



DIESEL

RECKLESS SOULS MC CALIFORNIA BOOK 11

WALL STREET JOURNAL & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

KB WINTERS

DIESEL

A MOTORCYCLE CLUB
ROMANCE

RECKLESS SOULS MC
BOOK 11

KB WINTERS



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To My Daughter

As this book reached completion, my daughter, Evie Monroe is courageously battling brain cancer. Life, it seems, never stops throwing challenges our way, but we persist, inspired by the stories we tell and the memories we cherish.

This book is dedicated to Evie, who faces every challenge with unparalleled bravery and love.

I love you honey. Today and for always.

Mom

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ABOUT DIESEL

In a world where loyalty is everything and betrayal gets you killed; I'll risk it all for her.

As the newest patched member of the Reckless Souls, my loyalty runs deep. I'm hustling day and night to move up the ranks, but everything shifts the second Cassidy Vega, a free-spirited truck driver, blows into Angel Harbor and flips my world upside down.

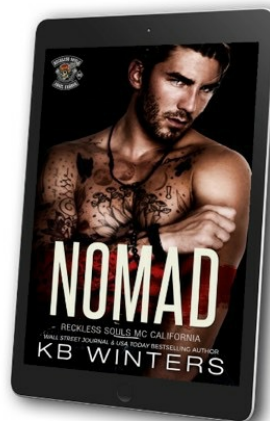
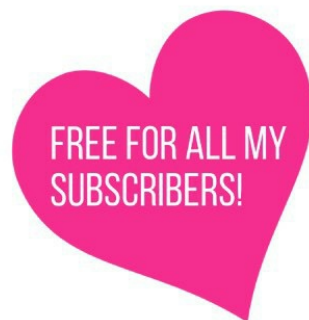
Before I can blink, Cassidy gets snatched up by a rival crew. My MC brothers refuse to intervene, wary of an unknown in a world where trust is not given—it's earned. But I can't sit back and watch her fate unfold. She's under my skin and has become more than just a hot minute between the sheets.

When it comes to Cassidy, there are no limits—only ride or die. I'll put my life on the line to get her back in my arms again.

If you love Narcos and Sons of Anarchy, then you'll be captivated by the morally gray hero and stranger-in-town intrigue in Diesel, the next exciting book of the Reckless Souls MC!

Don't wait—scroll up and one-click today!

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PROLOGUE

DIESEL

Dix raises his shot glass high in the air, a wide, shit-eating grin on his face. “To a long and slow and painful as fuck death. I can’t think of a more worthy man!”

For Dix, this is beyond personal. His wife Valentina is—or was—Rojas’s daughter, and they couldn’t rest until today. Until we got word that Arturo Rojas, our nemesis and head of the cartel, had taken his last breath.

“Fuck, yeah!” Banger, fully healed and hungry for revenge, is celebrating like there’s no tomorrow. He tosses his head back, his toothy grin visible from goddamn space he’s so loopy with glee.

There’s been no sign of the Bloodthirsty Devils or the Latin Mafia in weeks, but with the death of Arturo Rojas, they’ll make their presence known soon enough. I’m sure of that.

Ace steps into the middle of the party with a double-shot glass high in the air. “Officially, the old man died of a heart attack, but a slow poisoning sent him to the prison infirmary where he—unfortunately—succumbed to a lethal dose of potassium chloride that stopped his heart.” Ace flashes a wide grin, proud of the intricate plan that took out our biggest enemy. “Let us all drink to the life —”

“—and the death!” Dix calls out with a laugh.

“Of Arturo Rojas!” Ace lowers the shot glass and knocks it back with a smile, his gaze landing on the one woman who might feel something other than joy during our celebration. “Valentina, any words?”

With one arm slung over Dix’s broad shoulders, the former cartel princess smiles. “To my *papi*, may you rot in hell for all of eternity.”

She turns to Dix with a smile, whispering something softly that makes him smile in return.

“Fuck,” I growl as everyone takes a shot to celebrate the not-so-tragic death of our biggest enemy, or one of them anyway. Everyone is celebrating, and it feels like I’m the only one still worried about what comes next. Sure, Arturo is dead, but his cartel isn’t completely demolished. Have they forgotten we’ve added two more enemies to the mix. And now, their silence worries me more than anything.

“Hiya, Diesel. Feel like some company?” Layla is one of the newest club whores, as eager as she is gorgeous. She uses her bright red hair and pale blue eyes to advantage, and it doesn’t hurt that she’s built like a brick shithouse. Best of all? She’s always down for a quick fuck. Even better, she likes it hard and fast. Always.

With worries about the aftermath of Roja’s death on my mind, I’m not in the mood right now. But when Layla grabs my cock through my jeans, he stands up to make his opinion known. No matter what I think I want, he’s in the mood for something tight and wet, which describes Layla to a fucking tee.

It’s a good fucking thing he’s in charge right now because I don’t know what the fuck is wrong with me. This is exactly what I do. I fuck girls and fix cars, with a hell of a lot of partying in between. I chalk up my ambivalence to

stress and flash a smile at Layla. “Maybe?”

She laughs deep and throaty sounds like she lives on cigarettes, whiskey, and deepthroating.

“Just maybe? I’m sure I can push that maybe to a *fuck, yeah.*” She squeezes my cock again, pressing her perfect tits against my chest.

My cock responds, standing stiff and tall. But something holds me back, and I fucking hate it. Maybe this is what growing up feels like. *Fuck that*, I tell myself. I reject that notion flat out. If I wanted that shit, I’d have a miserable nine-to-five job where I daydream about killing my boss instead of the life I have as a bad-ass biker who gets to tinker with engines all day.

“You can try,” I tell Layla in a teasing voice because no matter what the fuck else is going on, I’m getting my dick wet. Period.

“Oh, I’ll do more than try, big guy,” she purrs. Her whole body presses against mine, and she nips my ear and squeezes my cock again, applying a bit more pressure, just how I like it. “Let me show you.”

“Yeah, sure,” I drawl, finishing off another shot along with my beer before she grabs my hand and leads me to an empty room inside the clubhouse.

As soon as we’re alone, Layla pushes me against the nearest wall and drops to her knees, where she makes quick work of my jeans and boxer briefs, tugging them halfway down my legs while she uses one hand to stroke my cock and the other to cup my balls.

“You’re already hard. Throbbing,” she whispers before sliding her tongue along the head of my cock.

“What the fuck is it supposed to do? I’ve got a big-titted woman with her lips around my dick,” I say, trying to make a joke of it. But my head falls back and one hand threads through her red hair as she takes me all the way to the back of her throat. “Ah, fuck,” I moan, releasing myself into the pleasure of her mouth.

She lets out a sound that’s a mixture between a giggle and a moan as she fists my cock, pumping in long, hard strokes. “Okay, Diesel. I’ll suck it for you, but I want a good hard fuck after,” she says before taking me down her

throat.

It's pure fucking heaven the way she impales her throat on my cock, and my eyes flutter shut, accepting the pleasure she gives so willingly. My hips start to move, and Layla moves with me, so greedy for my cock she's gagging and moaning like the taste of my meat is the best thing she's ever had. My hands tangle in her hair and I move faster, pumping my cock down her throat over and over, her nails digging deep into my ass cheeks.

"Layla," I groan as my balls tighten.

She takes me deeper and swallows once. Twice. Three times.

"Fuck," I growl, so fucking ready to blow my load, but now that she's got me all hot and bothered, I need to fuck someone. Anyone.

"Come here," I command in a deep, throaty voice, taking her hand and pulling her to her feet.

"How do you want me?"

My cock goes even stiffer at her question. I lift her arm over her head and twirl her around. "All fours, babe." I smack her ass, and instead of climbing onto the bed, she turns away from me, lifts her skirt, and steps out of her panties before arching her back and smacking her palms against the wall.

"Like this?"

"Fuck. Yes." Her bare pink pussy is winking at me, pink and glistening. I fist my cock in my hand, lining my cock up with her hungry cunt.

"Give it to me, Diesel. Give it all to me," she begs, which drives me out of my fucking mind.

My hands grip her ass, and I freeze. *What the fuck am I doing?* I reach into my jeans for a rubber, wrapping my dick before plunging deep into her wet, hot cunt. "Fuck," I groan, sliding deep in one long, slow stroke. "Such a tight fucking pussy."

"Damn straight," she says, arching her back until her pussy sucks me deeper into her cunt. "You know how I like it."

Hard and fast, same as me, and that's just what I give her. I sink into her, pausing until I feel her fluttering and pulsing around me, strangling my cock with her tight cunt. I pound into Layla hard and fast, taking everything I need from her, enjoying the moment for what it is. Release, relief, and motherfuckin' relaxation. I need this as much—if not more—than Layla does.

My fingertips dig into her pale flesh as I pound into her hard and deep so that the sound of our skin smacking together is louder than her cries and moans.

“Diesel,” she moans when she's close, but sadly that's not my top priority.

I grip her hips and pull her closer, leaving her feet barely brushing the ground as I pound into her, searching for the nut I'm desperate to bust. “Oh, fuck,” I shout when my cock explodes inside of her, light bursting behind my eyes as I pour every ounce of my pleasure into that rubber. “Shit.”

Her pussy squeezes tight as her orgasm grips her, and she lets out a quiet cry of pleasure that's so at odds with her take no prisoners approach. “Fucking perfect,” she moans. “Just fucking perfect.” Layla sags against the wall, her legs shaking as I pull my cock out of her.

When I'm done, I don't linger. Instead, I dispose of the condom, fix my clothes, and head back out to the party, finding Ace at the bar as I claim another beer. “And a shot of Cuervo, please, Trudy.”

Ace turns to me with a slow, knowing smile. “You good?”

I nod. “Better now, but this doesn't feel over,” I admit.

“It's never fucking over,” he growls and knocks back his shot. “For now, though, I need you at Morgan International full-time. We have a shit ton of shipments coming and going, and I need someone with your skills to make sure every truck makes it out on time and with a full load. You think you can handle that?”

I nod slowly because I'm a go-with-the-flow kind of guy, never really letting much bother me. “You need me there, then that's where I'll be.”

I'm always happy to help the MC in any way I can. They are my family and my brother Lucky is included in that.

“Good to hear,” he replies quietly, smacking the bar twice to get Trudy’s attention. “Two more shots,” he says in that tone of his that’s both a request and an order.

“Here you go, boys. Congrats.” She smiles, acknowledging the win at finally getting Rojas, and pours until the drinks are full to the brim.

“To the end of one chapter,” Ace says, holding up his glass.

I smile and tap my shot glass against his. “And the start of another, more lucrative fucking chapter.”

“A-fucking-men, brother.” He knocks back his shot, sets the glass down, and pushes away from the bar. With a smile and a nod, he strolls away in his lazy gait, stopping to chat with Coop. He sits next to a visibly very pregnant Kelsey, both of them chatting with her sister and Ace’s woman, Kenna. Ace hooks an arm around Kenna and kisses her head before he turns his attention to Coop.

I watch everyone, all of my brothers, wearing proud smiles, many of them with a woman on their arm, some with babies hanging from their hips. That’s the way of things around here lately. Brothers are falling in love and settling down, giving us more to fight for, more to protect.

In another corner, Dix and Shades are chatting, each holding their woman. Preacher and Gia are cuddling up in a corner, smiling and probably whispering filthy things at each other. Wild Man and Lucky play pool while Maven and Aria laugh over what looks like glasses of margaritas. I join them at the pool table with an easy smile, allowing myself to enjoy the peace.

For now.

It won’t last long, but today, we’re all happy.

All in heaven, all hoping for an extended moment of peace.

For however the fuck long it lasts.

CHAPTER ONE

CASSIDY

“Son of a fucking bitch!” My whole fucking truck is shaking like an earthquake rumbling underneath me, and I stroke the steering wheel in soft, gentle strokes. “It’s okay, girl. Just a few more miles.”

My load, thankfully, was dropped off at a warehouse twenty minutes ago, and I’m headed to the truck stop just north of here. But I don’t think I’ll make it. I can’t afford to get stuck on the side of the road between Angel Harbor and Los Angeles. My plan was to turn in at the truck stop and see about getting another load ASAP, but now the truck is my priority.

At the first red light, I Google the closest repair shop with the ability to handle my big rig because of the way she’s chugging and vibrating. “Call Ace Motors,” I say to the phone as an asshole in a red convertible cuts me off the minute the light turns green.

“Ace Motors, what can I do for ya?” The voice that answers the phone startles me because it’s not as professional as I expected. “Hello?”

“Yeah, sorry,” I say and shake my head. “My truck is making some weird noises, and I need to get it looked at. Do you require an appointment, or can I just roll on in?” I hold my breath, waiting for an answer.

“What kind of truck?”

“A 2018 Kenworth.”

“Ooh. I’m sorry, but we don’t have anything big enough here for that,” he begins. “But if you can limp it over to Morgan International on Harbor Way, they can get it looked at.” He rattles off an address, and I try to tap it out on my phone as quickly as possible.

“You there?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s a repair shop?” I ask, panicking now about the vibrations.

“Yes and no. But our mechanics are there, and they can fix you right up. It’s right in the middle of Angel Harbor. You need directions?”

“No, my Navigation says it’ll take twenty minutes.”

“All right. We’ll see you then. Call me back if you have any more questions.”

“Thanks,” I say and tap the screen. I follow the directions while my truck coughs and chugs along the road, and I spot the gleaming building sitting right on the water. The sign above it reads Morgan International in plain black lettering, and I roll through the gates with relief pounding through my chest.

A man strolls out of a work bay with a slow, lazy gait and a smile that can only be described as sexy. His thick brown hair curls at the edges because he’s at least a month overdue for a haircut. His eyes sparkle in the afternoon sun, and his broad shoulders are the kind that tell every woman in a ten-mile radius that he’s a strong, capable protector. He’s good-looking in that bad boy way that might’ve gotten my panties wet when I was younger, but now he’s just a beautiful man.

He bangs on my door with his palm to get my attention, and I open the door, jumping out and landing right in front of him.

“Hey.”

His dark brows quirk, and his lips tug into a crooked grin. “Need some help?”

I sigh and nod, motioning toward my truck. “Yeah, I’m pretty sure something electronic is causing the problems. Dashboard lit up like a Christmas tree, and it’s got a rough idle. Thought I was gonna have to leave it on the side of the freeway a few times.” I let out a long breath, and add, “A diagnostic should confirm it, so we can order the replacement part as soon as possible.”

His lips tug into a different kind of grin, and I’m sure I see a hint of surprise in his hazel eyes.

“Yeah, I know a little about engines, tough guy. I can also vote and own property, too.”

His gaze darkens, and he shoves his hands in his pockets. “Never said you didn’t, sweetheart.”

I let out a low growl at his use of *sweetheart*. I don’t know this guy from Adam and despite his good looks, his attitude is already pissing me off. “You know what?”

Another man appears beside him who looks like his brother. “You the driver who called Ace Motors?”

“I am,” I confirm and repeat my suspicions about the electronic panel to the other man.

He nods. “All right, we’ll need to get the rig inside and up on a machine, right, Diesel?”

The brown-haired man, Diesel, nods before his gaze slides to mine, and his lips curl into an amused grin. “Yep. Just slide it into bay number four. If you can manage it.” I don’t respond to his teasing tone.

“Yeah, okay. Number four,” I say under my breath and climb back into the cab, sweet-talking her to bay number four and rewarding her with a gentle touch when she makes it without more problems.

Diesel is there waiting for me when I exit the truck once again. “Want to look under the hood with me, sweetheart?”

My gaze narrows, and he laughs. “Of course I do. It’s my truck.” I roll my eyes and march around him to raise the hood.

“What happened before the lights came on and the rough idle?”

“Nothing. I just dropped a trailer over at the MDP Distribution center off of Hole, got back onto the 710 into that godawful traffic, and it started spittin’ and sputtering. That’s when I called you guys. Can you fix it? ”

“I can fuckin’ fix anything. You gonna stand here and bug me or let me look at it, sweetheart?” he barks at me.

“Cassidy,” I snarl. “My name is Cassidy. Not Sweetheart.”

He laughs again, shaking his head. “Okay, *Cassidy*. Give me something to go on or get the hell out of my way.”

“Have you ever fixed a truck before?”

His gaze slides to me, brows shooting up in surprise. “Have you?”

“Yes. But this isn’t my area so I don’t have my tools. Can you help me or not?”

“Oh,” he drawls. “So you *do* want my help?”

I growl. “Just let me know what else you find,” I bite back and walk away, crossing the expansive parking lot to check in with my folks. Though I’m twenty-five years old, I’m a full-time truck driver, so I stay with my parents on the rare occasions when I’m home in Riverbend, Nevada. In my childhood bedroom. It sounds weird to still live with my parents, but it’s better than spending my hard-earned cash on an apartment I sleep in for three or four nights a month.

“Cass, how was the trip?” I smile at my dad’s boisterous voice. He’s so proud that I followed in his footsteps, and he always asks about my trips like I’ve been on an adventure rather than a long-haul trek.

“Good,” I answer honestly. “No congestion and no accidents, which means

even with the engine trouble, I made it an hour early.”

“Of course you did. You learned from the best.”

I laugh at his joke that never gets old. “I did. Anyway, it started limpin’, so I’m in Angel Harbor having it looked at right now.”

“See if they can repair it enough to get you home, and I’ll have a look at it for you.”

“I appreciate that, Dad, but I hope to get another load out of California. Go back east for a bit.”

“You work too hard,” he says as if he didn’t work just as much as I do now when he was my age.

“So did you,” I shoot back. “I know because I was there.” I was his co-pilot for more trips than I can count, but it’s what gave me my love of the open road, of seeing new places and experiencing new things.

“Yeah, you got me there, baby girl. Keep me updated on your repairs, will ya?”

I nod even though he can’t see me. “Of course I will, Dad. Give Mom my love,” I tell him before ending the call and heading back inside to the beautiful, arrogant jerk. “Well, any news?”

“It’s the ECU,” he confirms with a smirk. “That’s the good news.”

A chill runs down my spine, and I cross my arms over my chest. “And the bad news?”

“It’ll take a few days to get the one you need for this model.”

I frown in disbelief. “And you know this model?”

He shrugs. “It’s a fucking Kenworth. Don’t know a damn thing about it,” he deadpans. “Wanna quiz me on it?”

Yeah. “Obviously not,” I growl at him.

He laughs. “Look, lady,” he begins, raking a hand through his coffee-brown locks.

“Cassidy,” I remind him. “Not, *Lady*.”

“Look, Cassidy, I’m too fucking busy to screw you over. Take a look for yourself if you don’t believe me. I really don’t give a damn.”

I take a quick look at the diagnostics just to make myself feel better. “Fuck,” I bite out when it’s clear that this insufferable man is right. “All right, you can order it.”

“Already did,” he says with a cocky grin. “The repair itself isn’t that difficult, but it’ll take some time to get the part, a few days at least.”

A few days? I don’t have a few days. Okay, technically, I do because I don’t have another job lined up, but I could be at home instead of chillin’ in California. “Is there anywhere close to here to rent a room for the night?” I need to stay close to my rig. This place looks nice enough with many new safety features, but I don’t know these people and prefer to be close rather than sorry.

“I might know of a place or two if you’re not too picky.”

I roll my eyes. “I need a hot shower and a hard mattress, that’s all.”

He lets out a snort-laugh. “I thought you were gonna say something else.”

“Of course you did,” I shoot back as if now I’m not thinking about exactly what else is *hard* that he thought I might mention. *No, stop it, Cassidy. That’s not what you’re here for.*

Definitely not, but the eye candy is definitely nice. Especially when he doesn’t speak.

CHAPTER TWO

DIESEL

“I can give you a ride if you want. I promise not to bite.” I wink at the cute trucker with the attitude. “Unless you ask.”

She rolls hazel eyes with big flecks of green in them. Then she crosses her arms over a perfect handful of tits hiding behind a black tank top that shows off the sculpted arms of a woman who works hard. She’s tall for a chick, toned and athletic, and dammit, I’m interested. Sort of.

Maybe.

I can’t deny that she’s attractive, even though she tries hard to hide the stacked body underneath. Even her hair, tied back with a leather strap, is styled for efficiency, not glamour, probably to keep her hair out of her face when she’s on the road.

But the way those jeans hug her strong, lean thighs tells me she's fit all over, which is *definitely* my type, just not usually the whole tomboy thing. "Well, you want a ride or what?"

She studies me carefully, clearly trying to decide if I'm trustworthy or not, and I get it. On the outside, I look like exactly what I am: a biker and a gearhead, nothing but a grease monkey. But I don't hurt women, not at all. Women are made for lovin', not fightin'.

Cassidy finally speaks up. "You can give me a ride to the closest and cheapest place to stay with a private bathroom."

I raise my brows. "A private bathroom?"

"Yeah," she nods, looking around the parking lot, anywhere but at me. "I want a shower, or else I'd just stay in the cab."

"Not a possibility as long as it's parked here," I tell her honestly. I may be willing to help her repair her rig, but there was too much valuable shit around here to let a complete stranger stay unsupervised.

"Okay, then," she sighs. "Make sure it's a motel close to here. Then, I don't want to fuck around with a rideshare app. When the truck's ready, I can walk over here and get on the road again."

"Eager to leave our fine city behind?" Why I'm teasing her, I can't say. But when she glares at me, I laugh, and I know that's why.

"Just ready to get back on the road," she says easily.

"All right. I know of a place that's close by and won't break the bank. Come on."

"You sure?"

I nod. "Positive."

"Thanks," she bites out through clenched teeth, and in one smooth move, she jumps up into the cab, returning a second later with a black canvas bag. "Okay," she says and motions for me to lead the way.

She falls in step beside me, and I point across the parking lot because she

seems suspicious, and I want to put her at ease. Mostly at ease, anyway. “So, how did you become a truck driver?”

“I took the classes and passed the test, and now here I am.”

