look... I need to pee. And there isn’t a chance I’m going in those nasty bathrooms under the bleachers. My new boots ain’t touching the concrete floor with overflowing toilet water.”

“Hunter just texted, he’s waiting for us by the bleachers.”

“Romeo can wait. My bladder can’t.”

“Ugh, fine, this way,” I tugged her by the hand, leading her to the tree line behind the field.

“Turn around,” she hissed as she lowered her butt.

“Please. As if I wanna— Umpff!” I struggled against the hand covering my mouth as a large arm snaked around my waist. Brandi’s eyes were frozen in fear mid-squat.

“I’ll cut her if you scream,” a gruff, voice threatened against my ear. Brandi snapped her mouth shut.

I let my body go dead weight, using my captor’s surprise to sink my teeth into his palm.

“Bitch!” I was thrown away and backhanded across the face. Brandi screamed but it was drown out by the buzzing engines of motorcycles. My head rattled. Blood filled my mouth. As my eyes squinted open, they landed on the path sewn into a thick leather cut.

*Fuck.*

*We were both dead.*

The Vipers Den was a new MC. They are new enemies of the Bastards and Scorpions. Compromised of ex cartel, illegals, and traitorous men who ran from their brothers before bullets could end their betrayals of their original patch.

“Nice pussy,” another asshole had entered the wooded area. He licked his lips as he stared between Brandi’s legs.

My right leg swung out in a sweeping karate kick to the back of his knees.

“Bitch!” He grunted as I knocked him off balance. Just as my second kick was about to launch toward his dick.

I felt the pinch of a needle in my neck.

“Hello, princess.”

“Linc? ... fuck... you... bastard... traitor...”

“I’m gonna send you back to your father in a box. After I fuck you, of course. Thanks for the invitation.”

“Hunter,” I whispered as my very being tried to cling to stay awake. Brandi’s soft cries, the wind through the trees and the fading, dying notes of the marching band were the last things my senses processed as my consciousness slipped from my grasp.

“

## CHAPTER 12

*River*

MY EYES MET Tank's from across the football field.

I shook my head, my lips pressed in a firm line.

He lifted his helmet from his head, chucked it to the sidelines and sprinted over.

“They ain't here yet?”

“No, both their phone are going straight to voicemail.”

“Eh, Brandi is probably still using a flat iron on her hair. I swear she spends hours getting herself pretty for me.”

My burner cell rang in my jeans. I held a finger up as I answered.

“Ash? What's up?”

“We have a problem.”

Tank walked off the field as he followed me behind the bleachers as I searched for a less crowded spot to take the call.

“What kind of problem?” I pinched the bridge of my nose. All I wanted was to find my girl.

“Someone else grabbed the Outlaw Prez before we could. It was probably an inside job.”

“Where are you now?”

“Two hours south of Vegas.”

“Okay. Stay on it. Dig around. Find some leads.”

“On it.”

‘My’ cell or rather Hunter’s dinged form my other pocket. “It’s about time.” I grinned. My smile died as soon as I glanced at the image sent to the phone.

Savvy was in a trunk, her eyes shut; one already swollen. Dried blood was on her upper lip.

Brandi laid wide eyes wide in fear, bound in gagged next to her.

“They’ve got our women.” I showed Tank the phone.

“Then they are already fucking dead.”

“Did the dumb shits think I wouldn’t have a tracker app on her phone?”

I dialed Hacker.

“Prez? I’m already inside the Nevada DOT looking at traffic cams.”

“I need you on something more important. They took my woman. Tank’s, too.”

He didn’t miss a beat as I shared the data of app I had on Savvy’s phone or where her last known location was.

“Call you in five.”

“Thanks, brother.”

“Tank! What the fuck are you doing? The game is about to start?” His fellow line backer, Gideon, tried yanking him by the arm toward the field. “Coach is losing his shit.”

Tank throws his helmet to the ground, “I have other shit to do.”

“Tank! THE FUCK?!”

Ignoring his protesting teammates and fans, we sprinted to the Bronco. The tires leaving skid marks as he peels out.

“Where do we start?”

I check the app on my phone. “Fuck. They ditched the phone. Their last known location was... here? Stop the truck.”

My boots pound on the pavement as I round the field, barged past the concessions to where the pin was dropped in Google Earth.

“Look at the tracks.” Tank, was breathing heavily as we both surveyed the scene.

“She fought them.”

I knelt, my finger tracing the long lines the heels of her boot dug into the earth next to the heavy set of motorcycle treads.

“Fuck.”

In Tank’s hand was an empty syringe.

Fear snaked down my spine. Our women were drugged. Even if we got them back alive, would they want to live?

Other MC’s live by different codes. Gang raping captive woman from rival clubs or forcing them into marriage is common.

“If I get Brandi back, I’m putting a ring on that shit.” Tank’s eyes are watery. “I fucking love that gold digger girl.”

My fist clenches.

“My big plan for revenge just blew the fuck up in both our faces. I love Savvy, too. My rival’s blood.”

Rage filled every inch of me, I breathed it in. Choked on it. nothing but darkness ran in my veins.

I would kill for her.

*Die for her.*

The only way to save my girl was to end this farce. Shed my mask and step into who I am.

*River Cruz.*

President of the Royal Bastards, Santa Fe.

“Hacker?” There was no hiding the anguish in my voice as I took his call. “They ditched her phone.”

“I know. I got them on the video feed, six were riding chrome. They stashed the girls in the back of five series BMW. Black with Vermont tags.”

“Which way?”

“I’m still hacking into the local traffic cams... I’ll text.”

“Tank?”

Fists clenched, he growls. “Tires picked up mud. We’ll follow the breadcrumbs until they disappear.”

“Those fuckers are dead,” I grated through clenched teeth.

“I already know a place to dump their bodies.”

“Good,” I grunted, already stalking forward through the ripped tree branches where they made their getaway.



## CHAPTER 13

### *Savannah*

DRIED blood coated my bottom lip. I squirmed in the back of the trunk trying to free myself. Brandi was limp beside me. The rise and fall of her chest letting me know she's alive. It was hard to breath between the gags in our mouth and the putrid, dank, humid air in the tiny enclosed trunk. My head was on fucking fire. I'm not sure how long I was out for.

Hopefully not too long.

Think. *Think.*

I fought the foggy haze of pain, trying to process just in what the fuck to do.

MC men aren't stupid criminals. The BMW we were shoved into rode smoothly, but I knew there was zero chance of any GPS tracking. They disabled that shit. There would be no trace of us or of me popping the truck from the inside.

The tips of my fingers grazed along the inside of the trunk, looking for any sharp piece of metal to try to rip through the plastic zip tie at my wrists.

*Don't panic. Stay calm.*

I repeated the words in my head over and over. I wiggled around so the heel of my boot was against the hatch, I kicked in the spot my old man taught me too.

I busted the friggin' tail light from the inside. The rush of cold air helped me focus. "Hang on, Brandi. I've got this."

Her weak moan gave me hope that her injuries wouldn't be severe. They didn't have time to rape us but damn did the men grab her lady bits in turn before the lights went out on me.

It's dark as hell. Despite me ninja move no one was coming to save us. There were no cars to see the busted tail light and my hand waving from the trunk.

Despair settled deep in the pit of my stomach.

It took everything I had not to give into the sweet pain of oblivion and let my mind go to never never land. I fought with everything I had to stay conscious.

The engine revved as the car climbed up the steep, windy mountain road.

These bastards were taking us to a "safe house." But there would be nothing safe in store for me and Brandi.

I moved my face as close as I could to the stream of fresh air. Letting the cold bite my face.

The stars were out tonight.

I tried letting the glittering crystals way up in the sky calm me. Remembering a thousand different nights.

Wishing this one could end differently.

"Hunter," I wished upon one, as I gazed up. "I love you... what in the hell is that?"

Hope came alive as the tiny drone appeared through the break in the trees. We were being followed.

By how and by who, I had no clue.

"Brandi... someone knows. Someone will find us... we just need to stay alive."

"Savvy," she groaned.

"I'm here," grabbing her hand, I threaded our fingers together. "Try to stay calm, breathing in deep and slow. There's a drone following the car."

“I hear something... feel something...,” she moans.

I stilled, pressing my ear to the wind... it carried the familiar buzz. Like fifty power saws cutting through the nights.

Our army saviors were coming riding chrome while wearing leather cuts.

My heart pounded as they grew closer and our kidnappers drove erratically as gunfire erupted.

“Holy shit. If they shoot back, they’ll hit us in the trunk!” Thinking quickly, I took off my white tank, tied it in a knot and hung it out the busted tail light. Hopefully they’d see and know not to shoot at the trunk.

The men were on us, trading gunfire.

Brandi screamed as the car careened.

“Fuck! Hold on!” I grabbed her head and we spooned as the car went off the road, barreling through trees before impact.

“Savannah!”

“Brandi!”

My vision blurred, my head was on fire. Nothing was making sense.

My brain must be processing in slow mo as the trunk’s popped and a livid ... Hunter...? He stares down at us with his jaw ticking and his veins...popped.”

“Fuck, you’re hot,” my voice slurs as his hands roam over me, checking for injuries.

“Brandi! Baby,” Tank is anguished as he reaches in to lift Brandi. He weeps as she’s cradled in his arms. Why is he wearing football pants... a leather cut with a “Sergeant” patch and a Glock clutched in his meaty fist?

“... the fuck?” My head rolls as Hunter peppers kisses against my neck, the salt from his tears touch my skin.

“Prez.... one is still alive.” From the corner of my eye, I witness a large body dragged from the twisted metal front of the car. With me still pressed to him, Hunter pulls a gun, points and lets two rounds off.

“What’sss going on?” I slur, slumping against my man.

“I’ve got you baby and I’m never letting you go.” His eyes are a possessive storm as his large palms pulls me closer. The last thing I process is the Prez of Santa Fe and Royal Bastards emblem etched into his cut before blackness descends.

“Get away from her!” I yelled, sweeping my right leg out to kick at the pair of male ankles standing over Brandi.

The man laughed low in his throat as he kicked her legs open wider. They took her gag out along with mine. Enjoying our screams.

“Your Daddy can’t save you now, eh, Club Princess. Neither can your Royal Bastard boy toy.”

*“What the fuck? You know who I am?”*

“Why did you think we took you? Ain’t so bright are ya’? By the time we done with ya’ the Prez won’t even recognize his woman.”

“Are you fucked in the head? I’m no one’s old lady!”

“Stupid bitch.” The tip of his boot meets my ribs, yet I refuse to scry out in agony.

“Let her go! She has nothing to do with any of this!” I looked away, biting my lip so hard I tasted blood as another man starting using a knife to cut her clothes from her body then took his tongue, trailing a path along her exposed skin.

Brandi kicked and screamed as more hands landed on her bared flesh.

“Take me instead. Hurt me instead!”

“We’re saving you for the boss. But thanks for offering.”

## CHAPTER 14

*River*

TERROR FILLED me as she crumpled in my arms. Her heart beat was steady as I pressed two finger to the vein in her slender neck.

“Rogan!”

“I’m busy with my own woman,” he snarled.

“I’m talking to you as your Prez not as the bullshit facade Hunter.” My voice cracked like a whip.

“I can’t... I can’t put her down,” his voice cracked with his own anguish.

“I’m gonna fucking skewer them. Dead already or not, you gonna help?” I growled.

“Hacker texted. His drone has eyes on our backup. They should be here in two with a truck to transport the girls.”

“Which outfit did he tap?”

“New Hampshire... we have loose relations with the Devil’s Glen MC outta North Conway. Some of their men were riding back from a transport and close by.

“Text back Hacker. Get us a safe house in North Conway for the girls until I can make sure the threat’s eliminated.”

“Who are these fucks, anyway?”

“I didn’t bother checking the patch I just fucking fired.” Reluctant to put Savvy down, I turned in a circle. “We’ll lay them with down on our cuts while we deal with these fuckers.”

Rogan followed me to a cluster of pine trees off the side of the road. I laid my woman gently down on the bed of pines, covering her with my cut while Rogan did the same with Brandi. “I’ll be right back, baby,” I whispered against her temple before gently pressing my lips to her swollen split ones.

I untucked my gun as I headed back toward the wreck. These stupid fuckers tried to fool us by splitting up their crew. The bikes headed south while the car with our girls headed toward the New Hampshire border.

I didn’t feel any remorse as I stared into the dead face of the man I popped. “Viper’s Glen... the fuck... how did they know about Savannah?”

“Prob the same inside job as the snitch who had her old man grabbed. Looks like we ain’t the only ones who have beef with the Outlaws in Santa Fe.” Rogan checked the car, making sure the two inside were dead by firing few more rounds.

“Let them burn both here and in hell.” I unpeopled the gas tank, rolled their cut into a thing rope and dipped it in the tank as far as I could. Rogan put the car in neutral... we lit the cut on fire then pushed the rear of the car until it gained enough momentum to continue its journey down the steep cliff.

“Boom!” I muttered seconds before the car exploded from the rocky canyon below.

“What about that fucker?” Rogan looked over to the dead body in the brush.

“Fuck, I forgot about him.”

Rogan shrugged. Picked him up and chucked him over the side of the road toward the burning car. Black smoke billowed up to through the dusky haze.

“We gotta go before we get busted here.”

“Pick top the casings,” I yelled back before snapping a long pine branch to sweep away both the car and our tire tread tracks. It was a sloppy clean up job but better than nothing. The car fire would incinerate any trace of Savannah... nothing more of this mess would touch her.

“Tank...,”

“Fuck,” I murmured, as my eyes cut to where Brandi sat up, confused and shaking.

“Shhh, baby. It’ll be okay. Hunter and I will take care of everything.”

“We’re gonna have to tell them everything,” I warned as he went to her.

“Later, right now we just need to get them out before the cops show.”