I laugh at her spunk. It’s not the answer I expect most women to give, but I’ve only known Cassidy for five minutes, and I wouldn’t expect any other answer. “That’s generally how it goes, but what made you *want* to become a truck driver?”

She shrugs, clearly uncomfortable talking about herself. “My dad was a driver.” She comes to a stop beside me and stares at my bike like it’s a fire-breathing dragon. “What the hell is that thing?”

“It’s called a motorcycle. You can tell by the two wheels and the handlebar steering.” She glares up at me, and I laugh again.

“Smartass. You sure you know how to drive this thing?”

I laugh again. “You don’t *drive* a motorcycle. You ride it or you,” I say and hand her my helmet, “ride *on* it. Strap it on.”

“You sure you know how to *ride* this thing?”

“Damn, sure. Hop on, Cassidy. Last chance.” She raises one eyebrow in my direction, a sign she doesn’t trust my skills as a rider. “Or you can walk.”

“Ugh, whatever. Fine. I’m getting on.” She shoves her bag at my midsection and takes the helmet, tugging it down hard. “Doesn’t fit,” she grumbles.

I can’t help but smile because Cassidy is one grumpy chick. “You gotta,” I start and lean forward to reach behind her to easily unravel the leather strap holding her thick brown hair in a ponytail. “Now it’ll fit.”

The shades of green and brown in her eyes swirl and darken before she blinks them all away. “Yeah, thanks.” She snatches the strap from me and shoves it in her pocket once the helmet is secure on her head. “Let’s go.”

“Yeah, okay.” I smile, storing her bag before I get settled. “Hop on, Cassidy.”

She’s frowning, which seems to be her default expression.

“Put your hands on my shoulders, step there with your left foot, and swing

the other one over the seat.” I can feel the heat in her glare but continue, nonetheless. “and plant your ass.” She’s feisty and proud, and it’s really doing it for me.

After another quick glance at me and then the bike, Cassidy follows my directions and settles behind me. “Now what?”

“Now you can finally get your hands on me like you’ve wanted to since you first saw me.”

Cassidy grunts behind me, but a second later, her arms wrap around my waist, and I feel her chest flush against my back. “This is for my safety,” she says over the roar of the bike. “Not my pleasure.”

“Whatever you need to tell yourself, Cass.”

There’s a motel about two miles from Morgan International that fits her needs perfectly, but I’m having too much fun to say goodbye just yet, so I opt for the scenic route. “This is Angel Harbor,” I shout as we weave through town, showing off local businesses, shops, and homes.

“Hey! We already passed three motels!” Her fist pummels my left shoulder. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“The scenic route,” I tell her with a shrug.

“Stop the bike right now!”

I shake my head. “Sorry, can’t hear you.”

Her hits land harder as we pass *For Goodness Cakes*, a pizza joint, and one of the MC’s dispensaries. “I. Said. Stop.” She gives me a poke in my side, and I wobble the whole fucking bike.

“Fine,” I growl and pull onto the side of the road. It’s a small two-lane road, mostly a backroad used by container trucks. “Happy?”

Cassidy jumps off the bike, snatching off the helmet with a growl. “Happy? Hell no, I’m not happy! I asked you to take me to a motel. Look around, Diesel. Not one goddamn motel in sight.”

I roll my eyes at her dramatics. *So much for a laidback tomboy.* “Damn, Miss

Priss. Just wanted to have some fun,” I shoot back, feeling defensive in the face of her anger.

“Miss Priss?” she shouts the words as if I called her a cunt or something equally worse. “I’m hardly being prissy.”

“Agree to disagree, Cassidy.”

She lifts her hands, pressing them against my chest and shoving me hard enough that I take a shocked step backward. “You said you’d take me to a motel close to Morgan International,” she begins, pushing me again.

“I was taking the scenic route, giving you a tour of Angel Harbor.”

“I don’t know you! You’re a fucking stranger,” she shouts, and her thick hair blows all around her as the breeze kicks up. Damn if she doesn’t look beautiful. “You said you were taking me one place, and now you’ve taken me somewhere else entirely. In a town I don’t know. With a man who’s a total stranger!”

Shit. I realize my mistake as soon as the words fly from her full, pouty lips. “Fuck, Cassidy. I’m sorry. I wasn’t even thinking about that. Seriously, I’m sorry.” I scrub a hand down my face and let out a sigh. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Her shoulders fall, and all the anger seems to disappear. “I can see that, but please, just take me to a motel.”

“Right.” The ride back into town isn’t as much fun now that I’ve scared a woman I was simply trying to show a good time. I take her to the Seaside Motel, the closest one to Morgan International, and wait in the parking lot until she gets her room. “Hey, yo!”

She stops and turns to face me with a wary expression that I’m fully responsible for. “What are you still doing here?”

I slide off my bike and close the space between us. “I wanted to give you my number. Call me if you need a ride or anything while you’re in town.”

She scoffs, and I can’t really blame her, but she takes the scrap of paper and shoves it into her back pocket.

“Look, the owner of Morgan International is my sister-in-law, so if you don’t trust me, she’ll vouch for me. It was really stupid of me, and I apologize.”

“Dude, you fuckin’ kidnapped me! And I don’t know you.”

I smile. The one that drops drawers. “Think of it more as a nonconsensual city tour, and we’ll both feel better about it.”

She opens her mouth and then snaps it shut, but when she opens it again, laughter spills out. The sound is rich and husky, surprisingly feminine. “Yeah, okay. Sounds less threatening, I suppose.”

I hold my hands up. “Not a threat.”

“That’s good. For you.”

“Oh, yeah, why’s that?”

She shrugs, hitching her bag higher on her shoulder. “Because I have a gun, and I’m not afraid to use it.”

Another laugh explodes out of me. “Well, don’t be afraid to use my number either, Cass. Be seein’ you soon,” I tell her and make my way back to my bike.

Another day gone, and I’m still standing.

CHAPTER THREE

CASSIDY

Nothing feels better after a long haul than a hot shower and a real bed—with a pillow—to lay my head on at the end of the day. And after that brief scare with Diesel, not to mention sparring with him, I order a pizza for a quick meal and then head to bed for a good, long sleep.

I wake up feeling refreshed and hopeful that my truck will be ready sooner rather than later. I'm not good at having nothing to do, and since I'm not at home, there's nothing else to do but grab my fully charged phone and call Diesel.

"Yo. What's up?" The gruff voice on the other end of the call belongs to a man, but it's not Diesel.

"Uhm...this is Cassidy Vega and you're working on my truck. It's a 2018

Kenworth,” I begin. “Is this Diesel?”

“No, he forgot his phone in the shop. This is Lucky,” he says, and I realize it’s Diesel’s brother. “The parts have been ordered, and we should have everything tomorrow, which means you can get back on the road the day after that.”

My shoulders sag as disappointment settles over me. I was hoping to get back on the road no later than tomorrow afternoon. “Yeah, okay. Thanks. I’ll check back in tomorrow.” With at least two full days ahead of me with nothing on my schedule, I figure I might as well venture outside of my room, and my thoughts immediately turn to food. Last night’s pizza stopped my stomach from growling, but I need some real food.

I step outside my room, thankful for the second-story room since it lets me look around to see what’s nearby. *I should’ve paid attention on the nonconsensual tour yesterday.* My lips quirk into a grin as I remember Diesel’s apology.

“Food,” I say out loud. “Food, not men.” And definitely not one specific man.

A quick search on my phone tells me a few restaurants are within walking distance, so I lock the door and jog down the cement steps, heading across the parking lot toward the street.

The sound of a motorcycle roars behind me, and I move left on the sidewalk, just in case. I’ve seen enough bike accidents on the road to have a healthy respect—okay, fear—of motorcycles.

The sound grows closer, but it’s not the loud roar of a speeding bike, and when I look to my right, I see why. It’s Diesel, and he’s wearing what can only be described as a panty-melting grin.

“Hey baby, wanna get lucky?” He asks the question like a man on the prowl.

“You got him in your back pocket? I just talked to him on your phone.”

“Aww shit. I left it at the shop again. You hungry? Wanna get some chow?” His hand is on his thigh, and the image he conjures up is total bad boy biker. But hot. As fuck.

I nod my head, sure that his smile, combined with his self-assuredness, works on every woman with a pulse. How do I know? It's working on me right now. "I'd love to."

"I know the best deli in all of California. You game?"

I'm hungry, and I love food, which is the only reason I'm considering getting back on that death trap with him. Yeah, okay, he smells good too. "Don't think of trying anything funny. I'll shoot you."

He laughs again and motions to the back of his bike. "I wouldn't dream of it. Hop on."

I settle behind Diesel on the motorcycle and wrap my arms around his waist, ignoring the feel of his hard muscles that bunch and flex with every breath he takes. Today, I take advantage of my position and look around Angel Harbor.

We cruise along the edge of the harbor, where the air is thick with the scent of salt water and fish. The docks are a flurry of activity, with workers hustling mountains of crates, loading and unloading stacks of goods from around the world. Seagulls circle overhead, adding to the lively chaos of the place.

Eventually, we arrive at a sandwich shop that oozes New York deli charm. Diesel follows me in, receiving warm smiles and greetings from the staff. "Seems like you're a celebrity here," I tease.

He gives a nonchalant shrug, his smile playful. "Can't resist a good sandwich. What about you?" His eyes linger on mine a moment longer before he scans the chalkboard menu. "So, how do you feel about pastrami?"

I lean in slightly, a mischievous glint in my eyes. "That depends. Are we talking rye or sourdough?"

Interest flickers in his eyes. "You wouldn't dare swap corned beef for pastrami in a Reuben, would you?"

I nod slowly, a teasing smirk on my lips. "Absolutely. Pastrami is the unsung hero of deli meats."

His smile is slow and hot, and when he smacks his hand on the counter, the

spell is, thankfully, broken. “Rudy, two Diesel specials. And some onion rings.”

“You might not be completely terrible,” I tell him and grab a soda from the fridge at the end of the counter.

His laughter rings through the deli, rich and genuine. “I’d take offense from anyone else, but coming from you, that almost sounds like a compliment.”

He has me there. “I give good compliments, just not easily.” I scan the small deli and claim a table overlooking the sidewalk and the quaint little street. “Tell me about the leather vest,” I say, nodding to the Reckless Souls MC patch on his chest.

“That’s my MC, motorcycle club,” he clarifies. “I was at loose ends when my brother became part of the MC and introduced me. Between the brotherhood and fixing cars, it’s where I belong.” His words are sincere, and it’s clear he’s happy with his lot in life. “Lucky got with Aria and now helps her run the family business. Hence, Morgan International.”

I shake my head. “I’ll bet that’s a good story.”

“It is, and Lucky tells it much better than me.” His smile gets wider when the food arrives, smelling delicious and accompanied by the biggest onion rings I’ve ever seen. “And what about you, Cassidy? What’s your story?”

“My story?”

“How’d you end up hauling shit back and forth across the country. Not many female truckers, are there?”

“A lot more than you’d think,” I say. “But I spent most of my summers riding shotgun in my dad’s big rig, and seeing the country to me was like seeing the world. I knew from a young age that’s what I wanted and so far I’ve seen nearly every state.” I still haven’t checked off Hawaii and Alaska yet or Maine and Vermont.

“A daddy’s girl. Unexpected. Tell me, Cass, what was your favorite place to see when you grew up?”

I let the daddy’s girl comment slide because it turns out this good-looking

biker is more than a pretty face, not that I've noticed his pretty face. Not much.

"Montana," I finally answer.

Surprise brightens his eyes. "Montana? Not sunny California?"

I laugh. "Offended?"

"A bit, yeah."

"California is great. What's not to like about nonstop sunshine? But Montana is big sky country. It's beautiful up there, and so many things to do outdoors."

"So you're an outdoorsy kind of girl? Hiking and shit like that?"

I nod. "Yeah, shit like that. River rafting. Rock climbing. Camping and hiking. All of it. I mean I grew up on the Colorado River, so there's that."

"So...you're an adrenaline junkie?"

I frown. "Not at all. Case in point, your motorcycle."

He waves me off. "You'll love it before the day is over. I guarantee it."

I finish my sandwich and the onion rings while eyeballing Diesel with wariness. "Doubtful."

He wipes his mouth and tosses the napkin down with a smile, a challenge gleaming in his eyes. "Wanna bet?"

I shake my head. "No. Growing up in a casino town, the last thing I wanna do is throw away money on gambling." Riverbend isn't Vegas, but I've seen more than enough gamblers down on their luck to know I want no part of that life.

"Another thing I now know about you," he says with a proud smile. "We don't have to bet money, Cassidy."

"What then?" I ask, my heart racing. *Please don't let him ask for a kiss.* Not that I'm opposed to kissing him. I'm not, but guys betting on kisses are just gross.

“Dinner. If you love being on my bike by the end of the day, you let me take you out for real.”

I think about it carefully. Spending time with Diesel is no hardship, and I’ll be leaving Angel Harbor as soon as my truck is ready to go, so there’s no risk of getting too attached. “What if I lie?”

“You won’t be able to, not if you really love it. Which you will. So, what’s it gonna be, Cass?”

I hate that I like it when he calls me Cass. “Okay. You have a bet. And if I win?”

“Think about what you’d like,” he says, standing to toss our trash. “Don’t think too hard, though, since you’re gonna lose.”

I laugh and follow him out of the deli. “So cocky.”

“Just confident,” he replies, smiling as we walk back to his bike. “I’m going to be your official tour guide today. Consensually, of course.”

“Of course.” I roll my eyes, accept the helmet, and let a biker too good-looking for my peace of mind take me all over the free world on the back of his motorcycle.

I can hang on to my attitude and pretend that I don’t want to see more of the town he calls home, but what I’ve seen so far only makes me want to see more.

The place isn’t polished or pretty, but it’s got a solid, no-nonsense vibe. Parts of it are a bit rough around the edges, but it doesn’t feel dangerous. That’s a relief, especially since I’m on the back of a motorcycle, out in the open for any troublemaker to target.

My eyes roam over the local bars, small boutiques, and nightclubs that look like they’ve hosted their share of stories. This town isn’t about being charming or quaint—it’s real, lived-in.

Soon, the residential part fades into an industrial zone. Diesel rolls the bike into a parking lot surrounded by a bunch of buildings, all looking pretty much the same, and kills the engine.

I take a look at my surroundings because I'm a smart girl who knows how to stay safe even when I'm doing questionable things, like letting a handsome biker take me wherever he pleases. The building in front of us looks like a repair shop, and my eyes land on the sign above: Ace Motors.

"Over there is Angel Harbor Choppers, which is sales and service of these beautiful machines."

"You work here and at Morgan International? So you have two jobs?"

He laughs. "Technically, more than that. Everything you see behind this fence belongs to the Reckless Souls MC, which means I do whatever is necessary. Mostly, I fix anything with an engine."

"So you're in a biker gang that also owns a Harley dealer and a repair shop?" My confusion is obvious.

"Not a gang, a motorcycle club. And yes, we own Morgan International, Angel Harbor Choppers, as well as Ace Motors and a dozen or so other businesses in town." His lips curl into a knowing smile.

"So this is like your headquarters or what?"

"Something like that. Right there is our clubhouse." He points to a different building, and I stop, meeting his gaze.

"This is your biker clubhouse?" He nods, his dark brows dipping into a deep vee. "What kind of club is this, exactly?"

"It's where we meet, hang out. Why? What do you think it is?"

I shake my head. "How in the hell should I know? That's why I'm asking!" A sinking sensation goes through me that this is some kind of sex club or worse. What could be worse, I'm not sure. All I know is that I'm feeling uneasy.

"Come on, Cassidy. We're not going to sell you into slavery or tie you up... unless you ask, of course." His lips curl up at the corners into a too-sexy grin. "It's like a bar inside, only cheaper." He grabs my hand, tugging me through a metal door where the sound of music and laughter hits me immediately.

There are people everywhere and it really would look like any dive bar in the country if every dive bar was populated by bikers.

Surprisingly, quite a few women are lounging around at tables, behind the bar, and even in front of a dart board. Some are even holding small children. Men are playing at the pool tables, a few sitting around a table playing cards, and all of them are drinking and laughing. Bonding. “Are all of these people part of your MC?”

“The men, yes. The women you see are either club whores, or old ladies.”

I frown. “Old ladies? I bet they like to be called that. Kinda rude, isn’t it?”

“Not rude at all. They’re girlfriends, wives, and significant others of my brothers.”

Okay, that makes sense. “And club whores? Is that what I think it means?”

Diesel hesitates before answering. “Pretty much. They’re loyal to the club, and they do whatever is needed.”

“Eww. I don’t want to know.”

“Suit yourself. Want a beer?”

I shake my head. “I’ll take a whiskey. Neat.”

With a nod, Diesel takes my hand, and we head to the bar to the right of us. “Two shots of whiskey, please, Layla.”

A blonde woman behind the bar smiles at Diesel, sparing me half a glance before she pours two healthy shots.

She looks in my direction, telling me exactly how little she thinks of me. “Doin’ charity work now, Diesel?”

He stiffens and then frowns. “Not now, Layla.”

“I’m just saying,” she huffs. “This chick hardly looks like your type.” She looks at me like I’m some fucking alien. “Are you even wearing makeup?”

I lean over the bar, getting right in her overly made-up face so she knows I’m not one to be fucked with. “You got a problem with me or somethin’? I’ll happily kick your ass.”

Her eyes go wide and she takes a step back, gaze shooting to Diesel as if he

can help her. “Better get your bitch, Diesel. She’s a little rabid.”

You rotten cunt. I take the glass of whiskey and do something I haven’t done since I was too young to set foot in a bar. I toss my drink right in her face. “I’ll show you, rabid.”

She lets out a high-pitched squeal just as Diesel steps in front of me. “I guess I’ll need another one,” he growls at the woman, Layla.

“Here you go, *babe.*” She says it loud enough for me to hear, which I guess is her goal.

“We’ll talk about your behavior later,” he grunts. “For now, I don’t want to see your fucking face.” Then, like flipping a switch, he turns to me with that charming grin and hands me the drink. “Ready to meet everyone?”

“Girlfriend of yours?”

“Club whore, don’t ask.”

I nearly choke on my drink, busting out a laugh. At least he’s not sugarcoating things. “All right, lead the way.”

Diesel grins, amused by my reaction, and grabs my hand again. We weave through the crowd, stopping here and there as he introduces me to his biker buddies.

I know it’s petty, but I’m feeling petty as hell as I look over my shoulder, flashing a victorious smile in Layla-the-bitch’s direction. I don’t know the story with those two but whatever their drama is, they can keep it to themselves.

It’s my hand he’s holding tonight.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIESEL

“Guys, this is Cassidy.” I slide one hand to Cassidy’s lower back and give her a little nudge forward. “Cassidy, this is Ace, our President. That’s Coop and his *ol’ lady*, Kelsey. That’s Preacher and Gia.”

Cassidy lifts a hand in greeting and cracks a friendly smile. “Nice to meet you guys.”

“How did you fall into such suspect company?” Coop asks her, flashing me a teasing grin, the fucker.

Cassidy’s smile brightens, and she starts to relax. “My big rig broke down shortly after I made a delivery, and I called Ace Motors to see if they could handle a semi. The guy on the phone sent me to Morgan International.”

“A truck driver?” Gia’s eyes go wide. “So you *like* being behind the steering

wheel for hours and hours at a time?”

Cassidy laughs. “I love it. I get to see new places and opt out of people when I need to.”

“Okay.” Gia nods, a smile spreading across her face. “I’m getting the appeal. How’s the money?”

“Gia, babe,” Preacher groans.

“The money is all right. Fuel prices are kicking my ass, but as long as I’m working, it’s all good.”

“Do you work for anyone in particular? Any contracts?” The questions come from Ace, and I can see more going on behind his eyes than he’s willing to let on just yet.

“No,” she sighs and takes another sip of her whiskey. “Owner-operator. I spent a year working for a shipping company based out of Texas, but the guy running the place got locked up for embezzling, and that was the end of that.” She shrugs her shoulders, looking around the room. “This is a pretty cool setup you have here.”

“We like it,” Coop offers, engaging as usual. “Another whiskey?”

“I better not,” she answers. “Thanks, though.”

“Come on,” I put my hand against her back again, and we move to the next table where Dix, Wild Man, Banger, and Valentina are playing cards. “Hey.”

All four look up, Dix and Valentina staring at me like a couple of dorks, and Banger looks very curious and then laughs. “Looks like Diesel has a new friend.”

“This is Cassidy. She’s hanging out for a few days while I get her truck fixed.” Even though she’s not mine, the urge to pull her against me is strong.

Banger laughs. “You trust this guy with your rig? He fixes cars and bikes.”

Cassidy turns curious eyes on me. “Tell me he’s kidding.”

“He’s kidding,” I answer quickly.

Dix and Wild Man chime in with the same words and matching smiles.

“I’m kidding,” Banger confirms. “The only person better for the job than Diesel is me. Too bad for you that I’m working at the shop this week.”

“She’s got about sixteen more wheels than you can handle,” I tell Banger and lead Cassidy away. “I’m the best damn mechanic in this whole MC, and everybody knows it.” I flash my most charming smile, the one Kenna says can get me any damn thing I want.

But the only sign Cassidy is affected is the way her eyes darken, and her breath hitches slightly, but she covers it quickly, taking another sip of whiskey. “Then I’m glad my baby is in good hands.”

“Extremely good hands.”

She let out a husky laugh. “You’re always *on*, aren’t you?”

I frown, unsure if that’s a good thing. “On? I’m just me, Cassidy. Playful, maybe a little flirtatious and very, very good with my hands.”

She leans in close enough that I can see all those shades of brown and gold in her hazel eyes. “How good?”

A low growl escapes at the curiosity burning in her eyes. “I could show you. In fact, I’d be happy to.”

Another laugh erupts, and her eyes sparkle with joy. “You *could* show me, but then I’d have to learn the hard way that you’re all hat and no cattle. Tell me so I know you know what you’re talking about.” Her tongue slips between her lips, sliding back and forth until they’re not just pink but also shiny. Wet.

“So, you want me to tell you what I’d do to you if given permission?” My brows arch skeptically.

Cassidy nods. “Exactly, on both counts.”

“Well,” I begin and step forward until her back is against the far wall of the clubhouse. “Any good seduction starts with a kiss. Technically, it starts with flirting, but we’re already knee-deep in a good flirt sesh right now, so the kiss.” I lean in close enough that I can smell the whiskey on her breath. I

watch as her pupils dilate and the little pulse at the base of her throat flutters wildly. “You can’t just jump right into a good kiss. Oh no, that would be bad.”

“Terrible,” she agrees in a breathy voice.

“You start with pulling her close,” I say and hook an arm around her waist, pulling her flush against my chest. “Then take one hand and grip her head, tilting it back and sifting my fingers through her silky soft hair.” My actions follow my words, and Cassidy’s mouth falls open. “And only when all the signs tell me that she’s begging for my touch, for a taste of my lips, do I move in closer.” I lean in until barely a breath can slide between my bottom lip and hers.

“Diesel.” My name leaves her lips in a breathless whisper, and everything about this moment, her actions, hell, even the look in her eyes tells me she wants this.

I close the rest of the small space between us, but when my lips should be touching hers, there’s nothing but air and her hands on my chest to stop me. I open my eyes with a frown. “What was that?”

She shrugs.

What the fuck? I can read a woman, and this woman wanted that kiss as much as I did and still do. “You know you want a kiss.”

“I don’t deny that,” she says casually. “Doesn’t mean we should.”

I realize she’s nervous, and a smile creeps across my face. “See, Cassidy, that’s where you’re wrong. That’s exactly what it means.”

She laughs, shaking her head. “To what end? I’ll be gone in about twenty-four hours.”

“And you’ll have the best kiss of your life to remember me by.” And if I get my way, she’ll have a long night of hot fucking and multiple orgasms to take back on the road with her. Then, another thought occurs to me. “Do you have a man back home in Nevada?”

“If I did, I would’ve kneed you in the balls.” Her lips twitch with amusement,

and I know she's joking. "There's no man back home or anywhere else."

"Then what's the problem with me kissing you?"

"The problem is if it's a really good kiss, I'll end up disappointed."

"Because you're worried you'll never get another kiss as good for the rest of your life?" Yeah, I can be a cocky bastard at times.

"That's one possibility."

I step back, leaning my shoulder against the wall as I finish my last sip of whiskey. "And another?"

Cassidy raises her glass, taking her time with the last of the amber liquid as if she might find courage at the bottom. "The more likely scenario is that it's a really good kiss, maybe even a great kiss, but then I find out you're not worth wishing for another kiss."

"There's only one way to rectify that," I tell her, grabbing her hand and dragging her back to the bar. "Two more whiskeys, please."

Cassidy turns to me, her eyes wide and curious, almost hopeful that I have a solution that will give us that first step, that kiss. "Yeah, and what's that?"

"We kiss, and then when it rocks your world, you get to know me and let me prove that I'm worth wishing for a hell of a lot more than a kiss."

She lets out one of those shuddery breaths that Letty calls a *swoon*, but a beat later, she's shaking her head like she's trying to talk herself out of wanting what she absolutely wants. "That's a hell of a promise."

I hand her a tumbler with three fingers of whiskey and take the other. "There's really only one way to find out, Cass."

She hesitates, her gaze searing into my own as if she can see straight through to who I am as a man, a potential lover.

I give her a break for now. "While you pretend it's not what we both want, let me kick your ass at a game or two of pool."

Her expression lifts into a smile, and she arches a dark brow. "You're gonna kick my ass at pool?"

“Maybe two games,” I shoot back, smiling even bigger because damn, do I like sparring with this chick?

“Lead the way,” she grins, motioning me toward the pool tables where Shades and Letty are currently kissing over one.

“You trying to get a glimpse at my ass, Cassidy?”

She laughs. “No comment. But I figure this’ll be the last time you’re in the lead tonight, and I really want you to savor it.”

I stop and turn to face her with a look of disbelief.

In reply, she points at me and bursts out laughing. “The look on your face,” she’s gasping with laughter. “Oh man, so perfect.”

“You’re a good shit-talker, but let’s see how good you are with a stick.”

My words stop her laughter, and heat fills her eyes. “No complaints so far.”

“Yeah?”

She shrugs and brushes past me. “Except for all the men whose asses I’ve kicked over the years. They complain a lot. I hope you’re not a sore loser because I would really hate to have dinner with a sore loser.” She walks over to the empty table, testing out sticks while I watch her move around like she didn’t just give me the best fucking gift of all.

She likes the bike, but more importantly, she likes being on the back of my bike.

And what’s better than letting her kick my ass at pool? Taking her to dinner.

CHAPTER FIVE

CASSIDY

My morning is interrupted by someone knocking on the door, which is strange since I don't know anyone who'd be knocking so early. The knocking continues, and I sit up, scanning the motel room, which isn't the best or the worst place I've ever bunked for a night. Everything is in place, and someone is still knocking.

"Fuck," I grumble and swing my legs over the edge of the bed. "Can't even wake up in peace." I don't give my appearance one ounce of concern as I march to the door, casting a surreptitious glance through a break in the curtains where I spot a familiar face. "Diesel," I snap as I open the door to his smiling face. "Damn, what is that heavenly smell?"

His handsome grin widens, and he hands me a steaming paper cup, the scent growing more intense the closer it gets to me. "Coffee. For you."

“Thanks.” I eye him suspiciously as he steps inside my room without waiting for an invitation. “What’s going on?” I take a sip of the coffee, and my eyes flutter shut. A low groan escapes before I take my second sip.

“Don’t make those sounds,” he growls, letting his gaze wander around my room. “I came to say good morning.”

“Good morning,” I shoot back, still eyeing the biker with suspicion. And lust. But mostly suspicion. I think.

I really don’t care right now because the coffee is heaven in a paper cup.

His gaze meets mine, and then he does a long, slow perusal down the length of my body, so heavy it’s almost like he’s actually touching me. “Morning’s lookin’ a hell of a lot better now.”

I roll my eyes at his words, but the unmistakable heat in his tone sends a bolt of arousal straight through me. “What’s in the bag?”

Diesel wiggles his brows, holding up a blue and white paper bag. “This bag?”

I shrug like it doesn’t matter, but with the door closed, the scent of bacon and cheese fills the room.

“Come over here and find out,” he says with a laugh, dropping down onto the chair by the table in the corner. He crosses his legs, one ankle resting on the opposite knee, looking like he belongs here like it’s his room rather than mine. “Come on, Cass. I won’t bite unless you ask me nicely.”

I cross my arms over my chest, refusing to smile even though I really want to smile at this man. “What’s in the bag, Diesel?”

He opens the bag, wearing a big-ass grin as he pulls out four paper-wrapped packages. “Only one way to find out. Tick-tock.” His gaze is steady on me, watching me as I weigh whether or not I want to give in and go to him or remain stubborn. And hungry.

“Whatever.” I walk over to the small table and snatch up one of the packages that smells a hell of a lot like bacon. I unwrap it quickly, groaning at the sight of a breakfast sandwich complete with brioche bread, bacon, scrambled eggs, and cheese. “My favorite.” I bite into it as if there isn’t a good-looking biker

watching me devour this sandwich like a feral animal. “So good. What?”

His lips curl up first at the corners, but another full-wattage smile spreads across his face. “Nothing. I never realized how much I enjoy a woman who enjoys her food.”

My face heats along with the rest of my body, but I refuse to give in to the blush, taking another bite instead. “Thank you for the sandwiches,” I say, taking the final bite before picking up another.

“No, thank *you*.” Diesel picks up one and eats it slowly. The heat of his gaze is impossible to ignore, but I try like hell. I’m leaving soon, and there’s no point getting involved, even if I kind of—okay, really—want to get involved.

Getting involved makes me think about my dismal dating history, which, of course, only highlights Diesel’s kind gesture of bringing me breakfast. When was the last time a guy brought me food without me having to ask him? Uhm...*never*.

“Thanks for breakfast,” I say again. “It was really thoughtful.”

“That’s me, a thoughtful guy.”

Despite his sarcasm, I believe him. Underneath the leather and the badass attitude, he’s more than that. *Dammit*. When he unwraps the last package, French toast sticks, and hands me two of the four sticks, I know I’m right and possibly in trouble.

“As much as it pains me to say this,” Diesel begins with a sigh and a sheepish smile. “Get dressed.”

Or...not? I frown. “Excuse me?”

“I’m taking you somewhere, and it requires more clothes than those itty-bitty pajama shorts. Unless you just want to stay here because I’m game for that, too.”

His gaze lasers in on my tits, and my nipples choose that exact moment to tighten into stiff peaks like they’re trying to jump out and touch him. “What’ll it be, Cass?”

My whole body lights up at the promise and the heat in those four words,

which is exactly why I jump up from my chair and send him a glare I don't really feel. "I'll be ready in a few minutes."

"Take your time," he says as I grab a change of clothes and go to the bathroom. "Take a shower if you like it, and feel free to leave the door open." He laughs when I stop to stare at him. "To avoid the windows getting all foggy, that is."

I shake my head, laughing as I disappear into the bathroom. Spending more time with Diesel is dangerous, but he looks nice, smells great, and makes me laugh. And a man that looks like he does who also brings a girl food? Hell, he's almost perfect, and I can handle a day or two of perfect.

I deserve it.

I swipe on some eyeliner and mascara, ignoring the mocking voice in my head. This isn't about impressing anyone, especially not Diesel. It's my armor, especially after that bitch's comments at the clubhouse last night. Dressed in my usual t-shirt and jeans, I step out, sighing. "So, where are we headed?"

Diesel gives me a half-smirk. "It's a surprise. Just so you know, I'm not planning to kill you or steal your virtue or anything. You might want a jacket, though. It might get chilly on the ride."

I chuckle, reaching for my denim jacket. "Good to know my life's not in danger. And my virtue? We'll talk about that later."

He looks at me, eyes intense but playful. "I'm not out to steal it, Cass. I want you to give it to me because you can't stop thinking about it, because you're lying awake at night, dreaming of giving it all to me."

Wow, that's some line. I nearly stumble over nothing but manage to keep my cool. "Okay, Romeo, enough sweet talk. Let's see this big surprise of yours." Hurrying him to the door, I lock up and follow him, trying not to show how his words affect me. Diesel just smiles and leads the way to his bike.

I don't know where he's taking me, but I hang onto him tightly and watch the town fly by until we're back at the clubhouse parking lot. My curiosity is piqued, that's for sure, but I wait for Diesel to reveal his surprise when he's ready. "Come on." He takes my hand with the ease of a man who's known

me for over a day and tugs me into Ace Motors.

“Are you putting me to work?”

“Even better,” he replies with a sparkle in his eyes. “Just wait.”

I’m strangely excited by his excitement. Anticipation is thick in the air as he shows me inside, ignoring the questioning stares from the other guys. When he pulls me into the work area, my brows dip into a frown until Diesel steps aside, and I see the beauty before me. “Is that what I think it is?”

He nods, his smile coming slow and so damn attractive I dig my nails into the palm of my hand to stop the wave of need in its tracks. “If you think it’s a 1967 Shelby GT, then yeah, that’s what it is.”

A smile curls my lips. “A GT500, to be exact.”

Diesel puts both hands to his heart, staggering back dramatically. “Holy shit, I might be in love.”

I laugh and move closer to the car, running a reverent hand over the shiny metallic red car as I circle her. “Me, too. She’s gorgeous. Is she yours?”

“I wish.” He pats the top of the car affectionately, his lips still smiling. “An old timer in town asked me to fix it up for him, get it running, and redo the interior. It’s going to take a few months, and that’s when I find the fucking time, but you seem like a woman who might appreciate this beauty.”

“Oh, I do,” I laugh. “Can I get a look?” My eyes flick to the hood with barely concealed excitement.

Diesel’s expression matches my own, and he pops the hood, standing back to let me appreciate his work so far. “Most of what’s already done is new. The old man tried to do some of it himself before he realized what a big job it would be.”

“It’s so shiny. Is she running yet?”

“Nope. That’s my next task. Soon.” He tells me about his plans for the interior, which sounds perfect. “Red leather with white piping is on backorder. The wooden rim steering wheel is original.”

I nod eagerly at his plans. “You gonna replace that 428 with something else?”

His smile is so bright it's damn near blinding. “Replace it? Not on your life, sweetheart. I got one in the back.”

“Wow. I love old cars, and muscle cars are like the cherry on top. I’m kind of jealous.” Instantly think of my dad and how much he’d get a kick out of seeing a car like this up close. “My dad used to have an old Chevy Nova. I always wanted to fix it up, but he was too busy. Gone all the time.” I sigh. “You really know how to show a girl a good time, Diesel.”

“Just wait for what comes next,” he says and takes my hand—again—and leads me out of the shop with nothing but a farewell from his still curious friends.

The more time I spend on the back of Diesel’s bike, the more I like it. Even with a helmet, the feel of the wind is freeing. The feeling of zipping down the road completely uncovered is an element of danger I never thought I’d like. But I do.

We pull into a parking lot at what seems to be a pretty fancy strip mall, and through the large windows, I see a few women smiling behind a counter of baked goods. “What’s this?”

“*For Goodness Cakes*. The owner is with one of my brothers. She won the money to pay for this place in a cooking competition. Come on.” He takes my hand, and it’s a feeling I’m starting to like more than I should. “Maven’s pastries are freakin’ delicious.”

We step inside, and all the women smile at him and greet him by name. But my attention shifts to the sugary, buttery smells that fill the space.

“Hey, Willow,” he says to a very pretty woman. “What’s good today?”

The woman, Willow, slides her gaze to me and then back to Diesel, arching her brows in question. “Everything is good, as always. What’ll it be?”

“I need to try that cronut-looking thingy first,” I say, practically salivating on the display case. “Is that caramel on top?”

Willow smiles. “Bourbon caramel.”

“Good God, can I have it now, please?”

Willow straightens up and laughs. “I like her,” she says to Diesel with a smile. She hands me the pastry wrapped in parchment paper, and I bite into it as she and Diesel go back and forth over what else to get.

I’m too in love with this cronut to pay attention to what they’re saying, but eventually, Diesel takes possession of a small box and shoves money into a tip jar. “Thanks, Willow.”

“Yeah, thanks, Willow. This is the best thing I’ve had in my mouth in a long time.”

She blinks, slides a gaze to Diesel, and then cracks up laughing.

“That’s only because she hasn’t had me in her mouth yet,” he says in return. “Ow,” he says with a smile when I smack his arm. “It’s the truth.”

“Says you,” I shoot back. “Where to next?”

He shrugs, holding the door open for me like a gentleman. “Wherever the day takes us.”

It seems the day has plans to take us everywhere. We stop at a bench overlooking the beach, enjoying the pastries while chatting about everything and nothing at once. We stop at a roadside pizza truck for a slice and a beer. It’s all no frills, yet the most impressive and thoughtful date I’d ever had.

Not that this is a date. I mean, who goes on an all-day date? Not me or any of the men I dated in the past. *It’s not a date, Cassidy.* Of course, it’s not. A guy like Diesel says what he wants explicitly, and if this was supposed to be a date, he would have said so.

Right?

Whatever this day is, it’s a lot of fun with a gorgeous man who makes me smile. He’s funny and spontaneous enough to be thrilling instead of exhausting. He’s passionate about cars, his MC, and his brothers.

Well, shit. That’s my perfect guy checklist, which can’t be because I don’t live anywhere near Angel Harbor, which means this can’t be anything more than two people spending time together. *Enjoy it, girl.*

And I do. A lot.

By the time Diesel drops me back at the motel, my mind is made up. He might be the perfect man, but geography says he's not the perfect man for me. But he's perfect for right now, so when he insists on walking me to my door, I turn to face him with a smile. "Thank you for today, Diesel. It was pretty damn great."

"Yeah?"

I nod. "Yeah." I place one hand and then the other on his broad shoulders, using his sturdy frame to lever myself up so we're face to face. "I had a great time." And then, before I can talk myself out of it, I press my lips to his, taking what I want because there's no time to waste.

Diesel kisses me back, and I slide my tongue across his bottom lip. His hands fly to my waist, pulling me closer as he presses my back against the motel door, deepening the kiss until my heart is racing and my toes curl.

He tastes like a man, and he's perfectly hard and sculpted under my palms that now rest on his pecs. And then lower to his abs.

Diesel's growl reverberates through me, sending shivers racing throughout my body as our kiss intensifies, and his hands slide down to my ass, gripping me closer. Tighter. Our tongues tangle together like we've kissed every day, all day like we can't get enough of each other.

A car backfires in the distance, and we slowly, almost reluctantly, separate. His lips—pink and full and delicious—part into a lazy grin. "Cassidy."

I smile, too, blinking away the fog of lust to bring his face back into focus. "Good night, Diesel."

"Great night," he shoots back and steps away from me. "See you tomorrow." He makes those three words sound like a promise.

My whole body is on fire, and when I step inside the motel room, my reflection shows my cheeks flush, my eyes wide, and my lips swollen and wet from his kisses. I don't look at all like me.

I look aroused.

Smitten.

I look like I don't know what the hell I'm doing kissing a gorgeous biker when I'm leaving town in less than forty-eight hours.

CHAPTER SIX

DIESEL

Her lips are so fucking soft. That hot as fuck kiss with Cassidy, her mouth and the feel of her curves pressed against me dominated my thoughts all night.

I show up at the shop the next morning to find the part for her truck is here, and even as I unload it, I know today—tonight—is all we have. Once her rig is fixed, she'll take off for parts unknown, and I'll never see her again.

“Hey there, Diesel, whatcha doin’?” The voice of Aria’s assistant, Brooke, is an unwanted interruption in my thoughts. The clack of her stiletto heels on the cement floor of the repair bay tells me she’s getting closer and closer.

I look up at the stacked chick and resist the urge to roll my eyes at her stupid fucking question. She’s a ditz, I remind myself. It’s not her fault I’m thinking

of Cassidy. “Hey, Brooke. Just unloading some shit. What’s up?”

Her full lips part into a seductive smile, which I don’t mind, not really. Brooke has big tits, a slim waist, and big hips. She’s a knockout, and she’s not afraid to show it off, which I appreciate, but there’s something a little too eager about her. Not that I mind an eager woman, but she’s riding that line between eager and desperate, which is why I’ve kept my dick to myself since I’ve been working at Morgan International. Life is too good and too fucking busy for a bunny boiler.

“What’s that? Something cool?” She shrugs.

I look up again. The woman is completely oblivious to the *leave me the fuck alone* vibes I’m sending her. “Truck parts,” I answer blandly, flashing her a final look before I turn back to the part for Cassidy’s truck.

Brooke’s heels continue to click-clack on the cement floor as she walks around the repair bay as if she’s never been in here before. It’s clear she’s walking around, shaking her ass, and swinging her hips to get my attention. I pay her no mind as I cut the box holding the parts and toss it aside.

“You must be pretty smart to be able to fix all kinds of stuff the way you do.”

I shrug. “Yeah, I guess so.” She keeps asking all kinds of dumbass questions, but after the fifth one, I stop answering and keep my attention on installing the new ECU.

“Hi, there.” Brooke coos so loudly, her squeaky voice echoes. “Can I help you?”

“Uhm, yeah. Maybe?” It’s Cassidy. “I’m looking for Diesel.”

“Over here,” I call out, barely able to stop the smile that spread across my face.

“The part came?” Her voice is moving in my direction, and without looking up, I know she stops beside me because the air crackles.

“Yeah. I didn’t call because I wanted to make sure it was fixed before I got your hopes up.” It’s not a complete lie, and Cassidy doesn’t call me out on it.

“Need some help?”

“Hi, there,” Brooke says before I can answer Cassidy. “I’m Brooke.”

“Okay,” Cassidy says, her tone pure confusion and I can almost picture her frowning at the busty assistant. “Nice to meet you, Brooke. I’m Cassidy. What do you do around here?”

“I’m Aria’s executive assistant. I answer calls, take messages, and keep her calendar. Stuff like that.”

“Sounds like you’re a valuable part of the team,” Cassidy says. I’m not sure from her tone whether she means it or she’s just trying to end the conversation.

“And what do you do, Cassidy?”

“I’m a truck driver. This one right here is mine.” The pride in her voice is clear.

“I’ve never met a lady truck driver before,” Brooke gushes, and I stifle a moan.

“Well, now you have,” Cassidy replies, her voice full of amusement.

“You must be surrounded by men all day.” Brooke sighs as if that’s her number one dream in the world.

I furrow my brows and turn to face the women, finding Cassidy with a strange expression on her face. “Not really. I’m alone in the cab for most of the day, actually.”

Brooke stares at her for a long time, and then her gaze lands on me. Finally, she gives us a smile and a shrug and saunters off. Slowly.

“That was odd,” Cassidy says when Brooke disappears from sight.

“She’s a bit of an odd one,” I agree. “It’s going to be a few hours to remove the old ECU and put the new one in before Wild Man comes in to do the programming part.” I run a hand over my face and offer up a smile.

Thankfully, Cassidy smiles back. “So you’re saying I’m here in Angel Harbor for another night?”

“That’s what I’m saying.” I step closer, forcing her to tilt her head back to

meet my gaze. “Also, I’m claiming my date tonight.”

Her brows shoot up. “Your date?”

I nod. “You love being on my bike, and I’m taking you out. Tonight.”

Am I being a little aggressive? Maybe, but she’s leaving tomorrow. Tonight is all I have.

“Where are you taking me?”

“Damn.” My smile grows. “That was easier than I thought it would be,” I admit.

“Gotta keep you on your toes, don’t I?”