“Hacker texted our ride is ten minutes out.”

I sat down in the brush, cradled Savvy across my lap and waited. My fingers tensed around my Glock as the sounds of vehicles coming up the mountain drive became closer.

“River? I’m Valor from Attitash MC. What the fuck? Hacker called in a favor and we walked into a damn shit show. How many?”

“Three dead in the car and one went over the cliff.”

“Prints?”

“Doubt it.”

“Fuck,” he blew out a breaths he ran his hands through his hair. Take the truck with the girls. We have a safe house outside of North Conway in Jackson. I had my local person start getting it ready with supplies and the wood stove going. You can lay low there for a while.”

I nodded. “We need a medic.”

“I already have someone on their way, Doc McShay. She married into the MC. She worked for Boston Hospital. She’ll be thorough and discreet.”

Rogan and I gently lifted our loves in to the back cab of the truck. “I appreciate this.” I clasped Valor’s hand. “Me and my crew are officially in your debt.”

“Damn straight you are. I’ll have this cleaned up. We got law on the inside. We watch each other’s backs up here.”

“No, doubt. I appreciate it, brother.”

“...Tank?”

“Shhh, baby. You’re safe. Both of you are safe. Please just slowly sip the water in back and try to stay awake in case you have a concussion. Hunter and I are taking you both someplace safe. We’ll explain everything then, okay?”

“Where’s the police and ambulance?” Brandi started to shake. My girl kept quiet as she started to come to. Her mind still hazy but Savvy knows the score. MC business is kept from scrutiny.

“We can’t. The men who did this are gangsters, Brandi we can’t trust the police or the EMT’s.”

“Whhaaat? That’s ludicrous. They hurt me. I want justice.”

“They’re all dead. That’s justice,” Tank growled with his fist clenched.

Brandi gasped as her face turned white. “This is bad. So bad. All I wanted was to watch you play in the game... how did all of this happen?”

Tears sprung from Savvy’s eyes. “It’s my fault. All of this... I haven’t been truthful to any of you about who I am...”

“Shh, baby,” I twisted around from the front seat, pressing my index finger to her lips. “Later. We can go hash all of this out later. Right now I need to get you and Brandi safe and we have a concierge doctor meeting us at a place in North Conway.” I had taken off my Royal Bastards cut and stashed it under the seat. I’m not sure how much she observed or remembered when I arrived. Hopefully not much until I’m also ready to confess.

“New Hampshire?” Brandi gasped again.



“It’s only a ninety minute drive. Until we know who came after you girls and why... we need to lay low.”

“This is like from a movie or TV show,” Brandi, exclaimed.

You have no idea,” I muttered, putting the truck into gear and taking off.

“...Hunter?” Savvy whispered as our eyes met in the rearview.

“I’ve got you...”

“But you’re...”

“Not who you think?”

“Neither were you sweetheart but we can talk about all this later, okay?”

“You Bastard,” she hissed. I engaged the child locks right as my little hellion’s wheels started turning. She tried ripping the door open without success.

“Not denying...”

“Rogan...,” I nodded my head to the glove box right as Savvy started trying to climb her way over the seat to rain tiny punches on me.

“Whose Rogan?” Brandi wondered, rubbing her head as if she misheard due to her injuries.

“His real name, I’m betting.” Savvy hissed, still trying to maim my face, this time with her nails as my hands remained on the wheel, keeping the truck steady despite the terror she was trying to rain on me.

“Easy now,” Rogan’s voice was steady as he opened the box, grabbed the zip ties, securing them on my wildcat’s little wrists.

“What? No!!! Please you can’t do that we were just abducted and restrained.” Brandi, cried trying to stop him.

“It’s for her safety and ours. He needs to drive, you both need medical attention and rest and she is losing it.”

I stopped the truck so Rogan could climb out and deal with Savvy in the back.

“So,” he drawled. “Are you two gonna be good or am I gonna have to sit back here between you to babysit ya?”

“Fuck this,” Savvy muttered, rearing back. She lifted her leg trying to kick him in the groin with her boot heel. A move he easily evaded.

“All the football blocking and talking finally coming in useful,” he chuckled.

“Fuck you,” she spat.

“Easy, now. We saved you. I’m thinking you should be grateful.”

“It’s because of you we were even targeted!” Savvy screamed.

“Negative. That would be your old man.”

She finally quieted. Sitting back in defeat. A light flashed in her eyes before he disguised it.

“What?” I turned her chin, forcing her to face me where I sat half twisted over the front seat. “Tell me.”

“No,” she spat.

“Savannah,” I warned, my voice a growl, “if you know something about what happened you need to tell me so I can deal with it.”

“Why? Why would a Royal Bastard want to help me?”

“Because of what we are to each other.”

“And what exactly is that now?” She challenged.

I rubbed the back of my neck not ready to get into this right now. “Romeo and Juliet? But we don’t have to die.”

“Spare me the attempt at romantics.”

“What’s your real name and what’s his? Let’s start with that and maybe I’ll play.”

Fuck I loved how even now, dirty and damaged she was strong willed and not backing down an inch. It turned me the fuck on. She was my equal in every way.

My queen.

My love.

My enemy's only daughter.

“River. River Cruz. Prez of the Royal Bastards Santa Fe. He's Rogan, my Searge. But oddly I still might call him Tank. It fits, ya know?”

“We need to get back on the road. I hear sirens.” Tank cocked his head. “Looks like I'm riding in the back with the ladies. He hauled Savvy out keeping her close to him by snaring her cuffed wrists before climbing in the middle and pulling her back inside. He reached across her lap to close the door with one hand while I re-engaged the locks.

“All set boss. The three of us are all nice and cozy.”

“You didn't restrain me,” Brandi bit her lip.

“That's because you enjoy that shit,” he snorted.

“I'm not sure if I will anymore.” A lone tear streaked down her face.

“Ah, shit babe. You will.” Tank, hauled Brandi across his lap and started peppering her with kisses.

“I don't even know you,” she hiccuped through tears.

“Yes, you do,” he insisted, taking her palm and placing it over his meaty pec so she could feel his heartbeat.

“I think I'm gonna be sick,” Savvy snarled, turning her head from the couple.

“I'm still me, babe. I ain't ever been an actor. Call me Tank, call me, Rogan, or you can still call me your 'Papa Bear.'”

“Now I'm gonna be sick,” I shook my head, pulling the truck off the side of the road and cutting the lights. Six Sheriff vehicles, a firetruck and an ambulance went tearing by.

“I thought Attitash had this handled?”

I met Tank’s eyes in the rearview, shrugging. “Who knows how they do shit up here?”

After another five, I pulled back out on the road and headed north.

We sat in the dark each of us lost in our own thoughts. Tank found a med kit and gave the girls some pain killers and anti inflammatories.

“There’s sleeping pills in here but you ladies gotta stay awake even if we gotta sing for over an hour.”

“Fuck me,” Savvy manned into her palm.

“Be nice or I’ll stick my road scarf in your mouth to gaga ya’.”

“I hate you too, Tank.”

He shrugged. “I really don’t give two fucks, Savannah. But You sure as shit better tell me what’s up. My job is to protect my Prez and whatever is coming your way is going his.”

“I’ll think about it,” she muttered. “If you take these off... maybe I’ll think really hard.”

“No can do, babe. You’d prob try to stab my Prez in the head with the heel of your boot.”

“It did smash that shit outta the Beamer’s tail light,” she popped a shoulder.

“Keep your eyes on the road,” Tank groaned as the truck swerved.

“I saw a Moose or some shit. Scared the fuck outta me,” I muttered, steadying the wheel.

“Moose my ass,” Tank breathed..., “more like a stubborn, sexy brunette who has ya’ by the balls.”

“I’m scared.” Brandi, sniffled still unsure what the fuck was going on. She hadn’t completely relaxed in Tank’s arms, despite his best efforts from all the sweet fucking nothings he

kept mumbling under his breath while Savvy and I pretended not to hear.

We ate up miles on the road stuck in this suspend awkward moment until my burner cell connected to the bluetooth.

“Sup, this is River.”

“River! We just heard some major shit went down! Are you okay? Mouse was worried.”

“Hi, Regan,” I smiled for the first time all day.

“Is the Outlaw Princess safe?”

“That’s debatable,” Savvy answered.

“Oh shit. Savannah?”

“Who, the fuck are you?”

“Regan, Tarak’s sister and Danny’s second cousin. You know Danny? The man your dad’s MC killed in cold blood when they raided our warehouse last summer.”

“I-he had nothing to do with that.”

“Come on, you are an MC princess you know enough about how shit rolls and how payback goes.”

“You fucked me for payback?” Savvy’s voice became unnaturally high as she reared back in her seat.

“Thanks, Regan. Good talk... Gotta go. Ciao.” I ended the call just as she started squawking too.

“Women,” I muttered pulling off the main highway.

“You didn’t just say that. You’re so dead. I mean it. I’ll cut you. I’m fucking savage too. I’m my father’s daughter.”

I didn’t trust myself to speak. I was living in a fool’s paradise—all caught up in my fake persona while catching real feelings for a woman who was also pretending to be somebody else. I pulled into the Starbuck’s drive thru off the interstate much to everyone’s shock.

“Be quiet. Don’t say a fucking word or I’ll peel out without getting you anything.” I warned both women. Despite the heated seats I knew they were bone cold. Brandi must be in

shock because the bubbly blonde usually doesn't shut up and we had more miles to go until the doctor could asses them.

I ordered their favorite hot sugary drinks with extra whip cream, plain black tall's for me and Tank, adding a half dozen cake pops at the last second.

After paying cash, I pulled around, parking in the furthest spot in the lot by the woods. I handed Tank and Brandi their drinks with half the cake pops before getting out of the truck to tend to Savvy.

"Be a good girl," I whispered in the deep bedroom voice I knew made her crazy.

"Fuck off," she hissed, but she eyed the drink in my hand as if she'd kill me for it.

I took off the lid. "It's hot. Don't want to burn you..." I murmured lightly blowing on her drink, before holding it to her lips. "Drink. Slowly."

"Please cut the cable ties."

"No can do, sugar. No hush up and drink. If you're real good I'll let you have all the cake pops."

She winced as the warm liquid hit her cut, swollen lip. Instinctively, I kissed it before I could even stop myself.

"Shit," I muttered pulling back. I practically stuffed the cake pop in her mouth just as she was about to go off on me again.

Despite her anger, she ate the sugary snack and took sips from her latte every time I held the cup to her lips.

We didn't speak but we battled. Our eyes locked in a heated, silent war.

I knew our situation was fucked up as hell but I also knew one thing deep in the depths of my soul. I loved her. Would cherish the friggin' girl as River Cruz Prez of the Royal Bastards Santa Fe.

"I'm going to cut your balls off the first chance I get, to feed to the coyotes behind my house."

I stifled a laugh, “Why can’t you be good like Brandi, babe? Look at her all cuddled up to Tank, drinking her mochaccino and shit.”

“I’m not your babe.”

“You’re still mine and you know it,” I countered.

“You wish. Whatever we had... is done and over. Hell, You weren’t even real.”

I leaned in close, my pecs pressing her back against the seat as my lips brushed just over her left ear. “When I had you naked beneath me... our hearts pounding in sync as we became one. Twisting the sheets all night... That shit was real babe and you can’t deny that.”

Her face colored crimson.

Good.

Her eyes were glassy her pupils dilated. But now it’d be hard to tell from a concussion or from the images I had just put in that pretty, little head.

I pulled back, clipped her seat belt and went back to the front cab. “We have another forty-five minutes according to the gps on the burner. Hang tight.” I turned the radio on... “Tank, if they start getting drowsy pinch them to keep them awake.”

“I’m good,” Savvy snarls. “I can pinch myself.”

I said nothing as I pulled back out on the road. In my mind I was already devising a plan to keep her with me... for good.

## CHAPTER 15

### *Savannah*

MY BARE FEET paced back and forth over the wide plank wooden floor all night. I had a mild concussion... no internal bleeding... well except for my crushed, shattered fucking piece of shit heart.

It betrayed me.

Bled for my enemy.

“Fuck,” my fists balled, I landed another punch into the stupid large pile of fluffy pillows on the bed.

The pounding in my head started subsiding about thirty minutes after the doctor gave me a few pain pills. She also left a Z pack, so my cuts and lip don't get infected. But unfortunately she had nothing; no cure for betrayal with a side of broken heart.

“So, stupid,” I muttered, swiping yet another tear from my cheek. I was so enamored by the new me; so busy conning Hunter that I never saw his con coming.

“Savannah?” Tank softly rapped his knuckled on my door but his voice was still soft thunder when he spoke. “I'm coming in doll so I hope you're decent.”

“Decent but mad as hell,” I warned while picking up a decorative glass orb and tossing it in my hand.

“Easy there girl, I'm not the one you want to take out.”



“Maybe you are. Brandi is my first real girlfriend. You hurt her. Lied to her. Conned her. I might just cut off your balls after I go after his.”

He sighs, walks over to the set of French doors that I had tried opening in vain all night. He stares out onto the same barren snowy landscape I already have memorized. “If you mean what you are sayin’ about really caring for her... you’ll tell me what you wouldn’t tell him.”

My fingers twist in the hem of the clean shirt that appeared on my bed after I had showered. “I saw someone from the Outlaws last night. He taunted me. He turned on the Club. Betrayed all is us. He was the one who murdered your friend, Danny. Not my father.”

“Your father didn’t pull the trigger? It’s still his Club. His orders. His man.”

“No, you don’t understand.” By this point the T-shirt was destroyed and my hands stung from twisting the fabric. “He went rogue. There were no orders. My father sent me up here under a new identity. He knew a coupe was about to go down and I could be used as collateral. He just never saw this play... frankly neither did I. I was so busy waiting, watching for Line to find me like the freaking boogeyman. Instead he found me. Hunter... River whatever the fuck name he wants to go by.”

“He got caught in his own game. He’s in deep with you... something he didn’t see coming. You two need to hash this shit out.”

“There’s nothing to figure out. It was all a lie. Both of us were pretending to be people we aren’t. It’s over. We can’t ever really be together as who we actually are.”

“That’s about to the two of you and no one else, sugar. I won’t stand in your way. Thanks for the info about Line. I’ll need more details about him so our guy, Hacker can start tracking him down.”

“I hate being locked in this room. Please, I’m going crazy.”

“He needs you safe. Secure. Until we eliminate the threat and figure out what in the hell is going on.”

“Is he too afraid to face me?” I spin, finally looking Tank in the eye.

“He left before dawn. Heading to a meet to make sure everything from yesterday was handled as well as take care of some shit back on campus. The team and coach was pissed when I just took off like that.”

“River’s gone? He just fucking up and left?” My voice raised to an almost nuclear level.

“Don’t worry. He’ll be back. I’ll send Brandi in with some breakfast, The two of you can keep company. I also have Club shit to handle myself.”

I resumed my tiger-like pacing, just needing to confront River. To get out the building explosion and burn us both. Get the nuclear break up over and done so I can could start soothing the after burn.

“Hey,” Brandi walked in a few minutes later looking a hell of a lot better than yesterday,

“Hey, you ok?”

“Not really, “ she shrugged.

“You?”

“Not really.”

We shared a soft smile as Tank reappeared carrying a serving tray. I couldn’t help the soft snort that escaped me as the giant man wearing baggy jeans, a chain belt and a T showing off more tats than I thought he had served me fucking tea.

“Biscuits?” I eyes the plate speculatively as he sat the tray down on the dresser.

“Fresh outta the oven. The doc said no caffeine for ya’ ladies for a few days so hot tea with honey instead.”

“How fucking cute,” I snarked, still taking two biscuits and the cup of tea. I stared at Tank as I stuffed the first one in my mouth. Finally, my brow rose hoping he’d get the hint to go.

“Ok... you ladies relax. I’ll send someone to check on ya’ in a. Bit. Go easy on the Pledge.”

“You have a Pledge up here.”

“Nope, he’s from The Devi’s Glen. Anything ya’ need within reason he’ll get for ya.”

“Great, shoo.” I motioned with my hand.

“Be good. Both of you,” he warned.

I saluted him with my middle finger while Brandi avoided eye contact all together despite him gripping her chin and kissing her on her split lips.

“I love ya’ girl,” he growled low with one hand fisted when she didn’t say it back.

I pressed my ear to the door, counting twelve steps of his heavy boots going down the stairs before trying the handle. “He locked us in.”

I wasn’t surprised but definitely disappointed.

“I’m sorry. I just can’t pretend everything is okay and my varsity baller is really an enforcer in a motorcycle gang.”

“So,” I declared taking sip of the hot tea. “What are we unpacking first? Me and River or you and him?”

She sighed, throwing herself back on the bed. “The man held me all night. Wouldn’t leave. He even sat in the bathroom while I showered like a damn guard dog. I mean I always wanted an alpha man you know? Someone who would be hot, and a bit crazy about me but all this.... This is waaayyyyy too much.”

“I’m so sorry. I truly had no idea. They both fooled me when I pride myself on having a pretty good bullshit meter.”

“Yeah, well, the two of them... are a force. River all dark and hot and they way he looked at you...”

“Like an obsession? His enemies daughter whose heart he was out to slaughter?” I finished for her.

“No, like you were his universe. His own personal solar system that he spun around.”

“Damn,” I groaned.” It was like that. If only it was real and I wasn’t pretending. If he did want me it was the girl I was trying to be not who I really am.”

“And who is that?”

“A girl who grew up with dust under her nails, a mutt named Cabo, and a brother who died way too young. My mother was a hooker from Vegas who thought being an Ol’ lady to a motorcycle outlaw guy like my dad was hot as fuck. Until it wasn’t.”

“Damn. I need a cigarette for this story...,” she drew a pack with a lighter from the pocket of her hoodie. I recognized Tank’s favorite lighter.

“Does he know you have all that?”

“He’ll figure it out when he goes to light up,” she smirked.

“What the hell, hand it over.”

We lay back on the bed, lighting up. Spill our secrets and chain smoke until the pack’s gone.

“That was cathartic as fuck,” I murmur, blowing a final smoke ring. “What are you going to do about Tank?”

Brandi, shrugs, her eyes fixated on the smoke spiraling above. “It’s

over. I thought he was a football stud. I can’t do kidnappings, almost rapes, and murder. Not even for the way he lays it down on me.”

“You’re handling this much better than me. He still thinks you are together.”

“It’s called surviving, sweetie. Something I just explained I’ve been doing for a while to. Maybe not in an MC in a dust bowl town but in a backwoods trailer park in Western North Carolina. Getting accepted to Bradbury was my ticket out of following own my mother’s footsteps of working three jobs to barely make bills while men fucked her instead of the

suburban housewives; all promising a tomorrow that never came.”

“Damn,” I muttered.

“I hoped Tank was different. A college athlete... Someone who’d get a degree.”

“Instead we both got second degree burns on our hearts.”

“Major damage,” she groans.

“We need to get the fuck out of here.”

“How?” She sits up. “They locked us in and that window is bulletproof and two stories up.”

“You. You are gonna seduce the fuck outta Tanka and swipe his burner cell the same way you did the cigs.”

“I don’t... I don’t want to sleep with him again when I’m trying to extricate myself from this relationship. He’s scary as fuck to me now... not my teddy bear baller anymore.”

“Don’t sleep with him. Just act needy and scared... when he gets close feign PTSD and say you can’t bear a man’s hands on you after yesterday....”

“I do have PTSD. This MC shit is way sexier on my streaming service then living it. What do I do when I get the phone?”

“Go to the bathroom. Lock yourself in, flush the toilet a few times... here... memorize this number...” I repeated Dean’s cell. “He’s the Prez of The Devil’s Glen MC. He spooked me a few times, showing up when River wasn’t around, letting me know his Club had my back if I ever needed anything. My father served with his for a few years in the Army when he had enlisted at eighteen.”

“Do you think he’ll come?”

“With guns blazing.”

“... you—you want them shot?” She swallowed hard.

“Maybe only River—his balls off....”

“Seriously?”

“Dean won’t start as war with The Bastards or Devil’s Glen. He’ll scare the pledge.... We just need a window when Tank and River both leave for a bit.”

“I could send him for lattes and scones tomorrow? He’ll do it for me especially if I guilt him.”

“He fell for you hard. That part was real.”

“I think River might’ve for you, too.”

“I can’t think about that. It’s moot.”

“So what’s going to happen?”

“Dean will take us to his Clubhouse... get us back to campus with a full security detail that won’t consist of men in suits. Tank and River won’t be able to touch us.”

“That’s good,” she shivers. “I still like it when he touches me. Even if in my head and heart I know he’s bad news.”

“Same. But I’d die before admitting it to anyone else.”

“I’m hungry. We need rest and food if we’re going to escape. Let’s make the pledge make us bacon and eggs... maybe some pancakes...”

“Pledge!” I yell, as I get up and pound on the door.

The poor fuck’s face is white as he gingerly opens the door eyeing us both like scary zoo cats about to pounce and slash his throat.

“Yeah?”

“We’re hungry and pissed at our men. Feed us. Got the streaming service turned on up here and make me a fire. I’m fucking freezing.”

Brandi rattles off our order while mumbles something about nRiver insisting I’d burn the place down if I had a fire in my room. He comes back with more blankets and an apology. I slam the door in his face and wait for lunch. Tomorrow is going to be lit. Brandi already memorized Dean’s cell. Now, all I have to do is rescue my heart after I escape. How to do that? I have no fucking clue.



## CHAPTER 16

*River*

“I FUCKED UP.”

An uneasy feeling churned in my gut as I surveyed the scene. Tank sat heavy in the old oak kitchen chair. Two medium sized latte looking drinks still sat in their trays while neatly arranged scones sat on a chipped plate.

The house stood silent.

Too silent.

“Where are they?”

My heart hammered in my chest. Adrenalin already flowing.

“Gone.”

One broken word torn right outta Tank’s own chest.

“THE FUCK?” I roared. I grabbed the chair across from Tank hurtling it out of the kitchen, my hand then reached out, sweeping all the freshly washed cups from the counter to the floor.

My hands shook with rage as I unholstered my Glock. “Take this,” I handed it out to Tank, “before I’m tempted to us hit on their Pledge.”

“I can’t. If you had it to me I’ll pull the trigger myself.” My heart almost stopped beating all together at the look on



Tank's face.

He was shattered.

Utterly destroyed.

My best friend who is bigger than life sat broken and utterly defeated in his seat. Tears leaked from the corner of his eyes.

Tank shedding tears was a big fucking deal for a man who was unbreakable.

I shoved open the backdoor, boots dreading through feet of snow. I stopped in the middle of the frozen back yard. With my fists balled I let out a soul-shattering bellow that echoed back to my hollowed out heart.

*She's gone.*

I had hoped.... Desperately hoped there was a sliver of a chance we could get through this. That she knew what we had shared despite all the lies, was still enough to hold onto.

I was a fool for thinking the Princess of my rival MC would choose to belong to me.

“She took my phone. Brandi was hurting bad... all fucked up from the ordeal. She let me hold her but tears streamed from her eyes if I touched her... ya know? So this morning when her big, sad eyes looked at me and she asked finally if they could have their coffees and scones I thought... doesn't she know I'd do anything for her? We killed for them... she had taken my burner last night without me suspecting and used it call for help.”

“Cops?”

“Worse, Devil's Glen. Hacker just called. He traced the number to Dean Smith himself. You wanna call?”

“Savvy must know him. Fuck. She ran to him? Too afraid to hash this out with me... the fuck!!!!”

“Where ya' been anyway? I've been lighting up your cell.”

“I needed time to think. Savvy and I were a bomb about to detonate. We needed to cool off and I had to handle shit with .

We made a fucking mess burning up that car but damned if I regret it. I also used the intel you got from Savvy to ask hacker and Attitash MC to get extra eyes on the area. He failed. She's his target."

"Or you. He could've been using her to get to you."

"I've been so stupid, wrapped up in pretending to be someone else. I lost focus that I was the target of his own game. The damn thing is Tank\_I liked being Hunter Northport. Just a normal guy, living a normal life. Not tis fucked up shit we signed up for."

Tank exhales heavily head bowed as he spoke, "Brandi's the first woman I've ever loved. Back home, I had every Club girl on me... wanting to be with me because of my status with the MC. None of them really wanted me. You know? Brandi's the first girl I wanted really wanted to be in a relationship with and when she found out who I really am, the girl gone and took off. I guess I'm not worthy of love from anyone other than a Club skank. The kind that fuck all of us not the quality wife types that some of our brothers have. I won't lie\_it fucking hurts."

I place a hand on his shoulder as he exhaled.

"...I never thought I could hurt this bad. This love shit really sucks. My fucking heart hurts like someone shoved a fist right through it. I was real with her... I did shit I never wanted to do for another woman, River. Cook pancakes from scratch? Run out to get her a six dollar coffee drink before she showers? Hell, I even did her laundry last month when she was studying for exams. I've become domesticated as shit. Not for an act but because I just wanted to take care of the girl. All that shit was real. The real me\_and she just tricked me into escaping instead of being real with me and talking shit out."

What could I say? There were no words I could offer when I also felt fucked up with my own heartache.

Tank's burner broke the heavy silence. "It's Hacker."

I took the phone form his hand. "It's River."

“Prez... I got a location. I texted the number from a burner. The girls are ‘safe’. The Devil’s Glen are aligned with The Outlaws. Savannah called in the Prez herself to fetch her. He says they are both under the protection of his Club and not to intervene.”

“Like hell, I won’t.” I growled. “Send me the GPS location of their Clubhouse.”

“That’s not a good idea. It’s just you and Tank against a full MC?”

“I’ll handle it. Any leads on Linc? Savvy told Tank he’s the one who murdered Danny after he went Rogue.”

“The Outlaws are looking for him too. Shit s going bad over there with Savannah’s dad being missing and Linc on the lam. There’s a power vacuum. They might go to Church and vote in a new Prez since they can’t find theirs.”

“Fuck,” my free hand grabbed the back of my own neck. “This is bad. Stay alert; no more day drinking. Shut down the Clubhouse for anyone other than members. No more girls, either, I don’t need them in the way of gunfire. Fortify the perimeter and send word tot arak to get Mouse and his little ones to the safe house. Regan too, but doubt she’ll go. Keep Edge in the loop.” I disconnected the call. “You coming?”

“No, brother. I just can’t. I’m sorry. I ain’t gonna go chase a woman who left on her own. She made the choice not me.”

I sighed. “Savvy she grew up in Club life. Brandi is a babe in the woods. Literally. She’s soft and smells like candy and marshmallows all the time. Maybe she isn’t meant to be a ride and die kinda girl, Tank. She freaked the fuck out. She could become a liability...”

“What are you sayin’? He growled rounding on me.

“Relax,” I held my palms up. “As your President and best friend I swear to you, your girl is safe. I trust she won’t talk and if she does go to the law someday we can say she’s crazy because you broke up and deny the whole thing. The bodies are gone anyway. You have to walk away now. We have to go back to New Mexico. There’s no point staying at Bradbury

now. The plan has gone to shit. Go back to campus, clear our shit out. I'll see you in Santa Fe... unless you change your mind?"

He look utterly defeated as he stared up into the grey, icy sky. "Nah, I'm good brother. I'll see you at home. Watch your back. I don't like leaving ya' alone."

"It's an order. I fear nothing. Nothing but never holding her again," I finished on a whisper as he turned to go. "Oh and Tank?"