I think about the date tonight and where I want to take her. “I guess I have to return the favor, don’t I?”

Cassidy tosses her head back with a husky laugh. “I’d be disappointed if you didn’t.”

“Good to know.” I stare at her, and she meets my gaze, matching my intensity as a slow smile curls up the corners of her full lips.

“Then I guess I’ll see you later,” she says rather than asking.

“Count on it, Cass.” I take a step back and wink at her, enjoying how she rolls her eyes even though she can’t stop the smile that spreads across her face.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CASSIDY

I have a date. I can't remember the last time I went on a real date, never mind the last time I was excited to go out with a guy. I want to look as good as I can tonight, but I'm frozen in front of the full-length mirror on the back of the motel's bathroom door. I know Diesel wants me; that's a given, but I want to make him drool tonight. *I can't believe I just thought that!* I also can't believe I'm going on a date with a biker, and I need to get my ass in gear.

It's just tonight, and it's enough.

Thankfully, I always have a good pair of jeans and a nice top in my bag on the off chance I decide to go out when I'm on the road.

The jeans have no holes in them but hug my ass and my legs perfectly. Also,

they show off my toned muscles and curves. The pink top is frilly and cut just low enough to show off a hint of cleavage while clinging to my flat stomach, leaving most of my arms bare. It's not exactly date attire, but it'll have to do.

As long as he doesn't take me someplace fancy.

By the time a knock sounds at the door, I'm a bundle of nerves. It's so unlike me that it's pissing me off. I glare at my reflection one last time before I head toward the door and yank it open, still scowling.

"Whoa, is this a bad time?"

"Nope. Your timing is perfect." How can it be a bad time when this sexy biker standing in front of me looks good enough to eat. Diesel's wearing black jeans, a gray t-shirt, and his leather vest, telling the world he's a member of the Reckless Souls MC. I try for a smile, but it feels like a grimace.

His brows lift higher. "You sure?"

I nod. "Yep. Absolutely."

"Okay," he smiles. "Let's go, then."

I nod again, ignoring my racing heart, as I grab a jacket and lock the door. "What's the plan?"

"Our plan is simple," he says, his hand pressing against my back. "We're going out." He leads me down the cement steps and to his bike while I try to focus on anything beyond the warmth of his touch.

In a daze, I swing my leg over the motorcycle and wrap my arms around him. I'm so close I can smell his scent, making it hard to think straight. But the cool breeze as the sun sets helps calm my emotions—and lust.

Fifteen minutes later, we arrive at a barbecue restaurant. The smell of food makes my stomach growl in anticipation. "Don't get too excited. We're just here for takeout," he says with a smile.

He picks up our order, and takes my hand in his, the paper bag in his other hand. We head back to the motorcycle and enjoy the ride until we reach a secluded beach on PCH. The parking lot is almost empty now that the sun has

set and the temperature has dropped.

“Barbecue on the beach? Good choice.” It’s exactly the kind of date I prefer instead of a fancy restaurant where I have to dress up in clothes I don’t have and order shit I can’t pronounce. This is low-key, low-pressure, and the view—from the man to the ocean—is stunning.

“I wasn’t sure what you’d prefer, but you seem like a laid-back chick, and I wanted to respect that.”

I smile up at him, taking the blanket he hands me before we make our way to a small plot of beach about twenty feet from the ocean.

“Thanks,” I say, too shy to look him directly in the eye yet. Diesel cracks open two bottles of beer before handing me one, his gaze on the dark water in front of us. “Tell me about the life of a biker.”

He freezes and turns to me with a hint of wariness. “What do you want to know?”

I shrug. “Anything. Everything. What do you guys do besides fix up cars and bikes? Do you have other businesses? Do you bust kneecaps?”

His lips curl into a grin. “We have what folks would call a diverse portfolio of businesses,” He pauses to think for a moment. “We run dispensaries, the shop, a few gun shops, nightclubs, the bakery, and of course, Morgan International.”

I let out a low whistle and reach for a drumstick drenched in tangy barbecue sauce. “Impressive. And the kneecaps?”

He laughs, and the sound is rich and contagious as hell. “We have been known to bust the occasional kneecap. This life ain’t for the faint of heart, but we fuck shit up only if and when there’s no other way.”

I let his words sink in for a few long moments, processing the truth of them along with what I think I know about motorcycle gangs. “So you’re like corporate types without the suits?”

“God, I hope the fuck not, but I’ll let the analogy stand.” There’s a gleam in his eye that’s impossible to look away from. “What about you, Cassidy?”

“What about me? Well, I’m not in a motorcycle club or even an eighteen-wheeler club.”

“I mean, what’s next for you?”

“Oh,” I sigh. It’s inevitable he would ask, but I didn’t plan on revealing the truth to him at all. “Aria and Ace asked if I could get a shipment to Bakersfield, then I’ll deadhead to Tulare and pick up a load of nuts due on the East Coast in a few days.”

The cost to fix my truck put a dent in my finances, and I’m grateful to have back-to-back jobs lined up to make up the difference.

“You come to California often?”

My heart makes a fuss at his question because it’s clear he’s thinking about spending more time with me. It’s a nice thought, and fuck me, but I wish I could say yes. “I’m in Central California probably once or twice a month. But L.A.? Down where you are? Not much. Why?”

His lips tug into a sultry smile so full of heat I’m suddenly no longer cold from the early evening breeze. “You know why.”

I do. “You want a booty call whenever I cross the state line?”

He laughs. “Or maybe I want to give you a reason to cross that line as fast and as often as you fucking can.”

Isn’t this what I’ve always wanted? Someone who makes every trip back home feel like a celebration instead of a reminder of what I miss while I’m away. “That sounds nice.”

He grunts. “Puppies are nice, Cassidy. I’m talking about long days, possibly weeks in bed, out of bed, on my bike, eating good food, and laughing until our sides ache.”

Shit. That’s exactly what I’ve always wanted, at least the chance to see if that’s really what I want. Maybe Diesel and I will fizzle out after a week or two or after a few long trips apart. Then again, maybe not. “Is it a good idea for us to think like that?”

He shrugs. “I only have good ideas once in a while.” That’s what his mouth

says, but he's leaning closer, and suddenly, all I want is his lips on mine again. "Like this," he whispers just before his lips crash into mine. "This is a great fucking idea."

When our lips lock, our tongues and teeth collide, I can't agree more. Kissing Diesel is better than kissing anyone I've ever known. His lips are full and soft, and his touch is demanding, forcing me to confront the swirl of emotions flipping around in my belly. He tastes like beer and barbecue sauce, which doesn't sound all that appealing until you're sucking it off a sexy biker's tongue.

Diesel pulls back first, which would usually make me feel foolish, but the look in his eyes stops me from feeling anything but white-hot attraction. "Cassidy." My name falls from his lips on a plea, like he's begging me to make up my mind.

Little does he know that my mind's been made up since before he knocked on my door hours ago. "Yes," I whisper before diving in for another taste of his mouth.

We kiss like horny teenagers right here on the beach. His body pushes forward until I'm on my back, arms and legs wrapped around him, his denim-covered cock nestles right between my thighs. Diesel devours my mouth, and I'm dizzy with the taste and the feel of him.

I need more. "Diesel," I moan against his lips. "We need to get out of here."

He stops abruptly and pulls back. "Now?"

I smile. "Right fucking now."

In seconds we're both on our feet, gathering the food and blanket, rushing across the beach to the parking lot until the bike is barreling back to the motel. My chest feels so fucking tight I can barely breathe with how badly I want this man, how much I need this.

We practically fall into the room, mouths fused together. Diesel kicks the door closed and flips the lock. His gaze never leaves mine as he crosses the room. "You sure?"

I nod and lick my lips. "So fucking sure." His mouth is on mine before I

finish the words, and I cling to him like he's my lifeboat in a violent storm. His hands roam over my bare flesh, caressing and massaging until I'm a trembling mess in his arms.

By the time we fall together on the mattress, our clothes are on the motel floor, our bodies hot as they slide together, hungry and eager for what's to come. "Oh!" His lips wrap around my nipple while his other hand snakes down my belly, finding me wet and swollen between my thighs.

"You're so fucking wet," he growls, sinking his teeth into the hard flesh of my nipple. "Is that for me?"

"No," I sigh, "it's for him," I answer, reaching between us to get my hand on his cock, long and thick and so hard my pussy aches to be filled by him.

"Tease," he growls, giving my other nipple the same treatment while his hands push me closer and closer to the edge. Strong, thick fingers pump into me, slow and deep.

"Diesel," I moan and arch into his touch. "More."

"You get this one for free. The next one is on me." Before I can ask what he means, his mouth is back on my nipple while he finger fucks me to the quickest, most violent orgasm of my life.

"Yes, Diesel!" My body shakes and quivers. My muscles are so tight they feel like they might snap me in half. Slowly, my body comes down, and a low laugh escapes. "Fuck, that was good." It's been too long since I've felt this good, and even longer since it was because of a man and not a vibrator.

"Good, because the next time you come, it's because I say you can."

I want to protest, but the teasing lilt in his voice, the spark in his eyes, it's all so fucking intriguing, so I just roll my eyes. "We'll see."

"Yeah, we will." His easy agreement should scare me, but it doesn't. But then he lifts one leg, kissing my ankle and up my calf and thigh, over my hipbone and ribcage, all the way up to my mouth before he plants a long, hard kiss against my lips and then kisses me all the way back down to my ankle.

I'm trembling with the need to come, but his slow moves tell me it'll be a

while. And it is. He takes his time until his lips touch every inch of my skin, and my fingertips dig into the flesh of his wide shoulders. “Diesel.”

“Tell me.”

“I need to come,” I whisper.

“I know. You’re vibrating with it. Not yet,” he whispers back, blowing a cool breeze over my nipples. His thumb circles my clit in slow, lazy circles. He’s watching me for any little sign of disobedience. “Soon,” he promises, teasing my clit with his tongue and then my opening.

“Please,” I whimper.

His reply is to suck my clit until I’m so close to coming I’m screaming. “Now that’s what I like to hear, Cassidy.” He does it again and again until sweat covers my body and my toes curl so hard they pop. I strain toward the orgasm that’s so close to the surface that my ears start ringing, and my vision blurs.

“Diesel.”

“Almost,” he chuckles before lifting my legs over his shoulders and cupping my ass while he feasts on my pussy, making me wetter, making me pulse harder and faster. He moans like he enjoys it more than I do, which makes me enjoy myself even more.

“Please,” I cry out, tangling my fingers in his hair.

“Soon.” His voice is a dark promise before his mouth returns to my clit, licking and sucking until the sounds of my pussy grow louder than my moans. Two fingers slide deep, stretching me out deliciously, making me jump when I feel another invasion. “You’re okay,” he whispers softly as his thumb slides into my asshole. “Breathe.”

I let out a slow breath as he invades me an inch deeper.

“Come for me, Cassidy. Now.”

I can’t say what the fuck it is about that low, commanding growl or maybe it’s just the permission, but I go off like a cherry bomb, loud and hard and dramatic. “Oh. My. God!” The orgasm goes on and on and on while his

tongue flicks against my clit in softer and softer touches. His fingers are still while I clench and pulse around him. “Yes. Oh fuck, yes!” I shake and tremble as all the pleasure leaves my body.

“Fuck, that was hot.” His hazel eyes are heavy-lidded, so fucking full of desire that instantly, I’m wet all over again. “That’s two for you. This last one is just for me.”

That should send warning bells clanging in my head, but after the way he just made me come, I am dead ass certain that the next orgasm will probably ruin me for all other men. I smile up at him. “I thought this one was just for you.”

Diesel licks his lips. “No, babe, that was for you. But fuck did I enjoy watching you come apart like that.”

“I enjoyed it too.”

He chuckles, reaching for his pants, where he produces a condom. Thank God because I’m clearly not thinking straight. I take it from him.

“Be my guest,” he says with a low chuckle, and he rolls onto his back.

I take the condom, tearing the gold wrapper with my teeth while my other hand strokes his giant cock. My hand wraps around it, barely, stroking slowly because the way his eyes flutter shut, showing off eyelashes women pay hundreds of dollars for, is too damn intoxicating to look away.

“Cassidy,” he growls, wrapping a hand around my wrist. “Don’t tease me.”

Just because I can, I slide my thumb over the tip of his cock, rubbing in the bead of pre-come that makes his eyes do that fluttery thing again. “Me, tease? I would never.” I slide the condom down his length, giving it one final squeeze just to make sure the damn thing is gonna fit. “You’re big.”

He smiles. “I’ll make sure your pussy is nice and wet first.”

“Oh, she is.”

His teeth clamp together, and he grabs a handful of my hair, tilting my head back so he has full access to my throat. “Just how I like it,” he growls before licking a trail of heat from my collarbone to my chin. “How do you want me to fuck you, Cassidy?”

“Hard,” I answer instantly, loving the way the gold twinkles in his dark eyes when he’s turned on.

He stares back at me wordlessly. The only sound he makes is a low grunt when I turn away from him and get on all fours before I look over my shoulder.

“Such a great ass.”

His compliment sends a wave of heat over me, but when his hand comes down on my ass just as his cock slides inside me, I let out a long, low cry, arching back to take every fucking inch of him. “Fuck,” I whisper.

“Good?”

“Better than good,” I assure him, pushing back to urge him to fuck me. He moves in slow strokes at first, which I appreciate because, holy hell, is he rocking a big ol’ cock. “Yes.” I’m so wet, so close to orgasm number three, that I try to slow him down.

He punishes me with another delicious slap on the ass, grunting when I pulse harder around him. “This one’s mine, remember?”

My head falls forward at his words. “You’re going to torture me, aren’t you?”

“Only a little,” he says through clenched teeth as his hips pick up speed and intensity. “But you’ll love every agonizing second.”

It’s a promise he fulfills for the next few hours, fucking me from behind, laying me face down while he slowly fucks me and massages my tits.

Diesel turns me over, showing me that the right guy with the perfect cock can make even missionary erotic as hell. But when he lifts me off the bed, impaling me on the biggest cock I’ve ever seen, I come so hard that I see stars. Hell, not just stars, the stars, the moon, maybe even a few planets lurking and watching.

I keep coming harder and more intense. Every flutter around his cock triggers more sensitive nerve endings until he finally explodes. He holds me tight enough that I can feel the flow of come into the condom, and it’s so intimate after those amazing orgasms that I feel a little strange, and I can’t exactly

understand why.

Thankfully, orgasm number three doesn't leave me with a lot of bandwidth to think about it before we both pass out on the bed.

I enjoy the feel of his arm around my back, the soothing pulse of his heart right beneath my ear, the steady rise and fall of his abs under my hand as we drift off to sleep, only to wake a few hours later and do it all over again.

I don't want to leave, but when the sun rays start to streak the sky, I know I can't wait any longer. I need to get to Morgan International to get that trailer hitched so I can hit the road.

I dress quietly and quickly but pause at the door, deciding to leave a note on the empty bag of barbecue that includes my phone number before I slip out.

I need to get away from these feelings as far and as fast as I can.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DIESEL

I wake up alone in Cassidy's motel room with a note—and her number—scribbled on a restaurant bag. I know she had to go, but dammit, I had plans for us this morning.

I take a quick shower, hoping to get to Morgan before she leaves. She said she had a load for Bakersfield from Aria, so I might be able to catch her.

I hop on my bike and fly over to the warehouse. When I get there, her truck is nowhere to be found. "Shit!" I say as I drop my backpack on the table inside the shop. There's an old tractor/trailer in the bay I still need to figure out, so I send a quick text to Cassidy. I tell her to have a safe trip, and I put my gearhead on and get to work.

After about an hour of breaking my brain on the truck, my phone buzzes in

my pocket. I pull it out and see a text from Cassidy.

Sorry, I had to bolt. No rest for the wicked.

Her words put a smile on my face, and I look up, glancing around to make sure I'm alone.

I type in a reply: *You are one of the wickedest.*

Is that a compliment?

Always. Where are you?

Her next message is a photo of her smiling inside her truck with aviator sunglasses on that make her look like an even bigger badass. *Just finished fueling up and ready to hit the road.*

You coming back? Do I sound like a thirsty-ass boy who can't wait to see his girlfriend again? Maybe, but I don't give a damn.

She sends a bunch of laughing emojis at first. *I could be persuaded to for such a pretty face.*

Fuck, this woman. Has any other woman I've been inside ever made me smile so much? Probably not. On top of that, my skin feels warm, and I can't stop smiling like an idiot.

In that case, just call me pretty.

Oh, I do. She messages back with more laughing faces.

Be safe out there, and I'll catch you on the flip side.

Talk soon. Send pics when you make progress on Shelby.

"What the fuck are you smiling about?" My brother's voice pulls me from thoughts of Cassidy and my phone.

"I'm not smiling," I insist, keeping my gaze on the truck rather than what I know is Lucky's scowling face.

"Yeah, you are. Why?" He does that big brother scowl shit that used to make me spill about all the bad shit I got up to back in the day with my so-called

friends.

“What? A man can’t smile? You smile all the fucking time, and I don’t give you shit about it.”

His frown morphs into a smile. “Yeah, well, I got a reason to smile. Do you?”

“What the fuck, man? I’m smiling. Who cares?”

My brother’s eyes go wide. “Oh, I get it. This is about the trucker chick.”

“Trucker, my ass,” I lie easily. “When are you going to put a ring on Aria’s finger and start popping out some babies?” A quick subject change should make him forget about interrogating me.

“Don’t you worry about Aria and me, little brother. My girl’s a businesswoman now, and business is booming.” He’s wearing a big goofy grin on his face, and rather than giving him shit, I turn back to the diesel engine on this truck.

Loud bass sounds just outside the large repair bay doors snap us to attention. A closer listen reveals the music is Spanish rap music. Lucky and I look at each other with matching confusion on our faces before we take off at a run to see who the fuck is out there.

“Un-fucking-believable,” Lucky growls, his sentiment matching mine.

“Oh, I believe this shit,” I say at the sight of a group of Bloodthirsty Devils in a drop-top.

“You guys wanna play?” I shout the question, pulling out my piece and aiming it at the driver.

Like the shit-licking pussies they are, the driver steps on the gas so hard the rear tires spin as they haul ass out of our parking lot, ready to get away from certain death.

“Stupid motherfuckers,” my brother growls. “What the fuck are they thinking?”

I shrug. “I think they were trying to scare us.” It’s funny because those assholes couldn’t scare anyone outside a haunted house for kids. “You

scared?”

Lucky’s lips part into a wide grin, and he shakes his head. “Goddamn terrified.”

A beat of silence passes between us, and then we both burst out laughing. “Too bad. I would’ve loved to fuck some shit up just now.”

“Right?” Lucky focuses his gaze on the distance, the car no longer in sight.

“We need to get to the clubhouse ASAP and let Ace and Dix know what the fuck is going on.”

I agree. “You need to check in with your woman first?”

He nods, heading back inside. “I’ll let Aria and security know if they don’t already to keep an eye out for trouble, and then we can roll out.”

I exhale slowly, feeling the weight in my chest as Lucky heads off to look after his old lady. The silence around us is just a brief pause. The Bloodthirsty Devils are still out there, and it’s only a matter of time before they come at us again. I’m ready to deal with them, ready to put them in the ground.

Shit. Angel Harbor is about to become a war zone, with all the brothers stepping up, taking control of the town, on top of everything else we’ve got going on. I pull out my phone and dial Cassidy. She’s a bit of light in all this darkness.

“Miss me already?” she teases.

I crack a smile. “Nah, just wanted to tell you to be careful. I’ll see you when you get back.”

“Sure thing,” she fires back, but there’s a pause, a shift in her tone. “Everything okay? You sound like you’re on edge.”

“Just club stuff,” I say, my voice low.

“Club stuff,” she repeats. “Yeah, I get it.”

Her laugh cuts through the bullshit of the day and brings out a grin I didn’t realize I was holding back. “It’s a hell of a life.”

“Tell me about it later,” she says, and I can hear the smile in her voice.

I frown. “You trying to get rid of me?”

“Not at all,” she shoots back. Then, her tone changes. “Hang on, got the cops on my tail. Need to handle this.”

“Good luck,” I tell her, wanting to say more but not quite sure what to say.

“Thanks. You too.”

The call ends just as Lucky returns, and we jump on our bikes, watching for enemies as we rush toward the clubhouse. There are no signs at all of the Bloodthirsty Devils or the Latin Mafia, which is a good thing because I don’t want my brother hurt, no matter how much I need to wreck some shit right now.

“You good?” Lucky asks when we arrive at the clubhouse.

“I’m good. Just wish I would’ve shot one of those fucking BTDA assholes.”

Lucky’s mouth tugs into a crooked grin. “Don’t worry, little brother. I’m sure you’ll get a chance to spill some enemy blood soon.”

It’s a promise he can’t keep, but I lean into that tingly sensation I get when I can unleash my inner asshole for a good cause. And what better cause than my MC? “Yeah, yeah. Don’t play with my emotions.”

Lucky laughs again, patting me on the back as we step inside. “You’ll get your chance,” he says again before we find Ace.

Our Prez picks up on our distress immediately and gets to his feet. “What’s up?”

Lucky and I tag team the storytelling of our surprise visit from the Bloodthirsty Devils.

He says nothing for a long time, just nods around his dark features. “We need to talk about what’s next. Church. Tonight at nine.”

“You got it, brother,” Lucky and I say in unison like the family unit we are.

CHAPTER NINE

CASSIDY

Driving along, my mind keeps drifting back to Diesel—his texts, the flirting, his whole vibe. It's ridiculous, really. Getting so wrapped up in someone I barely know? Yet, there's something about him. No one's caught my attention like this in a long time, and Diesel, well, he's nearly ticking all the boxes. And, yeah, he's incredibly good looking.

The police lights in my mirror aren't just a flicker of my imagination. They're real, and they've been tailing me for a bit. It's not unusual in my line of work, but today, the lights are shining on me, and that's my cue. With a deep breath that does little to ease my frustration, I guide my truck to the shoulder, a good distance ahead, prioritizing safety over everything else.

I tamp down my annoyance at the fact that the cops are pulling me over right before I go up the mountain. Fuckers.

I roll my eyes as my truck comes to a slow, halting stop, pinching my lips into something resembling a smile and letting my gaze bounce from one side mirror to another.

Two men emerge from a black Charger, and they don't look like any cops I've ever seen, not even VICE or undercover cops. In fact, they look a lot like gangsters, and suddenly, I'm on edge.

The guy on the driver's side is a white guy with white-blond hair. He's lanky with a lot of tattoos and an angry scowl on his face. The other one is Hispanic with dark skin and a scar down his chin, and neither of them looks like men on the right side of the law. I pull out my gun from my bag and flip off the safety as they approach.

Suddenly, my passenger door opens, and a third man appears. He has tattoos on the back of his hands and all the way up his arms, a bald head, and a teardrop on his cheek. *Nope, definitely not a cop.* "Hey," he grunts and tries to get inside the cab.

Even cops ask for permission, and I act on instinct, lifting my gun and squeezing the trigger. The bullet hits him right in the stomach, and from this distance, it does a lot of damage, so much so that his eyes go wide as he falls backward onto the ground.

My heart races like a motherfucker because whoever the hell these guys are, they're not police, which means I'm in big trouble.

"What the fuck?" I shout as one of the other motherfuckers yanks the driver side door open. I brace myself as two sets of hands try to pull me out.

"I don't think so, assholes."

They tug harder, but I still have the seatbelt strapped on, and no matter what they do, they can't free me.

"Bitch," one of them growls, but I'm too busy trying to save my life to figure out who's speaking.

I flail my arms and throw my head back in an effort to hit one of them. I need to do some kind of damage if I stand a chance at saving myself. The butt of my gun strikes something hard, and a pained grunt sounds a moment later. I

smile to myself, but the victory is short-lived as the belt goes slack, and with the next yank, one of them pulls me out of the cab.

I know I'm outnumbered, but I won't stop fighting, won't stop resisting. The desire to survive, to live, is too strong. As hands tug me out of the cab and drag me across the graveled shoulder, I'm sure I'm going to die. They're going to take me around the side of the truck where other drivers can't see me, shoot me in the head, and take my load. I wouldn't be the first or the last trucker to get killed for their cargo.

But the strangest thing happens. We get to the back of the trailer, and they keep tugging me past the trailer and all the way to the black Charger. The trunk squeaks as it opens, and they lift me, tossing me inside like a bag of trash.

"Let me go! Don't even fucking think about closing that door," I shout as if it's going to do me a damn bit of good.

"Keep quiet," the blond barks. "And you might make it through this alive."

"Either way, you'll wish we killed you," the other snarls, a grotesque sneer on his face.

The trunk closes with a final *thunk*, and then fear takes over.

I try to talk myself off the ledge time and time again, but the tight space and the darkness are overwhelming. The car rumbles to life under me, and we're back on the road. Time passes slowly, and it feels like they've been driving for days, weeks, even. I let my eyes close, hoping that movie shit about it improving the other senses is true.

I hear one guy call the other Ghost. Definitely a nickname, but it's a name. The name is unfamiliar to me, but who knows what kind of items are in the trailer, and who knows if these guys are gangsters or tweakers in need of a fix? Either way, they want what I have.

The Charger slows, and I'm sure we're exiting the freeway, but I have no fucking clue where we are or where they are taking me, never mind *why* strangers would kidnap me.

When the trunk finally opens, I attack immediately, kicking at the first figure

I see without regard. He falls back, and I leap from the trunk, but I overestimate just how long I've been in there because my legs give out almost instantly. "Fuck!"

An arm wraps around my neck and then my waist, effectively restricting all movements except my legs as they drag me away from the Charger and to something behind me that I can't see.

"Calm down you crazy bitch."

"I am calm," I shout, knocking my head back, hoping to knock that fucker's teeth loose.

"That's a problem," the guy behind me says, stopping at the bottom of the steps. His grip on my waist falls away, and I try to make a run for it, but his forearm muscle tightens around my neck, and I freeze.

"Good girl," he damn near purrs before covering my mouth with a disgusting-smelling cloth that knocks me out within seconds.

CHAPTER TEN

DIESEL

I walk up to the guy waiting beside his tractor/trailer. “We got a few more pallets to load up,” I tell him. “You wanna come up here and get the paperwork signed?” Then I scan each pallet ready to leave Morgan International. Aria has made plenty of changes to how the business operates. This makes it more efficient but also difficult for the wrong people to know what the fuck we’re shipping. Good thinking.

“I’ll be right there,” the trucker replies, smiling as he smokes a cigarette and stares at the clouds.

The door on the other side of the warehouse smacks against the wall, and my brother stomps across the cement floor with a dark scowl. “What the fuck?” he shouts to no one in particular, so angry smoke is practically wafting off the top of his head.

I shrug because with Lucky, you never know. Maybe he and Aria fought over something, or maybe it's some club shit that has him all riled up. I finish with the driver because nothing leaves late on my watch. I wait until the driver is gone before I turn to Lucky.

He's still pacing up and down the warehouse, obviously waiting for me. This gives me pause because I can't think of what I could've done recently to piss my brother off like this.

"Diesel," he growls.

"Lucky," I growl back. "Why you so fucking riled up?"

"That chick didn't make the goddamn delivery," he barks, still pacing. "It's about a four-hour drive and should have already been delivered. Yesterday. Did that bitch fuck us over?" He glares at me like this is somehow my fucking fault.

"Whoa, man." I step forward, frowning as I get in my brother's face. "I hope you're not saying what the fuck it *sounds* like you're sayin', man." Sure, he's got me in age, but I'm bigger and thicker. Everywhere.

"So where the fuck is that shipment?"

"I don't know," I sigh. "Let me see what's goin' on." I pull my phone out of my pocket, but the goddamn battery is dead. After that shit yesterday with the Bloodthirsty Devils, I bunked at the clubhouse after church and forgot about everything. "Shit. I need to charge it."

"Convenient," he snorts, shaking his head.

"Fuck you. Cassidy might be the only new person that's been around lately, but it's not like we don't have plenty of people who want to fuck us over." I know he's angry. Fuck. I'm angry too—and worried—but his attitude isn't helping.

Lucky nods, but his anger is still simmering and ready to blow.

"Do we know what the shipment is?"

"Fuck, yeah, we know."

I nod. It could be drugs, guns, or something legit. Something a trucker with an entrepreneurial spirit might find the perfect load to steal. *But Cassidy's not that stupid. She knows we'd kill her.*

“Okay,” I say when I power up my phone and find Cassidy’s name. “Shit. Is there something in that truck the law might seize?”

“That’s subjective,” he answers in a perfect non-answer that tells me nothing.

I call her about six times straight, but the phone rings and rings. “Cass, it’s me. Call me back. It’s important.” Each message is a variation of that, asking, pleading, and demanding that she call me back.

There’s no answer, but instead of being pissed off like Lucky, I’m worried. Sure, there’s a strong possibility that Cassidy just ghosted me and stole our shit, but on the second day of calling her, the voicemail is full.

“Fuck,” I growl and tap her number every few minutes, hoping she’s gonna pick up the fucking phone, but she doesn’t. She never does.

I know Cassidy didn’t take the load, and I know she didn’t ghost me. She’s a straightforward chick who would at least tell me to fuck off.

Banger flashes a sympathetic smile “Happens to the best of us, man.” That’s supposed to make me feel better, I guess, but it only pisses me off.

“That’s not what’s happening here,” I growl. “She’s too smart to just stop communicating if she stole from us. She knows there’s no way we’d stop hunting her for what she owes us, so at the very least, she’d call and tell me to fuck off.”

She had plenty of time in the few days she was in Angel Harbor.

Banger shrugs. “If you say so.”

“For another thing...” I say and freeze as the words play in my head.

“For another what thing?” Banger asks.

“Why didn’t I think of this before? Her load has a tracker on it.” Before Banger can ask any more stupid questions, I leave Morgan International early because I have questions and only one brother can answer them.

Wild Man.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CASSIDY

I wake up groggy. My arms feel heavy and slightly sore. That's because they're bound behind me. So, I try to move my legs, but they're folded under me in an uncomfortable position that I know I didn't choose. It's pitch black, and I have no clue where I am.

"Son of a bitch," I whisper to myself as I sit up painfully and squint in the endless dark for some clues about this place.

I re-adjust my body and unfold my legs, biting back a groan as my muscles protest. Almost instantly, my disorientation fades. I'm fully alert, completely awake. I remember yesterday in full color. I remember the not-a-cop car that pulled me over by Castaic, firing my gun and fighting with that guy. Is he the one they called Ghost? Or the asshole with the scar on his face?

Where the fuck am I?

I hear a noise and freeze, straining my head toward the door as the sound of distinct male voices draws closer. “What the fuck are we gonna do with this bitch, Ghost?” The voice sounds young, under thirty, for sure.

Ghost. There’s that name again. Who are these people?

“The longer we keep her, the more likely some shit goes wrong,” he adds.

“Only if you don’t think you can handle it. You said you could handle it, Tiny. Were you lying to me?” The threat in his voice is crystal clear, even through the darkness.

“N-n-no, of course. I don’t fuckin’ lie, man. Me and Sho-gun can handle it. Promise.”

“Good.”

“So, what are we gonna do? Just put a bullet in her? Pass her around and send her to the cartel? Shit, I’ll bet the home boys would buy a white girl with an ass like that,” he says, laughing.

Asshole, I’m not a white girl. I’m a Latina.

“Nah,” the voice belonging to Ghost answers slowly. “We’re not gonna kill the bitch, not yet anyway. I’m thinking a ransom, except when those fuckers show up to pay to get their whore back, we use that opportunity to fuck them up.”

The other guy, Tiny, laughs maniacally. It’s an evil villain laugh, which I’m not sure is funny or terrifying. Honestly, I don’t want to know either fucking way. “Okay. So we’ll get the money and kill those assholes all at once? I like it.”

“Glad you approve,” Ghost says in a tone that in no way indicates he’s glad to have Tiny’s stamp of approval.

I’m listening to the conversation between these two scary strangers talking about money and murder, which is fucking terrifying. But I don’t know who *those assholes* or *those fuckers* they’re talking about are, and I don’t know anyone who could or would pay a ransom.

My dad's retired, and Mom is a substitute teacher. That puts us all well below the pay-a-ransom rung on the socioeconomic ladder.

Because of my job, I have few real friends to speak of, aside from a few people in Riverbend I've known since I was a kid. Most of them work at one of the casinos in town or the hotels and restaurants that keep the town from going under.

It occurs to me that maybe this is just a case of mistaken identity. It's clear they think I'm someone else, someone who means something to people with money. People who'd pay a steep price to get me back. I open my mouth to shout to the men on the other side of the door, to tell them they've made a huge mistake and need to let me go.

But then reality kicks in. *Use your brain, Cassidy.* What are the odds these guys mixed up two female truck drivers? Do they want me or the cargo?

The door flings open, filling the room with blinding sunlight that forces my eyes shut and makes tears stream down my face.

Okay, breathe, Cassidy. Just. Fucking. Breathe.

"Hey, man," I shout. "You've got the wrong girl. What the fuck?" But then a flash of light goes off right in my face. I try again. "Listen to me."

One of the guys says, "Shut the fuck up." From the sound of his voice, I recognize him as Tiny. He holds the phone up again. "Smile pretty."

I glare at the man rather than the phone, and he laughs.

"As long as they can see your face, I don't give a shit." I try to stand, but he puts a foot out, pushing me back down. "Just because I can't kill you—yet—don't mean that I won't fuck you up, bitch." He snaps a few more pictures before stepping back and slamming the door.

I didn't see much in the way of details other than long dark hair, a mustache, and a bulging belly. *Tiny, my ass.*

Left alone with my thoughts in the darkness, I lean back against the wall and let out a heavy sigh. I stretch my legs out to feel around the cramped space. I didn't get enough time to look around when the light spilled in, mostly

because Tiny blocked it all out. The room seems to be more of a closet than an actual room, and it's completely empty.

I sit here, trying not to freak out. Damn, I actually shot a guy. Self-defense or not, it's messing with my head. I can't help feeling scared out of my wits.

After what feels like forever, I try to pull myself together. If these jerks nabbed me by mistake, I'm still in deep shit. And if they did it on purpose, who's gonna pay to get me back, a truck driver from out of state? Either way, I'm fucked.

"Come on, Cassidy, think," I say out loud. My voice sounds weird in the quiet. Who are these guys? And why me?

In desperation, I shout, "Hey! Over here! I gotta pee!" Maybe someone will hear and give a damn. "Hello? Anyone?" I listen hard, hoping for some noise, anything.

But what really gets to me is the silence. It's eerie, like I've been locked away to die. No sounds, no voices, nothing. The kind of silence that makes me feel like I might be left here to rot, forgotten. And that's the scariest feeling in the world.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DIESEL

The missing truck and driver, along with the return, or rather the reappearance of the Bloodthirsty Devils, requires an emergency Church session.

Ace wears an expression of pure frustration when he storms into the Sanctuary and takes his seat. Brows pulled into a frown, he looks around the room, tallying up the brothers that showed.

Ace bangs the gavel and says, “All right, let’s get down to business,” scrubbing a hand over the anxiety on his face. “First order of business is Reggie Song.”

My brows tense. “Who the fuck is that?” Do we have a new enemy I don’t know shit about?

“Tig Heights mayor,” Wild Man confirms for the group. “He ran on a platform of reform, and he’s determined to make the Iron Reapers the centerpiece of that effort.”

Ace nods. “He’s got the cops raiding their legit businesses, making customers skittish.”

“What about black market shit?” Dix leans back in his chair, like he’s relaxing, except for the tense lines around his eyes.

“They don’t have probable cause to search shit, just suspicions,” Wild Man replies. “Basically, he’s targeting them because they’re bikers. In his pea brain, bikers mean criminals.”

It’s the same with most people until they get to know us. “So, what’s the plan?”

“The plan,” Ace starts with a heavy sigh, “is to do what we promised the Iron Reapers we’d do. Take care of Reggie Song.”

“Gia and I have gathered all the available info on the mayor’s schedule, even hacked into his official schedule that covers ribbon cuttings and council meetings and shit like that.” He looks around the room. “But this guy isn’t dumb enough to put *meeting with my sidepiece* on his calendar, so we’ll need to do some recon.”

Ace searches the room until he lands on the face he needs. “Tank, you and Stone will work together on watch duty, digging up whatever Wild Man’s intel hasn’t told us, but Diesel, you’ll have to step in once in a while since your schedule is the most flexible.”

“No problem,” I say easily, always willing to do what I can to help my brothers. “I can leave my *kutte* and pick up parts for our shops instead of one of the prospects. It’s only a forty-minute ride.”

“That works,” he replies, sitting up taller as our plans coalesce.

Lucky growls in my direction. “Use your annoying charm to see what you can get from the residents.”

“That’s a great idea, bro. Thanks,” I tell him, every syllable dripping with as

much sarcasm as I can manage.

“Enough,” Ace grunts. “We can’t sleep on getting this shit done. The Iron Reapers came through when we needed them to, and we need to do this for them before Song does something they can’t recover from.”

He looks at each of us, making sure there’s no fucking confusion about how important this particular task is for our MC.

“And now we need to talk about the other pain in our asses. The Latin Mafia and Bloodthirsty Devils.”

The room erupts in a mixture of groans, curses, and wishes for bodily harm to both organizations. “Them showing up at Morgan International wasn’t just the young fucks being reckless,” I say. “They rolled in deep to let us know they’re not backing down from this fight.”

Lucky nods. “I agree. They didn’t get out or start any shit. They just stared us down until Diesel pulled his piece out. We need to be on high alert, especially the women and kids.”

“Please don’t fucking tell me we’re going back on lockdown,” Coop whines. “Carmine is obsessed with being outside unless she’s sleeping, sometimes even then.”

“No need for lockdown yet,” Ace confirms. “But I have a feeling we’ll get to that point again.”

We all know it’s heading in that direction unless we strike first and take both groups off the board completely. “We need to deal with the Tig Heights mayor first,” Dix says over the moaning and bitching. “Then we’ll have all hands on deck to eliminate these assholes.”

“We’re multi-tasking this shit,” Ace replies calmly. “Tank and Stone will handle the mayor while the rest of us deal with...every goddamn thing else.” His gaze slides to Wild Man.

Wild Man clears his throat before his gaze swings to me. “The good news is that we found Cassidy’s big rig,” he offers with a sympathetic smile.

“And the bad news?”

His smile fades. “It’s on the side of the freeway right on this side of The Grapevine where they apparently found a gangbanger with a hole in his stomach. The police report doesn’t name any gang, but I’ll give you two guesses who I suspect.”

“Is the banger dead?” Lucky asks.

“Any trace of Cassidy?” I ask.

Wild Man shakes his head. “No on both counts. The banger is probably wishing he was dead now that he’s laid up in a hospital bed.”

That news makes Wild Man smile again. “There was no blood or any signs that she was hurt, but the report indicates they suspect someone was trying to rob her, and she shot to stop him.”

“Okay,” I say, my fingers twitching nervously as I think about what I’ve learned so far. Wild Man suspects Ghost or Olivera are behind Cassidy’s kidnapping, which means she’s in real danger. “Any way you can hack into the hospital to see the name of the dead banger?”

“He’s not dead,” Wild Man repeats with a frown.

“Not yet,” I growl. “Can you or not?”

“I can but give me a minute. This stuff takes time,” he replies defiantly. “The cops have probably admitted him as a John Doe, and there are hundreds of people staying in one hospital at any given time, which means it’ll take a while.”

Shit. We don’t have a while.

“But there’s one more thing,” he adds. “A few witness statements said a black Charger with police lights stopped behind the truck. No one saw who was behind the wheel. Sorry, man.”

“This is connected. Has to be,” I say to no one in particular. “She’s not from California and has no ties here, so why take her if it’s not to fuck with us?”

“Maybe she tried to sell the load, and her buyers double-crossed her?” Lucky offers with a shrug.

“What the fuck is your problem?” I turn to Wild Man. “Was the trailer empty?”

“Doesn’t say anything other than they plan to tow it once they get their semi-truck tow back. It’s on loan down at the southern border.”

Anxious and on edge now, I turn to Ace, determined to find Cassidy. “Let me go check out the truck and see if I can get in to talk to the asshole in the hospital who tried to rob her.”

Ace shoots me an annoyed look. “Didn’t you just hear Wild Man say it would take a while to get his name?”

“But we don’t have a while. Let me try another angle. I think I can get it.” I have an idea, and fuck, I’m going to get in to talk to that motherfucker, whoever he is.

“And if you can’t?” Lucky, again.

“Then at least I’ll get eyes on him to see who the fuck he is. If it’s Olivera or Ghost, don’t you want to know?” I taunt him. “If they took Cassidy, it means Aria and the rest of the women aren’t safe, either. Right?”

Lucky’s fists tighten into fists on top of the table, and a low growl escapes.

I turn back to Ace. “This needs to be done, and I can see if the load is still there.”

“I’ll go with him,” Dix offers to sweeten the pot. “It’s not a long ride.”

“Get someone to take that fucking truck before the cops do if our load is still in it,” Ace says by way of an answer. “You have one day. Twenty-four hours, and then you come back no matter what you find.”

“Twenty-four hours. Got it.”

“Don’t do anything stupid,” he warns us both. “We can’t afford to have anybody locked up right now. Feel me?”

“Yep,” I answer, ready to get on the road and find out what the fuck happened to Cassidy. I barely pay attention as we go through other MC business before Ace officially adjourns Church.

“I hope you’re right about this chick,” Lucky says as we empty out of the Sanctuary. “But it ain’t lookin’ good.”

“Right now, it don’t look like shit but a missing driver and an abandoned truck.” I stop and turn to face my brother. “And what if I’m right, Lucky? What if she was taken by those assholes because of us when she doesn’t have shit to do with us? What then?”

“Then we’ll do what we have to do. Right now, that’s not what it looks like.”

I roll my eyes. “Because you’re so blinded by the fact that this starts at Aria’s company. She wasn’t taken, and guess what, if that load is gone, it’s also on us, so if you can’t say something helpful right now, please just shut the fuck up.” I don’t wait for Lucky to respond because it’s clear we’re just not gonna agree on this, and that’s fine.

Dix comes up to me, his eyes full of questions that I don’t want to fucking talk about right now. “Ready to head out?”

“Fuck, yeah. But we ought to stop and load up first.” The area where Cassidy’s truck is located isn’t exactly friendly territory, and we need to be safe. Don’t know who might be following us.

Dix nods his agreement. “Coop’s gonna meet us at the armory, and Shades is on the phone with a driver who’ll meet us at the rig.”

We hop on our bikes and head north. The entire time I hope this is all a big misunderstanding. I would never say it to my brother, but I would rather his version be the truth.

Being double-crossed by a chick is a hell of a lot better than the alternative.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CASSIDY

I wake up still in the dark closet, unsure of what time it is or how long I've been in this fucking place. I suspect it's been a couple days, but I haven't eaten a damn thing since I got thrown in here. All I have is a bottle of water someone left for me shortly after Tiny took those pictures. There's been no conversations or real noise aside from the sounds of people partying below me, which I think means I must be in a house. Upstairs.

But where?

Footsteps sound just outside the door before it opens with such intensity I think it's going to fly right off the hinges. I look up instantly, but the figure is big—even bigger than Tiny. He blocks out all the light before he jams something over my head.

It's not soft fabric; it feels like heavy-duty canvas and blocks out the light as I'm yanked to my feet by a pair of big hands. My feet barely touch the ground as they drag me from the closet.