"Yeah?"

"If something does happen to me... you are next in line."

"Fuck," he muttered as he trudged through the snow back to the house. "What do we do with the Pledge?"

"Nothing, he's not ours. Attitash will handle him."

"I still think it's a bad idea to confront Devil's Glen on your own."

"We also have a pact with Devil's Glen. Tarak is friends with a few of them. I can cut a deal to get her back. They won't touch me unless they want a war with every New England Chapter of the Bastards."

"Take the Pledge or a few men from Attitash."

"Can't do that, brother. They are feuding. "

"Fuck."

"I'm good. They won't touch me."

"But she might kick the ever living shit out of you."

"I just might let her," I grinned.

"How long?"

"What?"

"How long does it take to heal a broken heart?"

"Fuck if I know, Tank. Try asking Siri."

"Shittt," he mutters. "Tell her\_ never mind," he sighs.

“Just do us both a favor and don’t go spilling your guts out to Regan. That woman is a dog with a bone when it comes to this shit.”

“That woman terrifies me. She could probably get me to tell her everything.”

“Fuck,” I muttered. Just lay low until I get back home.



They call it Devil’s Glen for a reason. Deep in the mountains of New Hampshire somewhere by Smuggler’s Notch is a forest of thick pine trees filled with old secrets.

The Devil’s Glen MC uses trails and hidden caverns to move merc from Canada into the US, using the same routes locals used back in the day to smuggle booze in during the prohibition era.

Rough rock encased in ice flanks both sides of the windy road. Even though I’ve been in four wheel drive with the heavy truck loaded down in the back, it was still touch and go for a while that I might slide right off the damn road.

Dusk was descending. The sky turning from light to dark smoky gray, while the Earth below gleamed white. It was eery as fuck. I rolled down my window but heard nothing despite the feeling hundreds of eyes were watching.

I’d miss the turn if it weren’t for the deep tire tracks already in the snow pulling off between two thick trees.

They left their gate wide open but I doubt it was a welcome. I followed the tracks about a mile deep into the thick woods before the terrain opened into a clearing. A huge log cabin with what I was sure were bullet proof glass windows sat in the back. Smoke curled from three chimneys, a wide porch wrapped around. It’d be cozy as fuck if it weren’t for about thirty or so Devil Glen brothers hanging out around mini fires in the yard.

None of the men looked surprised as my truck pulled into an opening in the yard and came to a stop.

She was in there.

*I'd have to get passed them all.*

My hands clenched on the wheel before letting go. I unholstered both my pieces, gently placing them on the seat. I texted Hacker and Tank that I had entered the *Devil's Glen*.

I took my time getting out of the truck, acting like I had zero fucks to give while every fiber of my being just wanted to go grab my girl.

The men eyes me suspiciously but none made any moves when I turned my back so they could read my Royal Bastard's cut clearly.

It wasn't until I was almost right in front of the large cabin did the door open and a man close to my age stepped out.

"Thought you might head out this way. Did you come all by yourself?" He drawled, lazily pretending to not care less but the way his eyes cut behind my truck ever so slightly gave his nerves away.

"She's coming with me."

"You didn't come for both women? Interesting...."

I jogged forward ready to bound up the steps and right into that fucking house when two men suddenly jumped into action, each grabbing on elf my arms.

"The fuck? Do you know who I am?" I bellowed. "I'm fucking Prez of the Royal Bastards Santa Fe. I came into your den unarmed you fucks. Lay off." I shrugged my shoulders trying to get them to ease their grips.

"She doesn't want to see you, never mind go anywhere with you. She stays here."

The guy addressing me wore a fleece coat without a patch. The kind I'd see back on campus. "... the fuck are you?" I asked.

"Dean Smith. Firstborn son of our Prez. He's out on a run... leaving me here to handle things..."

"Bullshit! Where's your VP?"

"On the same run."

“Sergeant?”

“Holding your left hand.”

I fucking snapped. The way this guy looked down his fucking nose at me combined with his snarky attitude. I knew what he was thinking..... Savvy’s a precious jewel. She shines brighter than the sun. He was going to make a move on her. I just fucking knew it.

A snarl ripped from my chest as I there my body weight left and lunged right. I was up those fucking stairs in an instant, fist back, ready to punch the fucker in the face but my momentum had me tackling him instead. We rolled on the rough wide plank floor, each trying to gain the edge as we wrestled, jabbing each other wherever we could reach.

I tuned out the shouts around us, my only mission was to fucking get this guy.

We landed in the icy snow after rolling right off of the porch. I was able to roll right and get me weight up behind me knees. Both of us were panting like wild dogs as our eyes locked.

I didn’t even realize I was bleeding until I spat in the snow, turning the pristine white into haphazard drops of crimson.

“You are making a big mistake,” he warned.

“Fuck if I care. You can’t have my girl.”

“She’s made it clear she isn’t yours.”

“People in relationships sometimes need to sort some things out. You’d know that if your pencil dick every had a woman.”

He launched at me. I stood, ready for it. This time my fist connected with the fucker’s nose.

A river of red now painted the snow.

Men piled on me. I fought them all circled like a Gladiator in the fight for his life.

The animalistic sounds that came from me were ripped right from the sharp, jagged edges of my broken heart.

The hits kept coming.

Not hard hard enough to kill me, but enough that I'd limp out.

"Savannah!" I roared as I swore I spotted her standing by an upstairs window surveying the carnage below. "Don't do this! We can work this out! I'm still me and you're still you. I love you."

"How fucking sweet," Dean snickered as his men worked me over. Adrenalin and love had me fighting like Hercules but her refusal to come to me, made me feel so fucking defeated.

I didn't even know what I was gonna say until the words poured out of me the same way as my blood. Each desperate word of it dripping from my mouth the way crimson droplets dripped from my flesh.

"Savvy!!!!" I bellowed, sounding like a wolf howling in despair when he loses his mate. I fell to the ground, on my knees, raising a palm to fucking Dean Smith.

It was over.

He only won because she refused me.

That was the real defeat.

The men left, one by one. Leaving me to mourn alone in the icy frozen snow.

This place really was hell. Right here smack in the middle of the Devil's Glen.



## CHAPTER 17

### *Savannah*

“ARE you going to go out there?” Brandi stood to the right of the window her hand drawing a few inches of the drape aside.

I kept pacing right out of his line of sight, my nails now ragged and chewed as nerves churned throughout my body.

“What should I do?”

“Will they kill him?”

“No,” I replied, but I don’t know Dean that well. I gave him the bare minimum of tech story. But he knows enough to know something explosive went down between me and the Prez of the Royal Bastards who he’s now locked in a fistfight with.

“I don’t care what you say about Hunter, I mean River. That man is slaying for you. They’ve got him surrounded and he’s still screaming your name.”

I almost wavered as I caught sight of his bloody and bruising face. My hand turned the knob of the door when my name was ripped from his soul so loud it reverberated through the cabin room I was hiding in.

“I can’t.” My hand shook as I backed away from the door and sank down on the floor.

Brandi just looked at me with pity before flying past. “I’ll go.”

“Wait!”

With still shaky hands, I got up off the floor, grabbing the notebook left on the dresser with a pen. The previous guest here was writing music. Notes I couldn't read filled the pages.

I flipped to the back, tearing off a blank piece.

*Sorry.*

*I'm just not sure which version of Savannah I want to be.*

“Here. Give this to him,” I choked on my own words. Her eyes filled with sympathy as she scanned my note. But she said nothing as she tore out the door.

I heard her yelling at the men to move out of her way. Curiosity my down fall, I made my way back to the window.

River knelt in the snow. Blood dripped from him.

Brandi was out there without a coat fussing over his wounds while screaming at The Devil's Glen MC to get her a med kit. I almost smiled at my feisty blonde friend. Giants jumped at her commands. Just like Tank had.

I wanted to go to him. But to say what? Thanks for taking my V-card and heart while living under pseudonym?

I was still fucked up from the abduction, from all the lies, from finding out my father is missing and in MC life missing means good as dead.

I wanted to run to River. Let him wrap his arms around me and comfort me with whispered words of bullshit.

But I couldn't.

Something snapped in me the other night. A part of me died and another born.

I wanted to be strong like that woman who talked to me over the truck's audio. I could tell River indulged her. Respected her.

I want to be a woman no one fucks with.

Not half-grown fraternity boys and definitely not full down aloha bikers.

The only way to do this was to resist River, get back to my rental in the woods and pick up the pieces.

Figure out next moves on my own terms without MC interference of any kind.

When I figure out what I want, I'll let him know. Until then, I'm holding my head high. Because I told him the truth, I wasn't sure who the fuck I was anymore: the girl from New Mexico who wore a half pound of silver between her fingers and wrists, working the bar in an MC's Clubhouse or the mysterious college girl somehow pulling A's and forging a different future...



“This is surreal.”

Brandi and I were back on campus after our hellish four day ordeal. Apparently River and Tank got ahead of all of the drama, spinning some story about Tank's baby-sitter being airlifted after a car crash and the three of us dropping everything to support him.

The whole thing being so traumatic that Tank and Hunter would have to finish the remaining few weeks of the semester remote.

But we knew the truth: the two of them would never come back to Bradbury. The question now is will I continue?

“All these men are creeping me out.”

“They are here for our protection. The man who betrayed my father's Club and came for us is still out there.”

“River and Tank will get them. I-I saw the way they killed.” She swallows hard, wrapping the plaid blanket closer around her shoulders. “ They were cold. Calculated. Like they've done it so many times before.”

“Because they have,” I answered.

“And that’s why I just can’t. I’m focusing on my grades and then getting out of here over winter break.”

“You’re.... Not going back to North Carolina?”

“Never. I have some money saved up from summer when I waitressed along the shore. I want to getaway. Go somewhere warm. Come with me?”

I sat back in my Adirondack chair, watching the steady flames of the bonfire Dean’s men made for us. They cosseted us like little babies. My rental was on lockdown 24/7 with a group of at least ten surrounding the perimeter. Dean at least dressed normally when he took us to class. The funny thing is everyone thinks either me or Brandi are now serious cheaters. They just can’t figure out which one of us is supposedly with Dean.

I just roll my eyes at them all and roll on.

“I haven’t thought much about break.”

“I know. I think about them too. All the time... wondering where they are and what they are doing...”

My gaze lifts to the stars, “Probably wondering the same thing about the two of us. But I suspect he has a spy here. Someone keeping tabs on us, reporting back to their master.”

“Really?”

“I’d bet my life on it.”

“That’s hot.”

“What? That they are covertly stalking us?”

“Yeah.”

“There’s no hope for you.”

“I left him, didn’t I?”

“You did.” I raised my longneck beer in a salute. “Fuck it, let’s go. My father left me a stash of money. I think he knew... we might not see each other...,” I couldn’t finish speaking. “Fuck,” I finally cleared my throat. “I’m so sick of crying... of feeling all this all the time!”

“Which is why I am getting my laptop and we are booking a girls trip.”

“Anywhere, but Mexico.”

“Why?”

“Too close to home... I can't share his desert sky.”

“Right.” She placed her glass of wine down on a table as she went inside to grab the computer.

“You girls okay?”

“That's debatable.” Dean was standing in the shadows. He's always there. “Just because I'm not with him don't think I want to be with you.”

“Ouch,” he placed his hands over his heart as he stepped into the light of the fire.

“Sorry. That sounded harsh. You've really been here for me. For us.”

“It's nothing.”

“It's everything. My heart... my head... everything is just so fucked up right now. I just want to be alone.”

“I get it. Semester is almost over.”

“About a week.”

“I have a ski cabin in Vermont.”

“Thank, but no. Brandi and I want to make plans.”

“I see.”

“I—there was someone... It takes time.” I saw the flash of pain in his eyes and knew he knows exactly what I'm going through.

“She wasn't Club life?”

“Nope. Our parents would have none of it. We were young but she was my world.”

Brandi had come back out at this point and listened intently.

“South Beach.” She dropped those two words and he went off like a firecracker.

“No. Hell, no. That place is lit. Bad shit happens there. Miami is power vortex for every gang and underground network on the planet.”

“It’s also cheap, has the ocean and according this website... nonstop mojitos till dawn.”

“I’m in.” I grinned feeling normal again.

“FUCCCCCKKKK!” Dean groaned as Brandi announced she already put a deposit down.

“Come with us,” she crooned. “If you dare.”

“Cancel the hotel. You’ll stay with someone from our South Beach Chapter,” he growled, already tapping the request in his phone. “Th etwo of you are way too hot. You still need babysitting.”

“Okay, but I just booked our flights. And thanks, we know we’re hot,” she winked.

He rolled his eyes. “I meant hot as in targets.”

“Uh-huh, sure honey.”

I laughed, taking another sip of my beer. This felt good. Normal. Like old timex except *they* weren’t here.

“Move in with me.”

Dean’s mouth fell open. “Her not, you\_geesh!”

“Really?” Brandi’s eyes were wide and excited.

“Why not? There’s plenty of room and it’s a bit lonely out here. Besides, dorm life sucks. I wouldn’t charge you rent either. You can save room and board and bank that shit. There’s no way I’m letting you go back. Ever.” I promised.

“Okay! Dean can your guys move me in tomorrow?”

“Yup. It’ll be easier on us too. I’ll even give you one of our trucks to drive to campus.”

“This is like family. My family was never like this...”

“Welcome to the good part of Club life. The part where we treat our people like gold.”

“Just to be clear I’m not shooting anybody.... Or doing any weird initiation shit.”

“So the naked hot tub party is out?”

“No. I’m down for that.”

“Get the fuck out he laughed.” But Brandi got up and started stripping as she walked over to the brand new hot tub Dean and his guys installed off the back deck. I won’t lie there was something cathartic about sitting in the hot water while snowflakes fell on your wet skin. She left her bra and panties

Maybe it was the duality of the ice and the hot; the physical mirroring the emotional. The high of love with the devastation of heartbreak.