I squirm as much as possible, trying to shake loose the hood so I can see something. "Hey, slow down!"

With a grunt, the big guy yanks me under one arm, dragging me somewhere. I feel like I'm being led down a hall. Door hinges squeak, and I'm flung inside, falling to my knees and then on my face because my arms are still bound behind my back.

"Stay here." The big fucker's voice is softer than I thought it would be, but it still has that *don't fucking test me* tone that I've come to know well.

I stay flat on the floor with my hands behind my back, waiting to see what happens next. He grips my forearm, and two sharp jerks later, my hands are free. I flip over quickly and find a giant man glaring down at me. Broad shoulders, angry brows, and a tattoo that covers the front of his neck peg him as a gangbanger. "Eat, and don't try anything funny."

My gaze follows his finger to a small nightstand with a plate on top of it containing what looks like carne asada tacos.

"There ain't shit funny about any of this," I mumble as I get to my feet slowly. My legs are shaky since I've been sitting for at least twenty-four hours. "How long have I been here?"

"Too long," he grunts and then leaves the room. The sound of a key turning inside the lock is so loud it's damn near oppressive.

My shoulders fall in defeat. I'm locked inside a room with nothing but a bed and a nightstand with a shitty lamp on top of it that looks like a Goodwill cast off. And tacos. My stomach growls as a reminder. I eat the tacos, swallowing down the spicy meat with a scowl. They're kind of good, and at least it's food, fuel for whatever comes next.

I look around the room again, inspecting every inch of it in search of something. A weapon, a trap door. Anything. There's a window, and I try to open it to find it's nailed shut. And has bars on the outside. Figures. "Motherfucker!" I smack the window, pissed off it wasn't as easy as I'd

hoped.

But not easy doesn't mean impossible. I peek through the curtains to check out my surroundings. It's dark outside, and a large tree obscures just about everything except part of a red car.

“Think, Cassidy, goddammit, think!”

I don't know how much time passes before the door opens, and Tiny sticks his giant head in the small opening.

“Keep these guys happy. Or else.” He slams the door, and it echoes in the room like I'm in a cavern or something.

Left alone with my thoughts, I can't think of anything but who the fuck *these guys* are. Do they plan to whore me out? Sell my body until I'm a broken shell of a woman, and if so, then what? I move toward the door and press my ear to it, hearing an unfamiliar voice issue instructions.

“You motherfuckers have paid for time. You get twenty minutes to do whatever you want short of killing the bitch. Have fun.” The man speaking sounds happy as he gives instructions, and my shaky legs carry me back to the other side of the room.

A few minutes later, the door opens and a short and pudgy guy stares at me. He's bigger by at least fifty pounds. I can't see his face until he steps inside and pushes the door shut with a quiet *click*. He has straight dark hair, medium-brown skin, and a look in his eyes that's fucking terrifying.

“Hey.” He flashes a nervous smile, and suddenly, it all becomes clear.

I look around the room again, noting the details. The single bed. The nightstand with one drawer. *Oh, my fucking God.* No. Absolutely not. That is not happening. I won't let it. I stand to my full height and cross my arms.

“Don't be nervous, sweetheart. This will be over soon.” His smile turns menacing because he knows what I know. There's no place to run or hide. He takes a step forward, and then another, and another, until he's right in front of me, trapping me between him and the wall.

My hands ball into fists, and I prepare to raise my leg to knee this fucker as

hard as I can in the balls, but he shocks me first with a punch that sends my head flying into the wall before I slide to the floor.

“Fuck,” I groan and scramble to my feet.

He walks slowly, confident he has the upper hand as he looms over me. He’s got me on weight and grabs my hair, yanking me back.

“Don’t make this too easy, sweetheart.”

“I won’t,” I growl in reply, punching him right in the dick as hard as I can.

“Bitch,” he grunts, releasing me to cup his sore dick.

“Asshole,” I shoot back and kick him in the face. I feel proud, but I know it’s not over. I try to step around him to check the door, but he grabs my ankle, and I fall face-first.

“Nice shot,” he says, yanking me toward him.

My eyes go wide because I’m sure he’s about to tear my clothes and have his way with me, but he doesn’t.

He smiles. Again. Then rears his fist back to punch me in the face again. And again. And again.

Pain radiates all over my face, and the back of my head stings from hitting the floor. I scratch his arms, and he rears back, getting to his feet to kick me in the ribs. Twice. I’m hurting, and I don’t know if I can take much more of this. Half of me wishes he would just end my suffering, but the other, more logical part of me says to keep fighting. It’s better to die fighting than just letting that shit happen.

Two knocks sound on the door, and the man lifts me up, still smiling. “Not bad,” he grins and then spits in my face before releasing me and marching to the door. “You put up a good fight.”

I’m breathing heavily, listening as he knocks, and the door opens before closing again a few seconds later.

“Holy fucking shit, what was *that*?” I’m glad it’s not the rape I was expecting, but did that guy seriously just pay to beat the fuck out of me?

I can barely process what just happened because it's so outrageous. What the hell is this place, and why am I here? I don't have answers, and after thinking for too long, the door opens again, and a different guy steps inside with a black bag in his hand, wearing the same salacious smile as the asshole before.

I don't know what to expect or how to respond until after the fact.

The second guy is creepy as fuck when he assures me. "I'm not going to hurt you," he whispers and drops down on the bed. "I promise."

I stay in the corner, trying like hell not to tremble with fear.

"Come here," he says with a smile.

I shake my head and stand my ground. I stare at him with wide eyes as he opens the bag. What the fuck is in there? A machete? Needles?

It's a brush. A fucking hairbrush. "Come now."

I frown. "What are you gonna do with that?" *Obviously, shove it up inside of you or beat you with it, Cassidy.* I hesitate before taking a step forward because what the fuck is up with this guy? He's not as threatening as the other man, but his creep factor is off the charts.

"I just want to brush your hair." He's smiling, but I see the crazy in his eyes, so I decide to pick my battles and go to him and sit on the floor between his legs while he...brushes. My. Fucking. Hair.

I'm trembling the entire time, but he spends about fifteen minutes brushing my hair and humming to himself. He doesn't say another word to me; just ties a bow around my head, packs up his things and exits the room.

What. The. Fuck.

My mind is all over the place, and I don't know what the fuck is going on. It's like some twisted torture shit that is fucked up enough, but I don't even know why this is happening or if it will ever end.

My heart races, and my mind is going a thousand miles per minute because I can't get a grip on what the fuck is going on. Am I a slave? A whipping post? Will the next guy be the one that kills me?

I know what they're doing. They're trying to make me go crazy. This is psychological torture.

The door opens again, and I hold my breath, waiting for whatever fresh hell is sure to come.

Asshole number three wants to fight, and he's good at it, so good I'm pretty sure one of my ribs is fractured. The lamp scatters into pieces, but I'm too fucking tired and in too much pain to think of anything but keeping my face against the wall.

Then the double knock sounds, and he's gone. I sit down on the bed gently. I hurt everywhere. This is a fucking nightmare, and I have to find a way to get out of here.

Number four walks in, tall and angry at the world based on how he sneers in my direction. I prepare myself for another round of fighting, but he drops his pants and starts stroking his dick. "Get over here. Bitch. Now."

Fuck that noise, I say, trying to muster up all the energy I can to fight off this asshole. I don't shake my head. I don't respond. I just stare.

His expression darkens, and he comes to me, grabbing my hair and dragging me across the room. He sits on the bed, holding me between his thighs so I'm eye to eye with his semi-hard cock.

"Get on it." He gives my hair another pull and growls. "Right now, bitch. You bite me, I swear, I'll kill you."

Sounds better than what I have going on right now.

His hips jut forward, and I fall completely against his hairy crotch, but then I feel it. Right beside the bed. A piece of broken lamp. *Perfect*. I tap my fingers on the edges to feel which part is sharper.

"Suck it," he orders angrily.

I sit up straight and stare at him as I pull back my arm and jab the shard right into his thigh. I'm not sure if I hit anything that'll kill him, but blood shoots everywhere, and he releases my hair.

"Suck it yourself," I shout and yank my arm back again, stabbing that piece

of broken lamp into his shoulder.

The next few minutes pass in a blur. I scoot back on my ass until I'm pressed against the wall under the window as three people rush into the room to answer his screams. In a flash, the room is silent as they take care of him, and I'm hugging my knees, rocking back and forth as jumbled thoughts dance through my mind. *Is he dead? Did I kill him?*

Now, will they kill me?

I look at the mess in the room. The blood. The shards are so enticingly sharp that I contemplate beating these motherfuckers to the punch and jabbing that same piece into my own neck.

I grab a jagged piece of glass, gripping it so tight my hand aches. It would be so easy to stab this piece of lamp into my neck or wrist until blood rushes out, hot and gushing until I fade away.

Inhaling and exhaling deeply, I push to my feet and creep to the door, twisting the knob, which surprises me when it opens. As quietly as I can, I twist it all the way and pull it open, taking one step out of the room. And then another. I walk faster, suddenly feeling invigorated, but just before I reach the stairs, a hand reaches out, gripping my arm and pulling me back. "Fuck."

Whoever is behind me doesn't say a word. Just tugs the same black hood over my head as they toss me back into the tiny dark closet. I let out a shaky sigh, wrapping my arms around my legs and resting my chin on my knees. I refuse to cry because I'm not sure I'll be able to stop, and I can't afford to break down just yet.

I have to find a way to get the fuck out of here before they come up with another way to torture me.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DIESEL

“All right,” Dix sighs, shaking his head with a grin. “As un-fucking-believable as it is, the load is totally safe and secure.”

“That is completely un-fucking-believable,” I shoot back. “You think they wanted us to come here?” It wouldn’t surprise me if either Bloodthirsty Devils or Latin Mafia—or both—were trying to set a trap for us, so I stay on point, keeping my head on a swivel in search of enemies.

Dix shrugs. “Fuck if I know, but what I do know is that the load is secure, and the driver Shades set up is going to make the drop before heading back to Morgan. He’s almost here in his own rig, and I’ll help him make the switch.”

I nod. “Sounds good.”

“Now that we have that handled, you know what it’s time to do.”

I nod, raking a hand through my hair. “The hospital is just on the other side of Santa Clarita.” That’s where the guy Cassidy shot is being held, and I need to talk to him, make him regret coming after her.

“Maybe,” he agrees. “But probably not.”

Dix nods. “I’ll be a few minutes behind you, maybe longer, depending on how long it takes this fucking driver.”

“See you there.” I jump back on my bike, leaving Dix on the side of the freeway as I rev the engine, going full throttle until the hospital comes into view. It’s a short drive from the freeway to the hospital, but damn, the parking lot is full. It looks like everyone and their mother chose today to visit sick loved ones.

I shrug out of my *kutte* and store it in my bike, squaring my shoulders as I face the hospital, strolling inside like I’m just like everyone else, here to see a loved one. Nobody stops me or even spares me a glance other than a few young nurses who give me a once over. I wander around, doing a damn good job—if I say so myself—of blending in and looking like a lost loved one.

“Excuse me, sir? You can’t just wander around the hospital.” A nurse speaks behind me in a soft voice and grabs my arm.

I turn slowly and smile. “Sorry,” I say like I’m in a rush. “My aunt called to say that my cousin was robbed and shot on the side of the road, and I don’t even know where to start looking for him.”

Her expression softens, and she tugs me toward the half-moon-shaped desk in the middle of the main floor. “We only have a few gunshot victims.” She drops a few names I don’t recognize, so I keep silent. “And then we have a John Doe we haven’t been able to identify.”

“That may be him,” I say quickly.

Her expression shifts to understanding. “I’m sorry to hear that. Room four-ninety-three,” she says with a smile. “You didn’t hear it from me.”

“From who?” I offer a smile of gratitude and leave to find the nearest stairwell. The fourth floor is buzzing with so much activity that no one notices me as I wander the halls searching for room four-ninety-three.

I turn the corner and find two cops, smiling and joking as they walk away, leaving the corner room completely unguarded. Their absence doesn't mean another duo of cops isn't coming, but it does mean that I have time. As soon as the elevator doors close on the cops, I slip inside the room.

The guy is lying still but clearly not dead, which is the first thing I notice. The second is his tattoos, specific to the Bloodthirsty Devils.

The minute he realizes he's not alone, his eyes go wide, and he tries to sit up, wincing in pain. "What the fuck do you want?"

I smile and close the door, stalking toward him.

"I have a few questions, and then I'll leave you be."

"Bullshit," he spits. "I don't have shit to say to you, so get the fuck out."

"I was hoping you'd say that," I grin. "I'm glad you didn't disappoint." I scan the IV bag hanging over him, finding exactly what I'm looking for. We've had enough brothers shot up for me to recognize IV bags full of pain meds. "Tell me what happened on the side of the road."

"Fuck you."

"Who shot you?"

"Kiss my ass, motherfucker."

I flash a grin and kink the plastic IV tube. "Okay, asshole, I just want some answers. How I get them is up to you." I show him the tube, and his expression changes from smug asshole to fear. "Now, who shot you?"

"Fuck. You." He manages the words through his pain, which might have impressed me if I wasn't so desperate for information.

Two knocks sound on the door, and then a familiar voice. "I'm here. Took the driver fucking forever," Dix grunts, sticking his head inside the room.

I nod toward him and then look back to the shithead in the bed. "You want to try this again?"

He looks away.

“Suit yourself,” I say, tearing the blankets from his body and lifting the hospital gown.

“You sure you don’t want to answer our questions?” Dix comes to the bed, trying for a friendly smile, but the motherfucker is too intimidating to fool anybody.

“Fuck you too,” says our patient.

Dix shrugs. “Do your worst, man.”

I smile at the man, letting my gaze slide down his body until it lands on the stark white bandages covering the center of his midsection. “Who shot you?”

He looks away.

“Okay.” I rip the white bandage from his body to see a disgusting red wound, still moist and shiny. I shove two fingers into the wound, twisting it while he howls in extreme pain. I cover his mouth so a gang of nurses won’t come running into his room. “Shut up and listen. Tell me what happened on the side of the 5 freeway, and I’ll make sure you get the help you need.”

This tactic has a slim chance of working, but I give him the chance anyway.

Tears stream from the corners of his wide eyes as the pain grips him. But even in his anguish, I can still see his determined defiance.

“Okay. How about this? If you don’t tell me what I want to know, then I will slowly but surely kill everyone you love. Starting with your blood relatives and working my way up to Ghost and all the other shit stains in your little gang. If you have a little sister, a mother, an aunt? Mine. A little brother? Two bullets in the head. Understood?”

He weighs his options in his mind, trying to figure out if I’m full of shit or just crazy enough to kill everyone who means anything to him.

“If you wait to find out who I really am, what I can do, it’ll be too fucking late. For everybody.” I give him a few seconds to process my words and decide before I move my hand. “Who shot you?”

“Some bitch driving a truck,” he spits out. “Ghost took her along with that Mexican prick he’s been hanging out with lately. Fucker is crazy as shit and

not thinkin' straight, but we gotta deal with him. For now, anyway." He scoffs and then winces in pain. "Let that shit go, will you?" he nods toward the pain meds in the IV bag.

"Where'd they take her?"

"No fucking clue," he growls. "I thought we were there to rob the truck, maybe have a little fun with the bitch, not get a big ass fucking hole in my gut."

"Think harder."

"Fuck, man, it could be anywhere. If Ghost is runnin' shit, then she's at one of our houses in L.A. If that other dude has her, she could be anywhere."

That tracks. At least if BTD has her, then we have a pretty extensive list of their holdings, but the Latin Mafia? We're still building intel on them. "Why did you take her?"

He shrugs. "Someone saw her over there and figured one of you must be bangin' a hot piece of ass like that."

His words are like a fucking punch to the gut, and I release the IV tube with a groan. Guilt consumes me at the idea that Cassidy is in the hands of those animals because of me. Because someone saw her and drew the wrong conclusion.

"What's the plan with her?" Dix asks him when it becomes clear that my mind is someplace else.

"No clue. I don't fucking know, and I don't really care since the bitch shot me."

His words make me smile. Cassidy is a fighter, and I know she'll fight as much as she can for as long as she can. But knowing what I know of Ghost, she doesn't have long. I need to find her, and we don't have time to waste.

"Wrong answer," I tell him, finally checking back into the conversation. "Try again."

"Look, man, I don't fucking know, okay?"

I shake my head, hands balling into fists and then stretching out to flex. “One more time,” I say and rinse my hands in the sink. Then I yank out two rubber gloves from the box on the wall and put them on.

“What are you going to do?” the guy asks, and I pull out one of the pillows that prop him up from the stack.

“You want to give me something I can use?”

He shrugs. “Can’t give you what I don’t know.”

“Too bad.” I place the pillow over his face, holding the edges down so the whole damn thing covers him. He barely flails, thanks to the pain from his gunshot, but his arms twitch, and his legs squirm.

One minute passes. Two minutes. He’s still fighting the inevitable, and I let him because watching him suffer, watching him fight it, knowing he’ll lose is the only goddamn thing making me feel better about all of this.

Ghost has Cassidy, and this motherfucker is going to die.

“I think he’s gone, man.” Dix reaches out to touch my shoulder, and I blink.

“Yeah. Right. Good. Fuck him.” I remove the pillow to find a blank stare on his face, mouth wide open. I tuck the pillow behind him and wipe down everything I’ve touched with a sigh.

“Feel better?”

“Fuck no. We have to find Cassidy,” I say as we open the door, looking left and then right to make sure the coast is clear as we get the fuck out of the hospital. I pull off the gloves and stuff them into my pocket, walking across the parking lot to our bikes. “It doesn’t make sense that they took her or even fucking saw her. She was barely at Morgan.”

“You spent time with her,” he says. “It’s not farfetched to think they’ve been watching us all.” He pulls out his phone and dials. “Wild Man, check on surveillance around the clubhouse and Morgan.”

“What am I looking for?” he asks.

“I want to know if the BTD or Latin Mafia have been watching us more than

we realized.”

“I’ll hit you back when I find something,” he says and ends the call.

“Let’s go back and search the truck, see what else we can find. Sound good?”

“Where is it? I thought Shades sent a driver?”

“He did, for the trailer. The cab is still on the side of the freeway. Let’s go.”

We take off on the freeway and head to Cassidy’s truck. I use my slick criminal skills to get inside and open the side door for Dix. After a few minutes of searching, Dix says, “Diesel, check this out.”

“You find something?” I say and poke my head into the front of the cab. “What you got? There ain’t shit back here.”

He points to the camera mounted on the dashboard. “Your girl has video in here,” he grins. “Too bad I don’t know shit about how to watch it.”

“Fucking old man,” I say with a smile as I remove the camera from the dashboard mount. “You can play it right on here if you need to, but I’m sure she has storage somewhere in here or to her cloud service.”

“The image isn’t bad, but I can’t see shit,” Dix grunts.

“It’s enough,” I say, pointing to the shadow of the flashing lights that caused Cassidy to pull over. Her face is as calm as any other person being pulled over by the cops. At first. But her dark brows dip into a frown as she glances out her side mirror. I see the moment she realizes that these aren’t police. “Good girl,” I whisper when she reaches for her gun, talking to herself to remain calm.

“Smart,” Dix says just as the door right beside me opens, and the asshole from the hospital says, “Hey.” Not a second later, a gunshot rings out, followed by a grunt.

Cassidy struggles when her door opens, cursing up a storm as she fights with someone out of the camera’s view.

“Bitch!”

I sit up straight and look at Dix. “Ghost. That voice belongs to that fucking

blond-headed asshole.”

Dix nods. “Don’t know the other voice, but that whiny little bitch voice definitely belongs to Ghost.”

Which confirms it: Ghost has Cassidy. The Bloodthirsty Devils have her. “Fuck!”

“Come on, man, we need to head back.”

I nod, taking a minute to get my shit under control before I grab her backpack and some other things still in the cab. I’m actually surprised at how much is still in here.

I spend the entire drive back to Angel Harbor torturing myself, wondering what they’re doing to Cassidy, how she’s holding up, and most of all, if she’s figured out her current predicament is all my fucking fault.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CASSIDY

The door opens, and I go completely still. The hood is gone, but the plastic ties around my wrists are so tight I can't feel my fingers anymore.

The sun shines behind the guy who is much slimmer than Tiny, and when I look up, I see a shock of white-blond hair, obviously dyed based on his black brows. "Come on, sweetheart. It's okay."

I don't let the gentle voice fool me because I'm not a fucking idiot, but also because this guy is such a bad guy that he can't even pretend to be a good guy. Still, he's offering me time out of the box, which is how I've started referring to the closet. I struggle to my feet and follow him out. Maybe this time, I'll get a better chance to escape. If not, I'll at least have the beginning of a plan.

“Who are you?” I ask though I know it’s Ghost from the sound of his voice.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” he says before droning on and on about something.

I’m not really sure what the fuck he’s talking about. I know I should be listening, but I’m exhausted. I sleep no more than twenty or thirty minutes at a time. I’m tired, and my mind is too foggy to think straight. A big fucking problem with a guy like Chatty Cathy over here.

“Okay, so what do you want?”

He leads me down a hall where I pass a bathroom and an empty room that might be a bedroom if it had any furniture. Straight ahead, there’s a door that leads outside. The main door is open, just a screen door between me and freedom.

“What I want is answers.” He opens the door and nods to a room to the right.

I step inside hesitantly, scanning the room to find we’re alone. “Answers to what?” I turn so my back is against the wall and face him.

“How long have you been working for Morgan International?”

“Is this a joke?” I laugh and shake my head. “Probably never, thanks to you and your buffoons. That was my first job working with them, and I didn’t get to deliver the load, so, yeah, thanks for that.”

“Don’t lie to me, sweetheart.” The threat is clear. “It won’t work out well for you.”

I nod to let him know that I understand, nibbling my lips because what the fuck is going on? My head is swimming, and his questions make no sense. Why the fuck does he care about a shipping company?

“I’m not lying.”

“What do you know about the Reckless Souls?”

My brows knit into a frown, and it takes me a minute to process his question. “The Reckless Souls? The motorcycle club?”

He nods. “No, the fucking jazz band.”

“I don’t know anything about them, honestly. I met a few of them in Angel Harbor while I was waiting on my truck, but not enough to say I *know* them.”

He laughs, closing the gap between us until he looms over me. I can tell he’s working hard to appear intimidating. “What were you shipping for Morgan International?”

“No clue. I picked up the trailer already sealed.”

His hand comes from nowhere in a perfect backhand arc across my face. “Don’t. Fucking. Lie. To. Me.”

“Fuck,” I grunt. “That hurt.”

“That’s nothing compared to what I’ll do to you if you lie to me again. I know you know them, and I know you’re fucking one of them. Tell me the fucking truth. Or else.”

Maybe that smack cleared the fog from my brain because it’s all starting to make sense to me. None of the questions are about me. They’re about the shipment, Morgan International, and me fucking Diesel.

“Look, I don’t know who you think I am, but I promise you have it all twisted around. I don’t work for Morgan International, and I don’t know anything about the Reckless Souls. This was my first job for Morgan, and I spent a few hours partying with a biker dude and his friends. That’s it.”

I can already tell he doesn’t like that answer, and I brace myself for the next hit.

“Tiny! Get your fat ass in here.”

“Look, my truck broke down, and they directed me to Morgan International, where I met Diesel, who fixed it. We hung out while waiting for the parts to come in, and then I got back on the road where you stopped me.”

Tiny appears, looking as menacing as ever with a blank expression on his face. “Yeah, Boss?”

“She’s not cooperating,” Boss says, nodding in my direction.

“All right.” Tiny’s voice is quiet as he steps inside, removing a long canvas

roll from under his arm. He unrolls it across a table against the wall. “Teeth or fingernails first?”

The chill that runs down my spine is unstoppable, just like the gasp that escapes at the easy way he asks such a devastating question.

“I don’t give a fuck, just get me some fucking answers!”

I stare at both men as I try to ignore the loud pounding in my head, the panic that’s starting to rise as Tiny checks out his torture tools. “Th-there’s no need for any of...that.” I nod at Tiny and his kit.

“It is because you won’t tell me the goddamn truth!”

My shoulders sag. How can I get out of this if this man is determined not to believe me?

“I am telling you the truth, but you don’t want to hear it. Who are you anyway?”

“Nonya business who I am. I need you to tell me everything you know and do it now.”

“I don’t know anything.”

Tiny, the fat son of a bitch, grips my middle finger with a set of pliers and rips my fingernail from the root.

“Ow! Stop! Son of a motherfucking bitch!” Blood pours from my finger. “Holy mother of fuck, that shit hurts!” I clench my jaws tight against the pain and the urge to cry as tears burn my eyes.

“One more time,” he sighs. “Tell me everything you know about the Reckless Souls.”

“I already did,” I say with a whimper. I let out another anguished cry because I can’t focus on anything but how much it hurts.

Tiny grabs another finger and lines up the pliers with my pinky nail, prepared to yank it out.

“Okay. Okay, wait. Please.” I plead for my life, but I look up at Tiny and then Ghost with tears in my eyes. “What do you want to know?”

“Everything,” Ghost says with a menacing smile.

“I’m a truck driver,” I say. “I make deliveries for whoever pays me. Morgan International asked if I could do a delivery for them. That’s it.” Not that it matters now, of course.

“You’re fuckin’ one of ‘em.”

I nod because agreeing is the best thing to say to a man willing to yank out my fingernails just for shits and giggles. “It was a one-night stand. Nothing more, nothing less.”

He lets out an exhausted sigh. “Tiny, hammer. Now.”

“Hammer? That isn’t necessary. Leave the hammer where it is and tell me what you want me to say.”

“The fucking truth!” He yanks at his hair, pacing in front of me as if I’m the one ruining *his* plans.

Tiny grips my wrist with one meaty hand, gripping a hammer in the other, raising it high in the air.

“Stop! I don’t know anything,” I shout, but it’s too late. The hammer comes crashing down in the middle of my left hand with a sickening crack. “Fuck!” Tears stream down my cheeks, and pain radiates all the way up my arm so bad I may pass out.

Ghost sneers at me. “Ready to talk *now*?”

I can’t take it. The pain is too bad. “Just kill me,” I plead. I don’t know anything about what he’s asking. And he’s not going to listen. I hurt so bad I can’t even think straight.

How did I get here? Who are these people?

His arm jerks again in a stinging backhand. “Wake up! I’m not finished with you.”

My head snaps back, and I think my nose is bleeding, but I can’t do this anymore. “I’m awake,” I say as blood seeps from my nose into my mouth.

“Impressive,” Ghost offers with an awful attempt at a smile and pulls out a

revolver with a pearl white handle. “Did they ever say anything about *Los Tres Colombianos*?”

Fuck. Who?

My eyes are wide as he empties all the bullets into his hand, dropping them to the floor in front of me, one by one. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I say and swallow down the pain, “maybe I just don’t have the answers you want because I’m not who you think I am?”

“That’s possible,” he offers and squats down to pick up just one bullet. “But I need to be sure.” Ghost stands to his full height once again, clutching the bullet between his thumb and forefinger. “So, what are those fuckers planning?”

“I don’t know.” The fear and adrenaline start to take hold, and my mind gets fuzzy. Blood pumps through my head, and it’s the only thing I can hear.

He grins, stepping in front of me and grabbing my chin between his thumb and forefinger. Ghost presses the gun to my temple. “Have you heard them talk about a man named Arturo Rojas?”

“No.” I close my eyes tight and wait for him to squeeze the trigger and for my brain to go flying across the room.

“Wrong answer. Again.” His grip changes on the gun, and a loud clicking noise sounds to my left.

My heart skips, and I let out a shaky gasp as more tears fall. “Fuck.”

“That’s one. Try again.”

“What do you want me to say? I promise. I don’t know anything.” I’m exhausted. I wish this psycho would kill me. The pain is horrible.

He squeezes again, and it’s another dry click.

“Oh fuck,” I gasp, panting as if that’s another life saved...or lost. I’m not even sure anymore.

“Fuck this,” he growls and snatches the cell phone from Tiny’s back pocket, glaring at me intensely. “You better hope they’re willing to meet our terms,

or you are so fucking dead, you'll wish one of these bullets had pierced your skull."

His words scare the fuck out of me, but they also bring home another fact. I should already be dead, but I'm not, so what's he doing? "I thought I was dead anyway."

"Not yet," he laughs. "And don't worry," he grins, showing me the bullet that was supposed to be in the chamber. "I don't do easy deaths, sweetheart. Do you know what a tough bitch like you will fetch on the black market?"

I don't and don't wanna know.

Ghost grins. "Remember yesterday, letting those freaks have their way with you? That's nothing compared to what some of the sick shit rich fucks will pay to do to a pretty little thing like you." He laughs and shakes his head. "Ever been fucked by a horse? A dog? Videos go for thousands on the dark web. Electrocutation?" he gestures toward a shelf full of stuff. "Tiny, bring me that battery pack. Let's see how she likes it."

"No. What do you want from me?" I whimper. "I don't know anything. Please."

"Are you begging me now? Say it again. Beg me, *chula*," Ghost says with a sinister smile on his ugly face.

"Please? I am begging you. Please let me go." I'm terrified, and I don't want to give up, but I'm not sure I have it in me.

"Maybe once you're broken, I'll keep you for myself. You wanna be my sex slave, *chulita mia*?"

A whimper escapes despite my best efforts because I'm scared as fuck right now. There's nothing I can do to escape this hell, and it's only become clear to me just now.

I'm just a pawn to them. Not a real human life.

"There are the tears I was waiting for," he grins, letting out a satisfied sigh. "Something about your pain and fear gets me rock hard," he says and grabs his dick to punctuate his point.

“Tiny! Get the fuck out of here and lock the door on your way out. I’ve got some business to take care of.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DIESEL

It's been days now, and still no word on Cassidy. Neither Ghost and his crew nor the Latin Mafia have said a peep. Nobody's come forward, and it's eating me up inside.

I try to keep my shit together at Morgan International, acting like I'm all in, like everything's fine. But the truth is, my head's not here. Every quiet moment, and there are plenty, my mind races back to Cassidy. I keep wondering if she's okay. If she's mad at me. If she knows I'm the reason she's suffering right now.

I catch myself constantly checking the clock, counting the minutes until I can leave. I've never been a clock-watcher, and I hate it.

But I'm just looking to escape my thoughts, even for a little while. So,

instead of going home, I head straight to the clubhouse after work.

I'm not in the mood to talk to anyone, but I can't stand being alone, either. I need to be around my brothers, even though I'm pissed at them for how they've handled this Cassidy thing.

"Rough day?" Trudy leans her hip against the bar, one brow cocked at me.

"That doesn't even come close to describing it," I grunt and accept the shot she pours into a double glass with a half-smile. "Thanks."

"No problem. Wanna talk about it?"

I give her one short shake of my head. "Nope."

She lets out a short huff of laughter and points to a buxom woman with dark hair. "We have some new girls if you want to fuck it out."

"No thanks."

She shrugs. "Too bad. I'll get you another," she offers and makes her way to the end of the bar.

After two more ice-cold shots of tequila, I slow down with another shot and a cold beer, my thoughts still on Cassidy because I'm a glutton for punishment.

"Hiya, Diesel. You look like you could use a good time." Layla presses her tits against my side, her perfume tickling my nose and her thickly lined eyes so close I can smell the beer on her breath. "I have more than a good time to show you," she whispers softly.

A week ago, I would've taken her to the back room, pushed her onto her knees, and got my rocks off, but tonight, I'm not in the mood. "I'm good, thanks."

"Oh, come on. You look like you need to relieve some tension, and you know that's my specialty." Her hand lands on my thigh, sliding up toward my cock.

I grip her wrist to stop her. "I said I'm good."

Heat flares in her eyes, and she licks her lips like she thinks this is a fucking game. "And I can make you *better*."

I look at her, and my annoyance turns to anger. I know it's not her fault Cassidy is missing, and I know I've fucked her a time or two, but now it makes me feel dirty. If a guy like me could ever feel dirty. "Pretty sure last time I saw you I told you to stay the fuck away from me," I growl loud enough that a few sets of eyes shift in our direction, but I don't give a fuck. I push her hand away and glare at her.

She crosses her arms, sticking her tits out. "You won't be saying that next week when your bitch is gone, and your dick is hard. You know where to find me."

I see red at her words, and she's fucking lucky I don't hit women for the simple sin of being a bitch. "Fuck off, Layla, before I have Ace boot your ass the fuck outta here. For good."

She pouts and stomps off. I should feel bad for being such an asshole, but I don't.

I just want to find Cassidy, dammit. Is that so fucking hard?

Someone clasps me on my back, and I know it's one of my brothers without turning around. "Grab your beer and come with me." It's Wild Man's voice, and I grunt over my shoulder at him.

"I'm not in the mood, Wild Man."

He laughs. "Don't give a fuck, brother. Get moving, or I'll drag your ass with me." Instead of staying to make good on his threat, he walks away because he knows I'm too fucking curious not to follow him.

"Another beer, Trudy." I take it when it arrives, pushing off the booth slowly and going down the hall that leads out of the clubhouse, where it looks like half the MC is gathered. Ace, Dix, Coop and Lucky all turn to look at me, and Shades pulls up behind me, squeezing my shoulder.

"My invite must've got lost in the mail."

Wild Man snorts from his spot on the picnic table, his gaze on the tablet.

"What's up?" All of my brothers have serious expressions on their faces, which is either really good news or fucking terrible news. "What?" I bark

louder the second time.

No one says a goddamn thing, but Ace takes the tablet from Wild Man and turns the screen to face me.

“Cassidy.”

I step forward and take the tablet. It’s a bad photo with a big ass flash and she looks stunned. Pale.

“Where’d you get this?” I look up, first at Ace and then Wild Man. Even though she looks dazed and slightly confused, this photo gives me hope. A lot of fucking hope, actually.

“Ghost,” Ace bites out. “This came about an hour ago from Ghost.”

“He has her.” It’s not a question. Hell, it’s not even a surprise. Smart money was always on the fact that he’d picked her up. “When are we going to get her?”

“That fucker is demanding half a million dollars,” Shades growls. “For her *safe* return,” he adds, in a tone that tells me his opinion on the matter.

“It’s bullshit,” I say, my gaze landing on each of my brothers but lingering on Lucky, pleading with him to back me up. “I mean, we all know this ransom bullshit, right? At best, it’s a trap, which means we have to plan. Right?”

Shades sighs, and I turn to face him, holding my breath and clenching my free hand into a fist. “She’s nothing to us,” he begins in a calm, even tone. “Honestly, if you ask me, she’s not worth the risk.”

“Letty wasn’t a part of us either, but we helped her because it was the right thing to do. If we hadn’t, you wouldn’t be fucking her today. Would you?”

He balls his hands into fists, and I stand taller, silently daring him to deny it, to come at me. Instead he keeps his arms relaxed at his side and arches a brow at me. “Are you fucking her?”

“I didn’t say that, and what the fuck does that have to do with anything? The fact remains that they have her and they think she’s worth half a million bucks. We still have a beef with them, so rescuing her is just another chance to get back at them. What’s the downside?”

I ignore the acid churning in my gut at the fucking betrayal, but I know Cassidy needs to be rescued above all else. No telling what those monsters are doing to her.

“Wild Man, did you find anything in this photo?”

“Not yet, but I’m still looking.” He doesn’t look up from his ever-present tablet, and I know he’s a man of his word.

I look to Ace and then Dix. Neither seems like they’re on my side. I get it. I really do. There’s always a risk doing shit like this, but we’ve done it time and time again to save people who had more concrete ties to the club than Cassidy does.

“Okay, fine. You don’t give a shit that Cassidy is innocent and going through hell because of us? How about this: we should accept the offer just to find out where they’re holding her. We all know this is a trap, right?”

Everyone agrees.

“Then we have nothing to lose by negotiating and trying to find her.”

I know my brothers, and there’s no energy for this particular mission, which means I can pout like a fucking baby, or I can be a man and make my point.

“If they hurt Cassidy, who knows nothing about us, they’ll escalate this shit until they grab Kelsey or Letty or even Kenna.”

“Asshole,” Shades grumbles beside me.

“Maybe but look at the bigger picture. Cassidy has probably told them she’s nobody to us, which means next time, they’ll be sure to grab someone they *know* is important to us.”

“Fuck,” Ace growls.

Dix and Coop grunt in unison.

I smirk. Cocky, I know. But right now, I’m not just a player in the game—I’m making the rules.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CASSIDY

Nothing wakes a girl up faster than nearly being drowned in ice-cold water, which is how I'm woken up after my torture session, I mean interrogation. That Ghost is a real fucking asshole. He gets off on inflicting pain.

I sit up straight, gasping as cold water soaks through my clothes. "What. The. Fuck." It's dark for a second before someone rips the black hood from my head.

"Rise and shine, bitch!" A bunch of female laughter sounds, and I look up but can't see anything because two sets of hands grab my arms and drag me from the closet. "You girls see this bitch? Thinks she can try to fuck over Ghost and get away with it."

I'm flat on my back on a hardwood floor, staring up at five girls wearing

head-to-toe red and black. Some have on bandanas, while others wear hats, headbands, or ponytails wrapped in red and black. *Gang colors*, I realize a moment before the first stomp lands on my already broken hand.

“Fuck!” The pain radiates up my arm and settles at the base of my skull, causing my vision to blur around the edges.

“Tell us what you did.”

I’m not sure which of them is speaking, and I don’t really give a shit. I can’t focus on anything but the pain.

“Yeah, bitch,” a foot shoves me back down as I try to sit up, and I let out a low grunt. “Tell us about those stupid fucking bikers.”

“What bikers?” I get to my feet, shoving the pain down as deep as I can, even though it radiates through my entire body. The blood on my missing fingernail started to harden almost immediately, so the pain is less than yesterday, but it still hurts like a motherfucker.

“Wrong answer.” Another heavy boot collides with my back, crushing me to the ground. I wheeze as the air is knocked out of me, and my face hits the cold, hard floor. “What are they planning?” a voice shouts, half hysterical.

My mind races as I try to make sense of the situation. Whatever’s going on between these guys and Diesel’s people has nothing to do with me. “No clue,” I manage to croak out in response.

A woman with a jagged scar across her cheek kneels down in front of me, her dark eyes flashing with anger. She grabs my jaw roughly, forcing my head up to meet her gaze. “Hold this bitch,” she orders her companions.

I struggle against their grasp, but it’s futile. Four girls hold down my arms and legs while two others kneel on either side, their hands tugging at my clothes. Panic sets in as I realize what they’re about to do.

“What the fuck are you doing?” I shout frantically, still trying to break free. Maybe if I can tire them out, I can escape.

In the midst of the chaos, one of the girls loses her grip on my arm, and I take advantage of the opening. With a surge of adrenaline-fueled strength, I grab a

handful of hair from the girl, trying to remove my shirt and yank her back with all my might. The back of her head slams against the floor with a sickening thud, causing everyone to stop momentarily in shock.

“Let. Her. Go.”

“Let me go.” My fingers still clutch her hair even as she struggles, gripping my wrist with one hand and scratching me with the other.

“You have no moves here. Let her go. Now.” The scar-faced bitch towers over me, doing her best to look intimidating. And failing.

She’s right. I have no moves. Not one fucking thing I can do to get myself out of this situation, but I don’t give a shit. I’m not scared of these girls, not after those crazy fucks who paid money to fuck with me, and not after spending a couple hours with Ghost and Tiny. Instead of telling her to fuck off, I say nothing. Instead, I tighten my grip until the girl in my hand cries out.

“Put her down,” Scarface orders them and one by one each of my limbs falls to the floor.

I scramble to my feet quickly, stomping the bitch who tried to take my pants right below her knee. Her cry is so fucking loud it makes my ears ring, but I focus because they all crowd around me, hitting and kicking me. I fight back, but they’re landing more blows than I am, and the pain slows me down.

One of them starts recording. “Smile for the camera bitch.”

“Put your goddamn phone down,” Scarface orders angrily.

While they focus on the girl with the phone, I sucker punch a different one and run toward the door.

With no energy left, they easily grab hold of me and throw me to the ground. I feel something pressed against my side, and then a searing pain rushes through me like fire, making me feel like I’m being cooked alive. The agony is unbearable, but what’s worse is the violent convulsions as the electricity zaps through me.

“What the hell do you *pinche pendejas* think you’re doing?” The taser stops

immediately, and I collapse as a man with a thick Spanish accent scolds them. “I asked a damn question. *Contestame!*”

“We don’t answer to you,” one of them says, and even I know her timing is horrible.

The next sound I hear is a hand connecting to flesh and then a cry of pain. “Where the fuck is Ghost?” he shouts, and that’s when I risk opening my eyes.

It’s him. The guy with the scar on his face. He was with Ghost when they kidnapped me from my truck.

“Probably sleeping,” Scarface girl answers with a huff. “He had a long day yesterday,” she says, her eyes darting to me.

The man with the scar looks down at me with a pissed-off look on his face and shakes his head. “Get up.”

It takes me about a minute, but eventually, I get to my feet and attempt to fix my clothes. They’re in pieces, but I cover myself as best as I can. I move slowly as fuck because I hurt all over and limp toward the door, when a big, masculine hand wraps around my bicep and yanks me back.

“You’re not going anywhere,” he grunts and tosses me back into the dark closet, slamming the door behind him.

I hear him roar at the women just outside the door, “This is fucking business. You *pendejas* fuck that up, and I will kill each and every one of you, no matter what Ghost says. *Entiende?*”

What the fuck is up with all these guys who enjoy killing and hurting other people? Is Diesel like this? Are his biker friends like this?

I shake off those thoughts because it doesn’t matter what Diesel is like. He’s not here, and chances are good I’ll never see him again. This is too bad because I like him—or liked him—more than I like most people. However, given my current situation, I wonder if I need to reconsider that.

I need a way out of here, and I can’t think of one through this fucking pain. I wish I could talk to my dad. He’d come to rescue me. And then another sad

thought crosses my mind.

What if I never see my family again? What if the last time we talked was our last conversation ever?

That thought is depressing as fuck, so I lay on the floor in the closet and think back to my last night with Diesel. If I'm about to die, that's what I want to think about. Not everybody I'm gonna miss when I'm gone.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DIESEL

I suck on a cigarette as if it's a goddamn lifeline, ignoring the singing birds and the blue skies, determined to be pissed at the whole fucking world. A familiar red car turns into the Morgan International parking lot, and a tiny smile tugs at the corners of my mouth. I'm already pissed as hell and ready to fuck some shit up, so I take my time finishing my cigarette while keeping an eye on the assholes in the car.

They watch me carefully, probably confused about why I'm still puffing on a smoke and not calling for my brothers.

I smile a little bigger, take one final puff, and flick the cigarette off to the side before pushing off the building. I stroll toward the car, still smiling. "Can I help you *amigos* with something?"

“Nah, homie. We good.” The driver laughs, and his little buddies join in like he’s the funniest fucker to ever live.

I laugh, too, nodding and looking around like we’re all just having a good time together, not like we’re sworn enemies. Like they don’t have my woman. Okay, she’s not my woman. Hell, I barely know her, but still, I feel responsible for her.

Or something.

They laugh louder and harder, confident because there are four of them and just one of me, and they make a crucial mistake. They let me get close. Too close.

Before they know what’s happening, I have a tight grip on the driver’s hair, and I wrap it around my knuckles. “What the fuck?” I ask and slam his face on the steering wheel, “do you want?” I slam it again, and blood splatters across the dashboard.

“Let him go, *pendejo*.”