I put my beer down, peeled off my leggings, feeling Dean’s appreciate eyes on my ass as I continued undressing.

“This feels fucking good,” I hissed as the almost burning water shocked my skin inch by inch until I was lying back into the jets. “Want another beer?” Dean asked as he began taking off his hoodie.

“Yes, and some party favors too.”

“Oh, she’s a bad girl...,”

“I always was,” I winked. He disappeared off the deck into the black night probably getting what I wanted from his truck.

“You party like that?”

“I used to in Mexico at the Clubhouse, never anything hard. Sometimes I needed something take the edge off. I started after my brother was killed. It just hurt so much.”

“Damn, I act like I’m a party girl but I’m not. I saw too much shit in North Carolina. How drugs destroys your mind from the inside out.” She reached back and unclasped her bra as she finished talking, letting her boobs bob just below the surface of the frothy water.

“You’ve got great tits.”

“Thanks,” she winked.

Dean found us both topless and giggling when he returned five minutes later.

“Here,” he handed me a joint.

“This is street legal shit. I want the good stuff.”

“No.”

“What?” My neck snapped as I shot him daggers. “You aren’t my daddy or my boyfriend and I’m sick of men telling me what to do and trying to run my life. Now, give me the good shit.” My wet index finger poked his hard pecs. His eyes locked with mine before they lowered to my wet tits. He groaned in agony, his fists clenched as he shut his eyes.

“You are fucking killing me.”

“Hand over the good stuff and I might make out with you a little.”

“Tease. I know you won’t.”

“I’d film that shit and upload it to my OnlyFans.”

“You what!” We both turned to Brandi.

“What?” she shrugged. “I wear a wig and stage makeup. It’s easy money and I’m not doing anything wrong.”

“So many secrets,” I breathed into the crips air. Even Brandi still hid shit.

“Here,” Dean handed me the goods from the back pocket of his jeans as she shrugged them off.

“If only, I had met you first,” I blew him a kiss, handing off the original joint to Brandi.

“We make it ourselves. It’s a combo of street legal shit with Peyote.”

“Ah, this is the good stuff. Hold on a sec.” I jumped out of the hot tub, flashing them both my ass and tits through my soaked thong and bra as water trailed from my limbs. But I gave zero fucks as I hummed under my breath and raced through the house.



I opened up my locked desk drawer. Open the box and took out all my metal. The turquoise and silver bangles from home felt good as I slipped the cuffs and bangles up both arms. Then I took out my huge turquoise cocktail ring and put it in my right hand. Silver stacked rings went on every finger.

“Fuck yeah,” I breathed. I was coming back to life as who... I think I was finally figuring that out.

The baubles at my wrists jangled and clanked as I hopped my way back to the hot where I sank right in, lit my party favor and inhaled.

“No more beer, from now on I’m only drinking champagne.”

“What are we celebrating?” Brandi’s eyebrow rose as she exhaled.

“Men finally figuring shit out. I don’t have to hide or pretend anymore. The funny thing is—he always knew it was me.” I laughed hysterically at how carefully I had dressed, walked and talked to play a part when he always knew I was the girl raised outside of the slums of Albuquerque.

I took another long drag, inhaling deeply, feeling relaxed as fuck despite all the thoughts spinning through my head. I unclasped my bra, feeling free.

Dean hissed. “I’m not a saint, Savannah.”

“Never expected you to be.”

“You’re playing with fire.”

“I always did.”

He growled, pulling me to his lao. I wrapped my hands around his head, felt him hard and hot between my legs but as we locked eyes I knew I was still somebody else’s.

“It doesn’t feel right yet, sugar?” He hoarsely whispered against my throat.

“I’m not sure if or when it ever will,” I whispered back.

“It’s all good, baby girl. Me and my boys will always have your back. You’re mine to protect even if you’ll never be my

woman.”

“That’s sexy as fuck,” Brandi, cleared her throat.

“Sorry for the show,” I replied, climbing off of Dean’s lap.

“Don’t be I enjoyed it... I might’ve actually filmed it for my OnlyFans.”

“You didn’t!” But her phone was in her hands.

“No one will know it’s you. All you can see is your naked arm full of baubles wrapped around his head and his tatted forearm wrapped around your back. Your half wet hair trails down your spine and the water hovers just above the dip in your lower back.

“That does sound hot,” Dean croaks, adjusting himself under the water.

“Lemme see,” I held out a hand for her phone.

“No, you’ll get the screen wet.”

But she turned it around and pressed play.

She put music over our words... our faces were hidden. Swirling steam and snow contrasted with our wet, naked flesh. It was hot as fuck and she would get a ton of clicks.

“Fine, post it.”

“I will. Now I need you to take some shots of me.”

Brandi, leaned over the tub, her hand out catching snowflakes, her ass was sticking out and high, her wet thong slipped back on and between her thighs.

“I’m out. I only have so much self control.”

“Gonna call some club skank to take care of you?” I snickered.

“Maybe two or three, the way the two of you have me worked up.”

“And we didn’t even touch you,” Brandi replied, cupping her breasts as she turned around as I continued filming.

“Sexy girls, don’t need to try, You just have to breathe.”

“I’ll be by late morning to check in. I’ll leave the usual crew behind to make sure the two of you don’t drown in the hot tub.”

“Please,” I snickered.

Brandi and I just chilled as snow started to steadily fall. “I miss him,” she said so low I almost missed in my drug-hot tub induced coma.

“I know. I miss River too. I have a confession to make.”

“Oh?” She slid up in the water.

“A few days after we came back... I had a package out front on the stoop. It was a new burner with his new burner’s number programmed in, Tank’s too.”

“You’ve been talking?”

“No, but he texts every night. ‘Good night, beautiful.’ Sometimes I type replies then delete instead of pressing send. I still don’t know what to say, so I don’t.”

“You will know what to say when it’s time. Give yourself a break until then. Your dad’s still missing?”

“Yeah,” I croaked. “I’ve been in touch with the MC back home. It doesn’t look good.”

“Who’s in charge then?”

“The VP, he’s okay. I’m just not sure who to trust anymore with Line going rogue and coming after us. He must’ve had my father’s office bugged. He was planning his takeover for a while. Who knows who is loyal to him versus my dad.”

“It’s good we have River, Tank, and Dean on our side.”

“Are they though? Were they?”

“They never made me feel unsafe, Savvy.”

“Tell that to my broken heart.”

“I’m a prune. I’m going to go shower and resist the temptation to check the phone he gave me.”

“I’m going to work on my OnlyFans account.”

“I can’t believe you. Tank would flip if he ever found out.”

“I need to take care of myself. My grades are okay but academics was never really my thing.”

“How did you get in to Bradbury then?”

“I paid someone to take my Sat’s with a fake ID. I cheated on most guy high school tests.... I’m not proud of this okay so never tell....” tears leaked from her eyes.... “I gave my senior Calc teacher handjobs for grades.”

“We all do what we have to... to survive. There’s no shame in that. Make your money selling hot pics. You do you, okay? I’ll never judge.”

“Love ya’, girlie.”

“Back atcha!” I blew her a kiss as I got out of the tub. “You should get out too. I don’t want you out here all alone.”

“I’m coming,” she giggled.

“Ah, those were the days...”

“You should give me that burner.”

“I would but I don’t trust you not to text Tank or River.”

“Have you spoken to him?”

“No, I tricked him. Betrayed him when we escaped. He’s a proud man. He won’t let that slide. It probably sliced him like a knife. He trusted me and I used that against him. Besides, I can’t be with him. I want a different life. One that doesn’t involve illegal shit. I just want peace; a good man holding job a good job, a nice car and a four bedroom house with a. Roof that doesn’t leak. Why does that seem so fucking impossible?”

“It’s not. Just keep focusing on school and saving your own money. I’m going do the same. My life is interlaced with MC life. There is no out for me. I’m a target or a prize depending on where your loyalty lies. But I swear Brandi... I will be my own woman. I’m not going back. Not yet. I’m staying at Bradbury and getting a fucking degree in something. In what, I’m just not sure yet.”

“Same. We’ve got this.”

“Fuck, yeah, we do.”

## CHAPTER 18

### *Savannah*

I STOOD there for a long time after he left. I wanted to burn the sight and taste of him into my soul.

I should hate him.

I did for all of forty-eight hours. Mostly out of self-preservation.

A man like that you never get over.

I knew that.

I also know that I owed it to myself to try to be something different. If and when I saw River again, I'd be stronger.

Smarter.

Ready for whatever would come at me at us if we ever found our way back.

Finally when the cold wind cut through me like a thousand knives, I turned around with frozen tears on my cheeks.

I was numb for the rest of the day. My classes were a complete waste. I was so out of it I took one of the campus buses as far out as it went, deciding to walk the rest of the way home.

Dumbest move ever.

It was cold and icy. I slipped, falling on my ass more than a few times.

“Fuck this!” I muttered as I took another fall.

“Savvy! What the fuck!” Dean hollered through the woods as his Arctic Cat snowmobile cut through the trees.

“Fuck! Don’t ever take off like that again. Everyone’s been calling you.”

“I’m sorry. I’ve been so out of it. I must’ve forgotten to take it off silent since class. How did you find me?”

He got off the snowmobile, reached into at the small pocket of my bag, pulling out a round disc. “GPS tracker, we have several on y0u.”

I took it from chin and threw it into the woods. “Please stop. Linc’s dead and River is gone. You don’t need to be up my ass so much anymore. Sorry, I didn’t mean to sound so bitchy. I’m just fucking frozen and miserable.”

“Everyone’s been trying to reach you. It’s your old man... he’s alive. He’s back in New Mexico. Apparently my father had him hidden in Canada for his own safety when Line made his move. But there is bad news...”

“What?”

“The Outlaws are blaming the Bastards for a raid on one of their businesses. Linc hired some illegals to hit ‘em up hard. Bullets and blood happened. It’s a fucking shit show.”

River.

Tank.

My first thoughts were of them. That they were both just here and safe.

For now.

“Call him. Right now, my papa.”

“Lets get you home and...”

“Give me the fucking phone Dean. I just checked mine is dead.”

He handed it over and I quickly tapped into the Clubhouse’s main analog line that I knew by heart.

“It’s Savannah. He’s back. Put him on the line.”

“Savannah?” He sounded tired, hopeful.

“It’s me. Listen. Please. I need you to not hit back at the Bastards. Just leave River and his Searge alone. Okay?”

“Savvy...,” he warned. “What the fuck did you do girl? I told you to stay put in Maine! Stay away from Club shit!”

“I did. I have. Please. I know things and they... Line was here in Maine. He took me and a friend.”

“Why and I just hearing about this now?”

“Dean handled it.” I lied. “I made him swear to just keep it close. I don’t want any pity. I’m fine.”

“And your friend?”

“She’s fine, too. Just don’t start another false war like the one that killed Jason. The dying needs to stop. Please just let Dean fly down there and de-brief you.”

“If I ever find out River Cruz came near you, I’ll kill him myself.”

Dean took the phone from my stiff hands. My father might be tired but he’s ruthless. His past colored with more blood than the trail of tears.

He could never know.

He’d lose all respect for me and worse, he’s take whatever pieces of River he could get for revenge.

Raids or not, the Bastards and the Outlaws have been enemies for years and a few kisses had me wanting to forget all that.

River’s not my enemy but he can never be my lover.

“Dean? Handle this please. I know you probably hate him too but please I’ll die if he dies. I’m not being overly dramatic either. And Tank is the best man there is.”

“I’ll handle it,” he growled, dropping helmet on my head while motioning for me to get on the Arctic Cat.



“You’ll find a woman who deserves you someday. She’s just not me.” I placed a hand on his forearm, feeling it flex beneath my touch.

“Someday you might change your mind.”

Brandi was sitting in front of the fire when I got home. A glass of Tank’s favorite whisky was in her hand.

“He came back too?”

“Briefly, I told him everything. From my life in NC to my secret OnlyFans account. He just hung on every word not saying a thing. Then he kissed my head. Told me to ‘be good’ and that he’d see me again someday. It was fucking weird. I could tell he was just as cut up as I was. But he never asked for me back. Not once.”

“He can’t. Not when you’re both going in different directions.”

“And the really fucking off part? He left me this. She held up a vinyl record album.”

“Whitney Houston?”

“I know, right? He even gifted me an old fashioned record player from the antique shop downtown. He said it was an early Christmas gift and insisted I take it.”

“Did you play the record?”

“No.”

I took it from her hands, set up the player and dropped in on. Whitney’s rich voice filled the room. I poured myself a whiskey and sang along with her.

“Didn’t we almost have it all...” I belted out feeling the same heartache she sang about.

Soon after, Brandi did sang too.

We drank and sung by the fire for a good while.

“This was cathartic as fuck. Tank did good.” I yawned. “Something tells me your last chapter with him hasn’t been written yet.”

“Neither has yours and River’s.”

“Oh, our book is slammed shut and thrown into the fire. My Papa’s alive. He had to hide in Canada and have zero contact. Now with Line gone... he’s setting his sights on The Royal Bastards. Dean said he make sure Tank and River stay cool. But there; snow much bad blood and history. I fly father ever found out the game River played on me... he’d kill him for sure. I mean drop bombs on the clubhouse cartel style. He wouldn’t even care if I still loved him.”

Sh shook her head. “That’s why I need to stay out. No offense Savvy but as soon as I can afford to I might move closer to campus. It’s just all too much for me.”

“That’s fine, I’m more of a loner anyway. Although, it’s nice having you now. Are we still going away for break?”

“Hell yeah we are. Somewhere warm, where ghosts of our pasts can’t chase us.”

“I’m glad we’re both seeing college through.”

“Me, too. Let’s study and pack tomorrow. Let’s stay in Florida until after New Year’s. We’ll both come back with sick tans and Dean said we could still stay for free in a house The Club owns.”

“Fine. My dad will be busy sorting out MC shit and I want no part of any of it. Hopefully by the time we get back our hearts would’ve healed and the ghosts of Tank and Rover won’t be everywhere.”

“Agreed.”

I lay in bed later, tempted to check the burner I still kept. He was somewhere on the road, heading back to nights under the desert sky.

## CHAPTER 19

*River*

THE SWITCHBLADE GLINTED in my hands I stalked toward Line. I had the fucker strung up by chains, hanging like a piece of butcher meat. He'd die slowly.

For touching my girl.

Tank's girl.

For killing Danny.

Murdering Savvy's old man.

The man had so much blood on his hands. It was only fair he should shed some of his own.

He wasn't broken yet. I saw the gleam of defiance still shining in his eyes as I stalked closer.

"Your girl's pussy was wet when I touched her."

*Bam.*

My fist broke a few ribs if the crunch heard after I connected was any indicator.

He coughed up blood, sneering at me despite his predicament.

"Where's the father?"

"Fuck you," he spat.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way. It’s your choice.” I took my time cleaning the blade on my Henley as I stood in front of his bloody and bruised body. “If you give me the intel I need, I’ll go easy on ya’. I’ll even bury you in a nice spot. If you continue to be a dick... I’ll cut yours off and feed it to Tank’s new dog. While you watch.”

Line shuddered as the sound of barking came closer.

We were back in the desert.

On my turf.

Far away from *her*.

Hacker tracked his ass down after we called in a few favors. We intercepted Line in upstate New York. He was either going back for Savvy or making a run to Canada. We hog-tied his ass, shoved him in a back of trailer and brought him home to face what he’s done.

“TELL ME WHERE HE IS!” I roared, taking the blade and running it down his torso.

“Bring them in!” I hollered.

The door to the old barn opened, letting in three mixed breed patties who were sweet as sugar but I’d never cop to that. They were excited as all hell just coming back from their morning run.

They circled Line, barking and sniffing his blood. The man screamed. Literally screamed as they danced around his hanging legs.

“FUUUCKKKKKK GET THEM OFF!!! FUCK MAKE IT STOP!!! FINE! I’LL TELL YOU....”

“Too fucking easy.”

I whistled, called the dogs back. Tank put them back outside before coming back in and folding his arms across his chest.

“Cut me down?”

I looked over to Tank. He shook his head. I folded my arms across my chest mimicking him and waited.

“I threw his body over a cliff behind a turn on Route 66. The birds and the heat...”

“What’s the mile marker?”

“Two-hundred and six.”

Shaking my head I left him hanging. If he was lying I’d make good on my threat. If he was telling the truth I’d do the same to him as he did to Savvy’s old man.

My feet shuffled over to Tank. “Grab a small crew. Let’s change into street clothes. We need to lay low and see if his story checks out.”

“If it does?” Tank’s brow arcs.

“We’ll remove the body and return him to his brothers with the Outlaws. He gets a proper burial and I’ll go back to Maine to tell Savannah in person.”

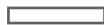
“You sure about that?”

“We left things... unsaid, unfinished.”

“I did too.”

“You coming?”

“I need to think about it. She hurt me badly.”



My palms sweated as I waited for her. It had only been almost three weeks since I kissed those lips. Held that body against mine.

I missed the smell of her hair on my pillow after we lay in bed. I craved the way she looked at me like I was her whole world.

And here I stood, tired, hungry for her after killing for my girl. To make sure she’d be safe whether with or without me. That was my primary goal.

Tank was tracking Brandi down. He had decided to come after all to try to get some closure as well.

Me? I was standing here with my heart in my hands, hoping she'd forgive me for tricking her and we could still give this thing between us a go.

She had men from another outfit watching her... fine. It only made my predatory senses more heightened. Baby girl was my prey; nothing would stop the inevitable. She'd be mine again whether today, tomorrow, or next year.

I watched with fists clenched from afar as she laughed at something her driver said before shutting the passenger door and giving him a wave. A few other men were dressed as students, following her around.

I made quick work of them, knocking them the fuck out and dragging them to the back of the truck and his them under the back bed hardtop cover. I'd deliver them home later.

Her boots were knee high, faux fur trimmed around the knee. They looked warm but sexy as fuck at the same time. Black, shiny leggings showing off her shapely thighs.

My north watered.

I needed my baby girl.

Right fucking now.

"Savvy." I breathed, cupping her by the elbow, jerking her back into the back alley behind the liberal arts building.

She must've been too shocked to struggle. Her face paled as I swung her around to face me. Her lips formed an "O" but no sound came out. I just saw that beautiful face and all reason left my head.

I kissed her.

Hard.

Pressed her up against the rough brick wall. My hips pushed against her.

She meowed into my mouth as our tongues fought for dominance.

She tasted so fucking good. Like caramel and cream with a hint of cherry chapstick.

“Fuck, Savvy, I missed you baby,” I breathed hoarsely into her hair as I inhaled my favorite perfume in the whole world: *her*.

“Fuck off, River.” She breathed, trying to bring her knee up in a certain spot. But her cheeks were pink and her eye glazed over.

Baby girl was still affected by me despite the hate in her heart right now.

“We need to talk.” I locked eyes with her. Her wrists now pinned in each of my hands as our bodies still pressed together. I noticed then the desert jewelry adorning her arms.

“There’s nothing to say,” her chin lifted despite the tremble I felt run through her.

“There’s everything to say.” I bowed my head, needing a second. “I... I found Line.”

“My dad?” She became hopeful for a split-second. “Is he...?”

I shook my head. “We don’t know. I chased a dead end. No one knows where he is. He’s just gone. Line lied until the end. I have no leads.”

My arms there to catch her as she deflated and sagged into my embrace.

“I’m sorry, Savvy. If I could give you the world I would.” I stroked her hair as she buried her face against me. “Tank and I took care of Line. He’s dead, baby girl and will never hurt you or Brandi again. I gave him the same death would’ve given your father.”

“Thank you. It is the MC way. You didn’t have to get vengeance for me.”

“Yes, I did. You’re freezing. Let’s go grab a hot coffee and sit?”

“Like we used to? I can’t. I can’t pretend to be her anymore just like I can’t pretend I don’t know you’re not my Hunter.”

“I don’t need you to be ‘her’ when I always knew it was you,” I replied softly.

“But I was pretending River. I was stuffing so much shit down, refusing to deal with it all. You. You were an escape. A fantasy that I could be someone else. Love a different type of man. Have a different life. I’m not sure who or what I want anymore. I never tried finding out. I want... need the time and space to do that now.”

“I... I love you. That was never a lie.”

“I know. I wasn’t lying either.”

Tears shine in both our eyes as we stood with both hands clasped but our bodies three feet apart.

“Come home with me,” I breathed. My heart pounding, praying she would.

“You know I can’t.”

I choked on a laugh, fighting so fucking hard not to let that one tear fall.

But it did.

She broke me.

*Savannah.*

Sh broke the Prez of the Royal Bastards MC.

Not the cartels, or rival mc, or gangs or the parents who I never met.

This brunette, slip of a girl with her silver jewelry, sassy attitude, and desert heat has completely gutted me.

I swallowed hard, “If that’s what you want.”

Her index finger reached out and took the tear from my cheek. She brought it to her lips and kissed it.

“Good bye, River Cruz, Prez of The Royal Bastards Santa Fe.”

“This isn’t goodbye, Savvy,” I growled.

“It has to be.”



“I won’t accept that. Dammit,” I ran a hand through my hair. “I’m sorry. So sorry I fucked up. But I’ll never be sorry for being with you. For loving you... for taking you.... I can’t. I can’t sit back and watch you be some other man’s.”

She put up a palm. “I don’t want to be. I just want to be me. I want to stay here. I enjoy college. I will fucking walk on stage and take that degree.”

“So transfer to UNM. You can have both, me and a college degree.”

“I need space. Air to breathe that isn’t filled with desert dust. Being here is my first chance to be free from all the MC bullshit. It felt free. And I can have that again with you and Line both gone.”

She meant it. I saw it in the firm set of her shoulders. She really wasn’t chasing me and that was a hard pill to swallow. I pulled her close, planted one last hard kiss on her lips. “Stay safe, baby girl. I hope you find what you’re looking for. You know where I am if you ever need me.”

I had to walk away before I went against her wishes and just took her like she feared I would.

I dropped her hand from mine, turned around and somehow managed to walk away like I hadn’t just left every piece of me with her.

I sat in the truck, just staring out the window. Reluctant to leave. It hit me so hard that during the few short months of fall, I had finally for the first time in my life felt fucking happy. Here at Bradbury there were no MC turf wars, or Church meetings demanding my time... for once I really was somebody else. It was a glimpse of a life that could’ve been but wasn’t meant to be.

That fucking broke me just as much as she did.

I felt numb from the colossal pain from all of it. It wasn’t until bangs coming from the bed of the truck snapped me out of it.

I let them go.

Just shoved them into the parking lot and got the hell out of Bradbury.

Fuck it if I cried.

No one was here to see or hear the bellows of pain escaping me.

It was just me, the road and the truck. I texted Tank I'd wait for him at the diner almost out of town.

When he got dropped off in the lot about an hour later, it was on the tip of my tongue to ask him how it went. But by the way his hoodie covered his massive head, I knew.

He opened the passenger door and just said, "drive." We went in silence for a few miles until he reached into his pocket and pulled out a smartphone. He connected it to the truck's audio and tapped a few buttons on the screen.

"The fuck, Tank?"

"Just let me be," he grumbled like a wounded Grizzly bear when Whitney Houston's "Where to Broken Hearts Go," played like she was sitting in the back singing just for the two of us. "Not one fucking word, Prez." His voice was sandpaper as he stared out the window.

"Fuck. This is helping me."

"It's helping me. The woman was smart. This album was a gold one."

"Fuck, it's gonna be a long drive."

"I hate planes. They fall out of the sky."

"Good, we'd be out of our misery," I shook my head.

"Bye baby," he whispered as we crossed state lines in between the song playing on repeat.

"Fuck it," I replied. This time as the song started up I started singing along having memorized it since it played slick fucking twenty times in a row. Tank barked out a laugh in surprise. "It's all good brother. You still got me."

*“So here I am.... Can you please tell me oh! Where do broken hearts go?”* We both sang in unison.

“It was a good fucking, ride bro. A good fucking ride.” Tank finally shut the song off.

“Play one for me? Luke Combs... Going, Going, Gone.... It’s Savvy to a T. “Good things come and they go..... that girl is going ,going gone!’ I sang, my words full of fucking pain.

We sang that one two until our throats hurt. W switched dit off, just driving straight into the silence of the dark, cold, New England night.

PART  
ONE

PART II

Almost one year later....

# CHAPTER 1

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'm still here. Stuck in winter. Wearing newer versions of the designer clothes my father had bought me last year. I'm hardly a material girl but I enjoy nice things and it's fucking cold here.

My heart is still frozen. Suspended in time. At least it's not thawed. Because anything that's not ice; hurts.

Spring came after he left. Birds sang, buds bloomed. Life didn't end just because we did. I stayed here during summer, took classes, maybe I'll graduate early. Brandi moved out like she said she would. Girl is making bank between the bar and her socials. And here I am in late fall again which in Bradbury means full on winter. So much has changed and yet so much hasn't.

Who knew Tank would become Brandi's number one paid subscriber on OnlyFans? The man still haunts her.

I thought time would make me love *him* less. Maybe I do. But I still want him.

No other man has managed that so far.

I snuck home several times, never flying direct always landing at weird times. It was tempting to text him. Just to let him know I was within arm's reach.

But it was too risky.

My love life wasn't worth the bullets that surely The Club would let fly if I ever got caught.

Maybe it was an omen.

His name.

*River Cruz.*

Like a river he winded his way into my heart.

Turn by turn.

Slowly at first until the love hate game between us overflowed. My heart is torn. An ugly tear with jagged, bloody edges.

*Love and hate.*

Flipsides of a coin.

Love, I can handle.

But the way that fucker made his way into my soul is the part I can't.

My hand gripped the sides of my phone so hard; I thought the pressure alone would make it crack. My mole sent me a pic of River with some black-haired bimbo on his lap. Her blood-red nails rested on his pecs right above his heart.

The same pecs my lips knew are soft steel to kiss. The same heart that I used to lay my head against, listening to the steady rhythm until I fell asleep. His dark hair was a bit long in the front with the wavy locks falling just above his brow.

My eyes narrowed.

*This really is war.*

And not just between our MC's.

This war between us was ancient. The feelings he invoked in me were the kind that make women do crazy shit like burn their ex's clothes in the middle of the street, slash their tires, or stalk their new girlfriends so they can be confronted—and bitch slapped.

I couldn't help my smirk. I was going to smack the shit out of this hoe.

No doubt.

The only question was before or after I dealt with River?

The way he made his way so deep under my skin that I still feel the burn of his touch; am haunted by the ghost of his hips flexing right before he drove the tip of his heat into me. I shifted my weight, hating that I craved him still.

Needed his touch.

I slammed my phone down on the coffee table not caring my screen shattered, tiny bits of glass shards falling to the floor.

The thought of that bitch getting what used to be mine; feeling what was mine... was enough to make me lose any shred of self-control.

I knew where he was... *what he was*.

I still wanted him anyway.

But my loyalty to Papa and the Club came first. I could never have both. River and be the Outlaw Princess.

I could never betray my patch.

I hated traitors.

The ones who turned on us for money, drugs or jealousy. Hell, I watched when my father took out Grease for snitching to the cops.

I didn't even flinch once when he pulled the trigger and Grease fell back onto the rough desert strewn with dried rocks. His running blood was the only thing wet the soil had seen for months. It seeped right in. The fucker got what he deserved when his snitching cost Papa two years behind bars. Two years I missed with him. But I knew without a doubt he'd still lose his shit if he ever found out about me and River.

I padded around the wooden floors on bare feet.

The snow was still falling.

It always fucking snows here. Truthfully, I'm sick of it. I miss the desert heat, the way the stars hang in the silky black sky at night... I miss authentic margaritas, a good peyote joint... I miss.... *him*.

Last time I went out the drifts were as high as the front windows. Beams of light cut through them reaching across the room. A tall figure gets off his snowmobile. I opened the door wearing nothing but my oversized shirt, purposefully cocking one hip to make it ride up my thigh three inches.

Dean Smith was a fine fucking man at six three with a full beard the warm color of maple syrup and eyes as dark as a hot espresso. The son of the Devil's Glen Prez wanted me badly. He's been there for me during some of the worst times of life this past year. My father had called the MC that patrols the border between Canada and Maine to be my deFacto protectors. Dean was the one given the job.

"Hey little lady, wanna go for a ride?"

"That's the best line you got? Heard that one so many times." I faked a yawn, turning away.

"Come on Sav, I don't bite."

"I know you want to." He came closer. I moved my long hair off my neck, arcing it to the side. "Eeeek! Stop!" I giggle-screamed as the tip of his ice-cold nose ran alongside my skin.

"You wanna warm me up?" I stepped back, swatting his gloved hands away. "No worries. I'm already burning up for you anyway."

The image of River and that skank flashed again in my mind. "Where are we going?"

"Alpha Omega bonfire at the lake house."

"A frat party? Damn, I haven't been to one of those in forever."

"I know they are lame as fuck compared the MC parties but it's the best I got."

"I'll be ready in five," I replied as I disappeared into my bedroom to pull on a pair of fleece-lined skinny jeans and



stuffed my feet into a pair of Sorel boots that cost as much as my first used Harley. My waterproof down, Canada Goose coat set my father back over a grand. ‘Nothing’s too good for my princess,’ he had said. But I knew it was a guilt gift for the shit he pulled last year. When he disappeared making me think he was dead.

Sighing, I stuffed a snow-white ski cap on my head complete with a faux-fur pompom on top. My skin’s tan after years soaking up the desert sun. A quick coat of gloss slicked on my lips and a check in the mirror confirmed what I already knew.

I was not an Outlaw Princess out here. I had transformed into a well-dressed, dare I say, hot as fuck college girl. But I still wore my beloved desert jewelry fashioned with chunky turquoise stones. Ring’s made of silver mined from the desert I liked to wear in stacks on my fingers.

No hint of the wild that lived inside me showed in my designer winter clothes. No one would guess of the shit I’ve seen and lived. No preppy as fuck frat boy could ever get me. I swallowed hard.

*He got me.*

I climbed into the rear seat of Dean’s shiny snowmobile and wrapped my arms around his muscular back. Fuck River with his new piece.

I spent the rest of the night going shot for shot with Dean and his boys while frat boys and jocks competed for my attention. The girls narrowed their eyes all wondering what it was that I had. The answer was easy.

*Zero fucks.*

I downed the rest of my drink. My fingers were past numb; my cheeks, too. The alcohol burned as it went down. I threw my head back to gaze at the mid-winter sky.

The stars shone like diamonds just like they did above the desert. I missed home. Missed the fine silt of red dust that would somehow make its way through the cracks between

doors. Missed the howl of a lone coyote wandering through the brush.

I missed the men—even the friggin’ pencil-necked pledge who annoyed me to no end. But going home to the dustbowl town somewhere between Vegas and Tijuana wasn’t an option.

It was a war zone. It turns out Linc pissed off the Cartels controlling the border using our Club’s name leaving a real shit show behind.

Little did Dad know the battle had followed me north. But River left my life as suddenly as he had appeared.

He knew I’d never snitch on myself. Telling your father you lost your V-card to the young hotheaded Prez of our rival MC would wound him more than a bullet ever could.

River knew that.

River and his Bastard crew were gunning hard, trying to take back everything Dad and the Outlaws took from them while their Prez was on his babymoon and my father hiding out in Canada. It took about six months for River to straighten most of his mess out.

Tarak was a legend.

Maybe he still is but love made him soft and I get that now. Never will I let my guard down again.

“Savvy? Are we going to do another round or am I taking you home?” Dean cocked a brow. I popped a shoulder. “How about a shot and then you take me home.”

“My place, or yours?”

My boots crunched in the snow, stopping when their tips kissed his. Slowly I lifted my index finger, running it up the inside of his half-unzipped ski coat. “My old man would kill you and you know it.”

His eyes hooded as he bent his head. A breath away from my lips he groaned. “You just might be worth dying for.”

I wish I could melt for him. Truly I did. But someone else had beat him to it. Snaked his River way into my heart and

soul then like a swift current, he vanished somewhere downstream with it.

The starlight reflected off the freshly fallen snow as Dean navigated through the woods back to my rental. I looked up through the barren limbs of tall trees finding the North star. I laughed at myself for once believing stars could truly grant wishes.

“Night, Savvy.”

“Night, Dean.”

“I’m going to clear the inside and check the perimeter before I go. Two men will watch like always.”

I shrugged, gave him a peck on the cheek and took off my coat. What was there to say when the enemy had already been inside the gates?

After I took a hot shower and put on fleece-line pajamas, I went for the burner phone I kept plugged in beside my bed.

Hey...

What’s up beautiful?

Use that line a lot tonight?

???? Are you spying on me sugar?

I have eyes and ears everywhere...

So do I. Does he touch you like I do?

Does she?

Forty-eight hours.

?

That's your head start baby. Ready or not here I come.

“What? Is he serious?” My heart pounded as I stared at his last text, too chicken to respond. I knew he had a mole on campus reporting back. Maybe I overdid my flirtations tonight mixed with my ‘don’t touch me bitch vibe’.

I tapped on Brandi’s name.

“Sav? I’m closing down the bar what’s up?”

“They’re coming. At least River is. He just texted.”

“When?”

“I-I’m not sure. Let me screen shot the texts on the burner and send them. Hang on.”

“Whoa, I think River isn’t one to bluff. He’s never once tried to see you or text about coming back since you saw him last winter, right?”

“It’s been about ten months. I know shit was hot with the club and I did reject him the he asked me not to end us.”

“I don’t get it? Why now? What is he up to? Do you think Tank will come as well?”

“Is he still paying thousands to see you in a red thong posing in the white snow?”

“Yeah,” she sighs.

“The man’s coming and if I were you... I’d hideout. There’s no way he isn’t gonna go all batshit caveman on you. Frankly, I’m not sure how he held back from not coming up here sooner and hauling you over his shoulder after the sext messages you showed me last week.”

“Maybe it’s wrong. It just feel safe to flirt with an ex when you know they are a timezone away. But him? Here? Like tomorrow? I’m not sure if I should run and hide in a cave or tie myself to the bed with all my next to me.”

“I am a bit sexually frustrated. I’ve kissed a few guys but none of them made my body want more. It enraged me. But You know what? I am who I am. After being raised by alphas you want one for yourself. None of the guys up here can compare.”

“I know. I just wish Tank could offer me more of a future than being ‘an ol’ lady. Bullets and blood is a hard no for me. Is there any way he can get out?”

“No, once you pledge and get voted in. It’s for life. Too many can snitch and turn otherwise. The only way out is death.”

“We need a plan. If they two of them really are coming to Bradbury we can’t be sitting ducks. If they are enriching it’s at least eighteen hours.”

“We can’t hide,” I snorted. “But I think they’ll fly. From what I understand the drive to New Mexico last year was a shit show. Plus, they have that Hacker guy who tracked us down last year. Besides I’m not afraid of him. If we run, it’ll give them the satisfaction of a chase. I’d rather hold my ground and make them sweat.”

“Hmm, there is the fall bonfire party in a few days.”

“God if that isn’t full circle. We met them at that party a year ago.”

“It’ll cause a scene if we go and they show up.”

“So? I already have a bad reputation. I give zero fucks. I never did.”

“I could get someone to cover my shift at the bar... fine we’ll go. But we need to male a pact. We will not take them home, We are not going to just hook up with them after not seeing them in person for a year.”

“Oh, hell no. I’m not even sure what I want from River, besides wishing I could do a master cleanse and get him the fuck out of my soul. Although a few ‘O’ s on the side couldn’t hurt.”

“Nope. We need to stay strong, sister. Bonfire or bust.”

‘What if they stand us up and don’t show?’ I wondered.

“Then we both dodged a bullet because let’s be real, if they do come so are we,” she laughed as I felt my face burn.

“We’re both fucked.”

“Literally! See ya’ tomorrow, Savvy. We’ll choose outfits and primp. Don’t forget to go get waxed!”

I ended the call, got out of bed and padded over to the windows on the back wall. The snow blanketed the Earth, tiny ice clusters clung the corner of the window.

I wanted to run.

And keep running.

Because I knew my time was up.

It was time to stop playing Savannah Gravestone and return to being the Outlaw Princess. The only question is would River take me as his queen?

## CHAPTER 2

*River*

THE LEGGY BRUNETTE was a real pain in the ass. She kept wriggling on my lap as if that rookie move was enough to get me hard for her. Sighing I finished my whiskey, plunked the glass down on the table and turned my face. Her eyes widened, hot pink tongue slicking over her lower lip expecting mine any second.

“Newsflash, sweetheart. I don’t do Club skanks and you are at the top of that list.”

Her mouth parted in a shocked “O” as I stood dumping back on the chair as I left.

My best friend in the MC, Tank, lifted an eye and nodded toward the back door of the clubhouse. “What’s up?” I asked as we stepped out into the crisp desert night.

“She just updated her Instagram.” Tank handed me his phone. It took everything in me to keep my face impassive while my insides burned. Savannah had her arms wrapped around the Prez’s son from the Devil’s Glen MC. My fist curled before I could stop it. “She posted it thirty minutes ago.”

My eyes studied the rosy glow on her cheeks the cold Maine winter night put there. It was close to the glow she got when I put my hands on her.

The thought some other fucking man might be doing the same left me sucker punched. It wasn't supposed to be this way. It was almost comical how her old man thought stashing her away in Maine could keep her safe.

*I found her.*

*Took her.*

Made her mine before casting her to the wind. So why did it feel like I was the one who was taken?

“Fuck.” I tipped my head back, eyes caught up to the sky finding the North star shining bright like a beacon.

“Shit,” Tank groaned. “Please tell me we aren't going back. My nuts don't like the cold.” His real name was Rogan but ever since our short stint in Maine, his new road name, Tank stuck.

“Bullshit,” I snorted. You found plenty of college girls to keep them warm.”

He smirked. “I sure did. But now I only want one. Are we driving or flying?”

“I need to settle shit here before I make another move on her.”

“You should've just kidnapped her like we had planned. Now she's free fucking around while you're here wishing you had her chained up in your room.”

“You fucked up too! I saw you stalking Brandi's socials just twenty minutes ago.”

“I can't forget her.”

“I can't forget, Savvy either.”

I whistled between my teeth. “Taking her now will only escalate the war between the Clubs. Sure, I was with her under his nose and Savvy would die before confessing it to her old man and his Club. But taking her hostage isn't something to do lightly. We'll need to move our women and kids outta state to the safe houses at another Charter. We need to tell the other



Bastards it's on. I don't want their help though. We got this on our own. I don't need anyone to fight my wars."

"You need the other Chapter's blessing though."

"And we'll get it."

"Savannah?"

"I'm wifing that shit someday. Then, I'm taking his Club—disbanding it.

Everything The Outlaws have will be ours. I'm sick of their shit, thinking I'm soft just because Tarak stepped back."

"I'll make the calls. Set the meet in case the girls don't leave Bradbury willingly. I can't do this love torn shit anymore and I know Brandi still loves me. You think Savvy is gonna just let you show up at her door and pack her up?"

"No, Savvy is gonna fight like hell," I grinned. "And I wouldn't want to any other way. Good thing we have the Vegas chapter at our back with one being a Justice of the Peace. It'll be all buttoned up and legal with now way out for her. I'll marry her next week if that's what it takes to keep her with me."

"She's gonna leave scratches all over your back."

"Fucking, right," I nodded as Tank went back inside. Tipping my head up to the sky, I made my first vow to her. "I'm coming back for you, Savvy. This time there's no going back. You're the final chess piece on the board, baby girl and I only play to win."

The stars didn't respond. She was somewhere out there tonight and if I ever find out Dean touched her, I'd slay him too.

It was hard as fuck staying away from my girl this past year, but I had Club shit to deal with and I loved her enough to respect her wishes to 'find herself' and all that Oprah bullshit. But time was up. I couldn't wait anymore. That's how I know what we had was love, cause I waited long enough to take it back.

“When are we leaving?” Tank came back outside with a glass of Whiskey in hand.

“In a few days, I need to wrap up some business here.”

“We driven’?”

“That depends. Only if we listen to my playlist this time. That fucking drive was brutal last time with you crying like a baby singing Whitney.”

“So?” He grunted, taking a long sip of his drink. “That shit was cathartic. I never knew how much shit I’d been holding onto.”

“Yeah, you definitely let it all out.” I shook my head at the memory.

“Fuck off. I saw you crying too.”

“Bullshit.” I rounded on him, giving his shoulder a playful shove. “We’ve both come a long way since Bradbury. I’m proud as fuck of you, Tank. The guys are too.”

“Savannah wasn’t the only one who figured out who she was. Maybe it’s the air up north. Its cleaner? Has more oxygen or some shit? Who the fuck knows? But I starting seeing shit clear as day.”

“I always knew who I was and what I wanted. Now I’m going back to get it,” I grinned. “I’m real proud of you bro. Real fucking proud. You’re gonna be the first Royal Bastard to hold a degree.”

Tank smiled. “Who knew I’d be so fucking good with numbers and shit?”

“You’ll be running all the books soon. Helping us bridge out into more legit business.”

“I hope she’ll see me as someone more than a tatted up biker dude who kills people.”

“Damn, that sounded harsh. We are a family, a brotherhood. We take care of our own and do what we have to in order to survive. Brandi gets that.”

“I need to show you something. He places his whiskey down and digs into his jean pocket.”

“Bruh? Seriously?” Tank opens the lid of a black velvet box, revealing a huge princess cut stone.

“Think she’ll say, ‘yes’? We’ve been talking for months. It’s long distance and we haven’t discussed us but I pay thousands to her OnlyFans. Broke a few phones thinking about all the men seeing my girl. I’m shutting that shit down. She gets the ring and I delete her account.”

“She doesn’t get the ring, Tank. She gets you. The most loyal, baddest mother fucker in her corner. You’re the catch here. Remember that?”

Tank swallowed hard. “You gonna be my best man?”

I clapped him on the back. “As long as you’ll be mine when the day comes. I have a confession, too. Savvy and I have been texting. I left her a burner when we left Maine. I texted her every night for months. They always went unanswered until Valentine’s Day.”

“Ah, the V-day. Get’s them every time.”

“Our break up hit her harder than she’d ever admit. Valentine’s Day was the crack in armor. Once the door was opened, I barred right through. We’ve been texting almost daily ever since. It’s cute she thinks I didn’t know about her ‘secret’ trips home. One time... I was so close to grabbing her and going straight to Vegas.”

“No shit?”

“It was July. Hot as hell. We got hit on the road by the migrant gang.”

“Fuck that was a bloody one.”

“Yeah, I was tired as all hell. We almost lost Jinx after the took three shots after The Outlaws were still pushing the boundaries of their turf.”

“It didn’t help that Reese hooked up with an ol’ lady of one of the Outlaws,” Tank shrugged.

“He didn’t know! She hit him up on Tinder!”

“It was a mess,” Tank agreed. “I’m gonna sober up by packing. Chief”’s here. If he wasn’t drunk as fuck, I’d ask for a fresh cut. Gotta look good when I see my girl.”

“You think Savvy will dig my beard. Remember when I had to shave it to be Hunter?”

“Women love facial hair. Especially when... well you know.”

“Then I’m about to drive her fuckin’ crazy.”

“You think they’ll let us in their beds?”

“Hell, no. They are both gonna make us work to get back there. Frankly, I’m looking forward to it.”

“We need to make a pit stop to get gifts. I’m thinking Gucci for Brandi and Cartier for Savvy?”

“Is that a hint that I should bring a diamond too? Nah, Savvy is gonna get a custom turquoise colored diamond.”

“They come in that shade?”

“Come enough if you pay enough. And nothing is too much to spend on that girl. You surf you don’t want to fly?”

“Fuck that. Planes fall outta the sky and I need to live long enough to make Brandi mine again.”

“It’s a long ass drive we better leave by dawn.”



“Our campus mole just reported in. They just texted that the girls are planning on attending the bonfire. And that they are expecting’ us to show.”

“No, I want a sneak attack. I’m not showing somewhere they’ll be ready.”

“The house is still watched by Dean and his crew. Brandi’s place, as well.”

“Well, then I guess it’s a good thing we have twelve more hours to formulate a plan.” I tapped on on the steering wheel

buttons until the song I wanted came on.

“Oh fuck,” Tank groaned as I grinned and started belting out my new favorite tune for the fiftieth time since we’d been on the road, George Birge’s song, “I Got My Mind On You.”

*“Well, baby, you’re a wildfire. That’ll light me up, little out of control*

*Yeah, you know. Baby, you’re a tall drink, little top shelf that’ll get me going, hold on. We both know that road that we’re goin’ down. And right now, all I can think about. I got my mind on you and you on my mind. Got these four wheels on a two-lane and we cuttin’ through the night. Got you high in my head and your love on my lips. Girl, I’m huggin’ on these curves, like them jeans on your hips. Every time you hop in lookin’ like you do. I got my hands and my eyes and my mind on you.*

*I got my mind on you.*

*I got my mind on you...”*

“What’s up Tank? You only sing break up songs from the eighties?”

“First,” he held up a hand hitting pause on the stereo, “Whitney is the greatest of all time. Secondly, I beat your ass based on all the applause last night when stopped in that bar for karaoke.”

“Please, you ripped your shirt off and sang Deaf Leopard... that’s basically cheating.”

“You wanna rematch tonight? I’ll start looking for karaoke bars along the route to our destination.”

I shook my head, checked the rearview and changes lanes. “It’s all good, bro. You can have it. We need to formulate a plan for Operation Get our Girls Back.”

Tank rubbed his beard, thoughtfully, “Nothing on campus.... But nothing that could scare them or trigger memories of when they were grabbed. Fuck this is hard.”

“Maybe we should just take the honest approach this time? We could rent tuxes and show up with flowers?”

“Yeah, “ he snorted, “Savvy would take the flowers and start bashing you on the head.”

“Ok, I’m just gonna text her and ask her out on a date. You should do the same with Brandi... plan your big proposal.”

“A date? That’s not a grand gesture... big enough.”

I stared out at the road letting my thoughts go in rewind. I remembered the rage and the anger I felt after Danny died. “I was such a hot-headed idiot. What was I thinking when I cooked up the plan to go to Bradbury and seduce her as revenge?”

“Well, I for one, saw they way you eye-fucked her photo when we gathered intel on The Outlaws. Maybe it was just inevitable, fate and all that shit. I have zero regrets and neither should you. Look at the two of us driving practically all day and night to win them back after an almost year long cooling off period.”

“She did look pretty hot in that photo. Listen, I think I have an idea about Brandi. Let’s stop and get you a tux, and some luxury shit. She’s the type pf girl that needs a proposal Bachelor style.”

“I knew you watched that show.”

“Nah, but hacker was into The Golden Bachelor for some odd reason I still don’t get.”

“He’s got a specific taste in the ladies. Always like a sexy cougar. Who knows? But I think you are right about Brandi. Wining and dining her fine ass is the way to go.”

“Let’s focus on that then. I’ll handle Savvy on my own.” I turned back up the tunes feeling better than I had in a long time. Hopefully with a bit of luck, my world would be righted again.

“You set my world on fire,” I sang in my deep baritone while tapping my fingers on the wheel. Sometimes you just have to trust that things will be all right. That life works out, despite all the bad shit and obstacles that seem insurmountable.

I mean look at me, River Cruz, born a poor, unwanted nobody living on stale crumbs and expired formula. Yet, I found a family, a place to belong with good people beside me.

“

## CHAPTER 3

### *Savannah*

THEY DIDN'T SHOW. Brandi and I both felt stood-up which was irrational. But we were moody after being excited to see both our men in the person after so long.

“What are you doing tomorrow?” I asked Savvy as we both sank down into the frothy water of the hot tub. I had invite her to crash like old times.

“Study? Make more TikTok's?”

“Lame. We should go apple picking or hiking.”

“Maybe,” she shrugged. “I'm beat. Let's make a fire, put on Netflix and bake cookies.

“Fine,” I grumbled. “Take my burner phone. I need to stop myself from sending a text I might regret.”

“Yeah, you better take my phone, too.”

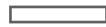
While my eyes were on the show Brandi selected, my mind went back... back to the days when he was Hunter and I was Savannah Smith....

I remembered how we kissed in the orchard, the movie date in the back of the truck, the nights we spent here on this couch. My eyes welled with tears.

*I missed him.*



We were both liars. My lie was no worse than his. Maybe it was time to stop being so stubborn and let love back in.



“Holy shit,” my heart pounded as a dark figure sat in a chair across the wall from my bed. “You’re starting to creep me the fuck out, Dean.”

“I’m not lover boy,” he growled low like a wolf.

My heart tripled in speed.

He was finally here, hidden in shadow. The air in the room charged instantly.

I wanted to scream, throw the lamp at his head, get up and crawl on his lap. Grab his face and fight kiss.

“I want coffee, chocolate chip pancakes with fresh cut strawberries on the side,” I drawled, pretending to yawn after as I stretched my arms, knowing it made my shirt ride up a few inches.

“Still as bossy as ever, huh, Savvy?” He uncrossed his booted feet, stood up and slowly stalked toward my bed.

“You know it,” I lifted my chin, hoping he wouldn’t notice the pulse at my throat wildly beating.

His finger trailed down my cheek. “I missed you, beautiful, so fucking much. Do you have any idea how badly you broke this?” His index finger poked his own chest.

“I hope it fucking hurt so badly you thought you’d die,” I whispered. “Because that’s how I felt.” I grabbed his shirt by the fist, pulling him close.

“I still love you,” he breathed.

“Good. Feed me. Caffeinate me. We’ll negotiate terms then.”

His brow rose. “I didn’t realize love required terms.”

“Ours does. It always did. I’m still an Outlaw Princess... and I see you still have the Perez patch on. Besides, are you

opening a up a new Bradbury Chapter of The Bastards? How did you get in here anyway?"

"It was easy. I fucked with Dean's head a little bit but finding his ex girl in New York City and giving her a free ride home. Let's just say he's occupied..."

"Oh, no! Please tell me you didn't! Dean's a good guy. She royally screwed him over," I facepalmed.

"Debatable. Besides he needs to focus on someone other than you."

"Is that so?"

"Ummnhmmm," his lips nibbled the side of my neck. My nipple tightened instantaneously.

"Maybe coffee can wait, " I moved my neck, giving him more access to skin as I wrapped my arms around his neck. "I missed you too. No sex... you need to wait for that... but I could you a helping hand..."

"Right here?" He cupped my sex like he owned it. Because let's admit that he does.

"Yessss," I panted as he rubbed circles against my pajama pants as his mouth lowered to my breast.

His hands moved my shirt up, his mouth fastened against a tight bud. I cried out as his fingers slipped under the waist band of my pjs and right into my wet heat. He circled my bud blooming for him before pumping back in.

"River!" I cried out as my orgasm came harder and faster than ever before.

"That's the first time you've cried out with my real name. I like the sound of that baby." He drawled as he pulled away.

"Where are you going?" I sounded crazed, desperate at the sight of his retreating back.

"To make coffee and pancakes. Where else? Oh, you might want to hurry out of bed. We have a proposal to plan."

"What?"

“Tank bought Brandi a big ass ring. We bought Tank a tux. Tank needs our help. Are you in?”

“I’m so in. I’m all in actually,” I smiled as our eyes met.

“Good, so am I,” he whistled as he left my room.

## EPILOGUE SAVANNAH

“DO YOU MISS IT HERE?” I turned to River after I took the last four steps to reach the top of Mount Washington. It was a very unique and unexpected honeymoon but one that would be unforgettable.

“I do.”

Smiling, I reached out, cupped his cheek and stood on the tips of my boots to press a kiss to his mouth. “You already said those words to me.”

“Is this honeymoon okay? Because if you wanted a Sandals resort we could still do that...”

“It’s perfect.” He moved to stand behind me, wrapped his arms around my waist as we both took in the spectacular view.

“It feels like we are on top of the world. I’ve never been happier.”

“That’s a relief since I was worried how you’d feel being married to a Prez of a road gang.”

I turned, smacking his chest playfully. “I was worried there’d be a shoot out at our wedding between all the different chapters of Clubs in attendance.”

“Nah, Hacker and Tank had the place locked down. I’m sorry we had to use plastic utensils but I couldn’t risk The Outlaws or The Bastards taking stabs at one another since you insisted on having an open bar. Or me using one to stab Dean’s eyes out they way he was looking at my *wife*.”

“It was beautifully chaotic wedding. Everyone we both loved and hated were there. Besides, Dean and I were never like that and you know it. You got to me first. Snaked your way inside my soul and I couldn’t get you out.”

“Fucking right,” he growled. “I was prepared for you old man to object.”

“Yeah, I felt you tense up.”

“He’s never going to like me. Hell, I half expect him to order a hit on our warehouse just fuck with me because he knows I’m away.“

“A baby will bring everyone together.

“Savvy?”

“No, not yet. Maybe in a few years...” As I surveyed the valley full of thick green grass below us until the land curved up seeming to touch the sky, I imagined a beautiful little girl with her daddy’s eyes and my grit. I inhaled deeply, enjoying how pure the air was here with no particles of desert dust. I couldn’t wait to camp again on our way back down the mountain.

River had definitely surprised me by whisking us away to New Hampshire. He pampered me at the Inn at Mount Washington with spa days, fine dining, and boutique shopping before announcing we were going to spend the next three days camping and hiking our way to the summit of the majestic mountain behind the hotel.

We made love under the starry night’s for hours, our skin reflecting the glow of the campfire.

It was rustic, rough, romantic as fuck. Especially when he was above me, his eyes almost feral with lust as he proclaimed “mine” over and over as he slammed his hips into mine.

“Ready, babe?”

“For what?”

“To be a member of the mild high club?”

“Huh?” I arched a brow.

“The summit of the mountain is 1.2 miles.” He waggles his brows.

“Babe, there are kids and tourists everywhere.”

“So? We’ll be discreet. Since when are you shy?”

“You’re insatiable.”

“I’m just making up for all of those long and lonely nights we spent apart.”

“But they did us good. I’m months away from graduation from UNM with a bachelor’s degree. You managed to create a truce between multiple clubs while making it profitable. And I finally figured out who I am now.”

“Who’s that,” he nibbled my ear.

“Yours.”

“I like that,” he growled, pulling my back down the trail toward our camping gear. It was a quarter mile down the mountain trail but at least downhill...

“River! What about the summit?”

“We can do that later, right now I need you...”

**THE END**

“



She came to my town.  
My turf.  
Now she's trapped in  
the...

*Devil's*  
**L A I R**

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