“Nah, I’m good,” I say, mocking his earlier words as I pull out my own gun and press it against the driver’s temple. “Stay in the fucking car, or you’ll be wearing his brains.”

“Stay,” he shouts the order over me. “Stay, goddammit.”

I slam his face into the wheel with a sickening crunch. The driver howls defiantly, but his words are drowned out by the sound of my own pounding heart.

“You want a piece of me? Come and fucking get it!” I snarl, daring them to try me. With every ounce of willpower, I resist the temptation to unleash my full wrath upon these fools.

My grip tightens, and I slam his face against the wheel a few more times, relishing the satisfying crunch of bone on metal.

“Now get your sorry ass out of here before I blow your fuckin’ brains out!” Rage courses through me, so strong that I have to fight the urge to kill them all right here and now.

But Lucky would kill me if I did anything illegal on Morgan International property, and then Aria would bring me back to life just to kill me again. So I release the driver and step back, keeping my gun aimed at him just in case these sons of bitches try anything funny.

They peel out of the parking lot so damn fast they leave burning rubber in their wake. Damn cowards.

As soon as they're out of sight, I get on my bike and catch up to them, keeping four cars between us just to make sure they don't spot me. I stay back, taking note of every stop to drop off his friends in the same four or five-block area. When the car turns into the driveway of a big two-story house on a cul-de-sac, I stay even further back because there are no cars, no traffic.

Loud music blares from the house, and lights are on in every window, a sign of a lot of activity. I park my bike behind a row of bushes where I can watch the house.

For almost an hour, I sit there and watch as people come and go. You can spot the Johns right away, and not just because of the women passing by the windows in colorful lingerie. The men paying for pussy stay a while, but the drug dealers—or addicts—only stop for a few minutes at a time, a sure sign they're picking something up.

When the traffic to the house finally dies down, I creep closer, going around the back of the house next door to see if I can get a look inside. There's a room with two guys sitting around a table. They're counting money while another huge dude guards the door. I can't believe these guys have their blinds open. They must feel pretty safe over here.

There's no sign of Cassidy anywhere, dammit. I know she's around here somewhere. She has to be.

I head back to my bike just as the asshole with the fucked up face gets back into the red car.

I know what I have to do, so I text Lucky to let him know what's going down.

Man, I'm about to follow this mofo.

I follow him, this time leaving only two cars between us. I'm not letting this motherfucker out of my sight. Every turn he makes, I make until there are no cars between us. He doesn't notice me behind him when he stops at the curb or when he jogs up the steps to a small cottage between two ranch-style houses.

I'm right on his heels, and I bum-rush him as soon as he unlocks the door, shoving him inside and kicking the door shut. "What the fuck, man? Oh. You."

I smile and pin him against the wall with my forearm across his throat. "Where the fuck is she?"

He grunts and tries for his piece, but I'm bigger and stronger. "Who?" I shove my forearm harder onto his throat, and his eyes go wide.

"Where the fuck is she?" I ask again.

"Don't know who you're talking about," he says with a sneer.

"Fuck this." I pull out my gun and shove it in his mouth. "Tell me where the fuck she is."

"I don't know," he mumbles around the gun.

I knew he'd say that. "I don't believe you."

He shrugs. "Fuck you."

"You're right," I tell him and loosen my grip. He relaxes, and I stand tall again. "Too bad," I say and pull the trigger. The warm spray of blood splashes on my face as his body slumps to the ground.

I kick him off my feet and take a quick look around the house just in case Cassidy is here or has been here.

She's not, dammit.

I leave the house and close the door behind me, freezing when I see Lucky leaning against his bike beside mine.

"How'd you find me?"

“GPS. You good?”

I nod. “Fine.”

“All righty, then.”

We don’t say another word; just get on our bikes and head back to the clubhouse, silently agreeing not to talk about anything that happened inside that cottage.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CASSIDY

I'm so fucking hungry I can barely think straight. It feels like my stomach is eating itself, gnawing away at whatever's left. Over the past few days, I've barely eaten a couple of tacos and a bottle of water. My body aches for something more substantial, but there's nothing. Just this gnawing hunger that's starting to eat away at my sanity.

Then, the hallucinations start. They creep in at the edges of my vision, whispers and shadows that make me doubt my own mind. I see Diesel's smirk, hear his teasing words, but I know he's not really here. He can't be. And my dad, his voice urging me on, telling me to keep fighting, to stay strong. But he's not here either. It's just me, all alone in this hell.

I squeeze my eyes shut, trying to block out the visions, the voices. I tell myself they're not real and can't let them get to me. But it's hard to keep

fighting when I'm not even sure what I'm fighting for anymore. The temptation to succumb to the madness is overwhelming.

A voice penetrates my thoughts, feminine and slightly familiar, but nothing I can pinpoint. I hear a lot of voices across the radio, at warehouses, and truck stops, so it could be anyone. But there's something about this one, a sense of déjà vu.

She's cooing to a man in a cutesy baby talk. "I'm doin' so good, aren't I, baby? They don't even know." She's fishing for compliments, almost desperate for approval.

"Yeah, babe, you did good." That voice belongs to Ghost. "But I need you to keep your eye on the prize, and then we can be together."

"I'll make *Papi* forget all about that traitor bitch. Maggie. *Cabrona*," she says. Then I hear a loud thump. Something, or someone, just hit the floor. Hard.

"Never mention her name again. Got it?" Ghost snaps, and the girl's whimper slices through the air.

As their voices fade, a silence envelops the place. It's a stark contrast to the usual nighttime chaos. The blaring music and party atmosphere is gone, and it dawns on me. It must be daytime. The quiet allows me to pick up on more of what's happening around the house.

As I sit in my dark cell, I hear a lot, even though I have no context for the details. Some guy named Rojas was killed in prison, and these guys think Diesel's motorcycle club had something to do with it, and because of that they are talking about revenge and settling scores.

"That bitch in the closet will help us seal the deal," one of them says in a wicked tone that leaves me cold and shaking.

I press myself closer to the door, straining to hear more. But I'm cautious, careful not to make a sound. They don't know I'm listening, and I need to keep it that way. I want to know what they're planning, even if it won't help me. Even if it's just confirming what I already know—they have no intention of letting me go.

Suddenly, everything changes.

A loud thud, followed by grunts and muffled voices. Gunshots, the unmistakable sound of a silencer in use. My heart races, pounding against my chest like a trapped animal. “Holy shit. Holy shit,” I whisper to myself, pressing my back against the far wall of the closet.

I curl into a ball, burying my face in my knees. “Oh God. Oh God.”

I cover my ears, trying to block out the sounds of violence just beyond the door. But I can’t block out the fear, the knowledge that whatever’s happening out there, it’s not going to end well for me.

The door opens, and I gasp, making myself even smaller until my face is damn near burrowed into my belly. My body starts to rock as my heart pounds, and tears burn my eyeballs. I try to make myself invisible, which is impossible in a closet this small. “No, stop!” I shrink back when a hand lands on my shoulder, tugging me forward. “Let me go!”

“Cassidy, it’s me, Diesel.”

Diesel? My mind reels at the sound of his name. It’s a hallucination; it has to be. Diesel isn’t here. He can’t be. This is just another trick of my mind, a cruel illusion produced by my desperation.

“Cassidy,” Diesel insists, his voice sounds real. But I won’t let myself believe it. The warmth of his arms around me, the deep rumble of his voice—it’s too much. I shrink into myself, telling myself it’s just my mind playing tricks on me.

“He’s not here. This isn’t real,” I whisper, my voice barely there. I feel like I’m floating, detached from everything.

But Diesel is right here, his presence undeniable. “I’m here, Cass,” he says, his voice a lifeline in the chaos of my mind. “I know you didn’t expect me, but I’m here. You’re safe now.” He lifts me into his arms, and I feel the light against my closed eyelids, a stark contrast to the darkness of the closet.

But I can’t open my eyes. I don’t want to see the aftermath, the carnage they caused to rescue me.

“Cassidy, talk to me,” Diesel urges, his voice filled with concern and something else—something like hope.

I shake my head, burying my face against his neck. “No, it’s not real,” I mumble. “Can’t be real.”

“You’re safe,” Diesel whispers. “I’m here, Cassidy. I’m real.” As if his words alone could banish the horrors of this nightmare.

But I keep my eyes shut, letting my mind drift off to a better place, a memory of that motel room with Diesel. Just us. No worries. No pain. No fear.

CHAPTER TWENTY

DIESEL

The moment I see Cassidy, relief pulses through me. Seeing her terrified, curled into a ball, makes my heart clench and ache. I scoop her in my arms, and she's shaking like a leaf, obviously traumatized.

She's more vulnerable than I've ever seen her, and I don't know what the fuck to do what that.

"You're not real," she mumbles against my neck. "This isn't real."

"I'm real, sweetheart. I'm here, and you're safe." I press a kiss to the top of her head as I carry her from the house, shielding her from the dead bodies and the blood dripping down the walls. She shivers in my arms, and I hold her even tighter. "You're safe," I whisper again, hoping she'll eventually believe me.

“Diesel?” She blinks and looks up at me.

She’s shivering, her clothes are torn, and she’s so weak a stiff breeze will knock her over.

“We’re going home,” I tell her, carrying her to the van at the end of the block and setting her on the seat. “You’re all right, Cass. I promise.” It’s a promise I hope like hell I can keep, but the truth is that this version of Cassidy, vulnerable and weak, is fucking with my mind.

The drive back to the clubhouse is mostly silent, aside from the sound of Cassidy sniffing and her teeth chattering. I don’t stop once we arrive at the clubhouse, carrying her back to my old room and putting her on the bed.

I stare at the broken woman before me with my hands balled into tight fists. Her arms are wrapped around her legs as she rocks back and forth gently, her teeth chattering as slow, gasping sobs escape her lush mouth. I don’t know what the fuck to do about this. I don’t know how to respond to this version of her.

“Cassidy, talk to me.”

Her eyes meet mine, but she looks at me as if she can’t see me, as if she doesn’t fucking know me. It pisses me off what they’ve done to her.

I should have found her sooner. She was at risk because of me, and they broke her. It’s all my fucking fault.

“I’m so fucking sorry, Cass.” I sit beside her on the bed and wrap my arms around her. “I looked everywhere for you. I swear I did.” I just hope that, eventually, she forgives me for all of it.

One hour passes and then another, and Cassidy still hasn’t spoken a word. She’s hardly moved from the spot in the center of the full-size bed, other than gently rocking herself in a self-soothing manner. “You’re not real,” she whispers.

“I’m real, and I have to do something really quick. Stay here. I’ll be right back,” I tell her and rush from the room, closing the door behind me because I don’t want her to wander out in her vulnerable state, and I don’t want her to hear what I have to say to my brothers.

“Diesel, how’s your girl?”

I glare at Dix, staring around the room until I find Ace.

“She can’t stay here. She’s too fucking traumatized, and she’s not gonna get better sitting in that small room alone all day.” I didn’t know what I would say until the words tumble from my mouth, but once they’re out, I know I’m right.

“Fuck that,” Shades argues. “We need her to stay here. Or better yet, send her back wherever she came from.”

I glare at this man who is my friend, my brother. This man who’s supposed to have my back. “What the fuck is your problem? She didn’t do shit to deserve this, you asshole. We owe her better than this. Whether we want to believe it or not, she’s in this position because of us.”

“Because of you, don’t you mean?”

I ignore Shades. I don’t know why he’s being an asshole, and right now, I really don’t give a shit. “I’m taking her to my place. She needs to be comfortable, and she needs to feel safe if she’s going to get through this and get back on the road.”

“If she does,” Preacher offers with a sympathetic smile.

I nod even though I don’t even want to think about the possibility that she might not return to her normal self. “Yeah, that.”

Tank drops a hand on my shoulder, his gaze full of sympathy. “Let’s have Sophie check her out first, make sure she’s okay physically.”

I nod. “Can she come to the room, or do I need to take Cass to her?”

Tank smiles. “I’ll have her meet you there in a few minutes.”

“Thanks, brother.” I go back to Cassidy, who is, no surprise, still holding herself in a tiny ball while she rocks back and forth. “Cass, Sophie is a really good nurse and she’s going to check you out, and then we’re going home.”

Nothing. She gives me nothing. Fuck, it’s less than nothing, and I sigh, raking a hand through my hair.

“You’re not here,” she mumbles. “You’re not real.”

I bite back the angry words on the tip of my tongue and sit beside her, wrapping an arm around her to reassure myself that she’s here and she’s safe. She doesn’t pull away from me, and I take that as a win.

For now.

A light knock sounds on the door and I let Sophie in to examine Cassidy, then give them some privacy.

What seems like forever passes and finally, Sophie steps outside the room with a worried expression.

“How is she?” My heart races, and bile rises in my throat. “Is she going to be okay?”

“Yes and no,” Sophie sighs. Her big dark eyes are full of sympathy and what looks like anger. “She’s been through a lot.”

I nod, scrubbing a hand over my face as my mind flashes to the few details I allowed myself to take in when we rescued her. “The bruises?”

“Yeah, the bruises. The fractured ribs. The boot-shaped marks. The split lip.” Sophie looks away and lays a hand on her shoulder.

“Tell me.”

Sophie wraps her arm around her waist and then covers her mouth. “One of her fingernails is missing, and she has several broken bones in her left hand. She’s been tortured, Diesel.”

“Fuck,” I bite out and drop my face into my hands. “Tortured?”

Sophie nods. “Beaten repeatedly. The nail was pulled out cleanly. It’s...not good. It’ll take a long time to heal physically and even longer before her mind is healed. If it ever is.”

That’s the last thing I want to hear. “Should I take her to a hospital?”

“No. I wrapped her hand, put some balm on her bruises, and I have some painkillers for her. I’m just warning you what you’re up against.”

“Yeah, I got it. Thanks, Sophie.”

She nods and wraps her arms tighter around her midsection. “I’m here for whatever you need, Diesel. Both of you.”

I settle Cassidy on my bike, even though I’m not sure it’s the best way to get her to my place. I need to feel her arms around me, to have her close to me, so I have to try. She’s dressed now in jeans and a t-shirt that Kenna brought for her, but she’s not talking other than to assure herself that none of this is real.

“Okay, Cass, I need you to hang on to me until we get home. Do you think you can do that?”

She nods, but her gaze is fuzzy, and I’m not sure she can hear or understand me.

“Good girl.” I fasten the helmet on her head and latch the chin strap before I awkwardly maneuver onto my seat in front of her, wrapping her arms around my waist. “Hang on tight, yeah?”

She says nothing, but her grip tightens, and I smile. My bike roars to life and Cassidy’s grip tightens as if she’s hanging on for dear life. Then her cheek rests on my back, nearly unraveling my resolve.

Weaving through the city, I plan my revenge on the Bloodthirsty Devils and the Latin Mafia, knowing that the deaths left in my wake are nothing compared to what I have planned for the rest of those motherfuckers. Oh no, they will pay. For every fucking day it takes Cassidy to find herself, I will make them pay.

In blood.

By the time we arrive at my condo, I’m a ball of anger and nerves that I try to settle as I kill the engine and slide off to face Cassidy. She sits there on my bike like a damn zombie, so I have to remove her helmet and help her from the bike before I guide her into the elevator and my front door.

We step inside together, but she doesn’t look around the way she would have a week or two ago. Instead, she keeps her gaze on the floor as I guide her inside, giving her a quick tour that she ignores.

“You’re safe here, Cass. I swear.”

She squeezes my hand, and it’s the only sign that she’s still in there. I take it as a win and show her to the bedroom and the attached bathroom.

“How about a shower?” I ask, knowing she won’t answer.

When she doesn’t, I strip her out of her clothes and help her into the shower, giving her a quick soap and rinse while trying my damndest not to appreciate her curves and muscles, her perfect tits. I move quickly to preserve my own sanity and dress her in one of my t-shirts that falls to her knees before taking her back to the living room so we can talk.

“I’m so fucking sorry, Cassidy, for everything you went through because of me. I promise I’ll make every last one of those assholes pay for whatever they did to you. We don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to. But if you do, I’m all ears,” I assure her with a heavy sigh.

A small sob escapes when I wrap an arm around her and tug her against my chest. She doesn’t return the hug, but she doesn’t fight it either, and I accept that for the victory that it is.

“Whatever you need, Cassidy. I’m here.”

She keeps silent, but her hand curls into the fabric of my t-shirt as if it’s the only thing keeping her grounded.

“I’m here,” I say again. I don’t know how long we sit here wrapped up in each other, but I let her take all the time she needs until her breathing evens out and she falls asleep against my chest.

I lift her in my arms and put her to bed, then curl around her, vowing to keep her safe, no matter what.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

CASSIDY

I'm flailing, trapped in a room with no way out. It's so close and suffocating, the walls closing in, and absolutely terrifying. "No! Stop!" I scream, my voice raw with fear. "Leave me alone!"

Suddenly, a voice, deep and familiar, cuts through the chaos of my dream.

"Cassidy." It's Diesel. His strong arms wrap around me, stopping my frantic movements. He pulls me tight against his chest, the steady thump of his heartbeat against my ear. "You're okay, Cass. It's me, Diesel. You're safe at my house. You're all right."

For a moment, I can't differentiate reality from the nightmare. My body trembles, and a wave of relief mixed with doubt washes over me.

"Diesel?" I whisper, my voice shaky. Is he here, or is this just another trick of

my mind?

“Yeah, babe, it’s me.” He pushes a lock of hair off my face, kissing the side of my forehead. “You’re safe now, Cassidy. I promise.”

I don’t say anything, but I let my body go lax against his, soaking up his warmth and his strength, allowing myself to believe—just for a second—that all is right in the world, even though it couldn’t possibly be. Hot, fat tears roll down my cheeks, and no matter what I do, they refuse to stop falling.

“I’m so fucking sorry, Cassidy. I should have found you sooner,” he says.

Found me sooner? I open my mouth to tell him that I didn’t think he would come at all, but nothing comes out. My voice refuses to work. I can’t push words past my lips, so I snap my mouth closed once again.

“Fuck, you must hate me.” The pain in his voice is evident. “Hate me if you need to, but I’ll make sure you’re safe now. Make sure the smart-ass chick that I met comes back to me.” He chuckles. “She’ll probably slap the shit out of me, but you know what? I’m here for it.”

I’m so fucking angry I could spit at the whole world for what those fuckers did to me. I’m so angry that I just want to scream, but I can’t because I don’t have the energy.

Diesel keeps talking. “I was so fucking scared when I found out you’d been kidnapped. We went to your rig and looked at the cameras inside, but still, it took too fucking long to find you.”

I lay my hand on top of his to comfort him because the truth is that I never expected him or his MC to save me. The fact that Diesel feels responsible makes me more confused than ever.

“I hope you know that I did everything I could to find you. I went after that fuck you put in the hospital. Good job, by the way, but he didn’t know shit. I tracked the Bloodthirsty Devils to their brothels, stash houses, and flop houses to find you. I just wish it hadn’t taken so fucking long.”

It’s okay, I want to tell him, but I can’t push the words past my lips. He doesn’t deserve to carry this burden when he doesn’t owe me anything. I’m so grateful they came for me at all and rescued me when I thought death was

certain.

I want to ask him why he looked for me. Why did he come for me?

Why me?

But I can't, so I don't. I lay against his chest, breathing slowly and watching the dark shadows play on the wall, wondering where do I go from here.

I need to get through this.

Shit, can I even get back in my truck after everything that's happened?

"I'm going to make those fuckers pay for every bruise. I want you to know that. I'm going to make them hurt. Fuck that, I'm going to make them bleed."

His promise is dark and tantalizing, and a small smile touches my lips before I turn and snuggle against his chest.

As I close my eyes, I wonder how far down I'll go before the darkness swallows me whole?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

DIESEL

I take a deep breath and step inside my condo, not sure if I'll find something different than the past two days.

Cassidy hasn't left my bed for three straight days. Under any other circumstances, I wouldn't have a problem with it, but she's not in my bed to seduce me. She's there because she's traumatized as fuck. So far, I haven't been able to get through to her. Nothing I say has brought back the strong, sassy woman who gave me attitude within five seconds of meeting me.

Instead of being curled up in bed, she's in the living room on the sofa with the television on, even though she's not looking at the screen.

"Hey," I say tentatively because I don't want to scare her. She's been scared enough, dammit.

Cass looks up as if she didn't hear me come in, her gaze nothing more than a blank fucking stare as if she's looking right through me.

"Hi," she says in a bland tone before absently reaching for the remote to turn off the TV.

"How are you feeling today?" God, when did conversation become so stilted and difficult? We texted almost nonstop from the moment she left Angel Harbor, and now I have no fucking clue what to say to her.

She answers me with a shrug.

Okay. "Do you want to go for a walk or a ride? Get some fresh air, maybe?"

She meets my eyes—finally—and the pain and fear swirling in hers is like a kick to the chest. "I'm good."

"Okay, well, do you want to talk? About anything specific or nothing at all?"

"No." The word is barely above a whisper.

I sigh and restrain my frustration because I'm not mad at Cassidy, and I don't want her to think I am. Honestly, I'm not sure I know how to deal with her. I just want to give her what she needs if I ever figure out what that is.

"Okay. If you change your mind, let me know."

She nods, and her gaze lingers on me. It's not much, but I take it as an opening, and I go to her. I sit on the sofa beside her with my cell phone in my hand.

"Diesel."

"You should call your parents," I tell her and hold out my phone to her. "They're probably worried as fuck about you. I know I was, and they're your parents."

Cass eyes the phone like it's a rabid dog about to jump up and bite her before she drops it on the sofa between us.

"I can't." It's the first sign of life she's shown since I brought her home, and fuck, but it makes me feel hopeful.

“Sure, you can. From everything you’ve told me, you have a good relationship with them.”

Her eyes go wide, and she looks at me in surprise. “You...never mind.” She shakes her head again. “I can’t. They’ll hear my voice and know something is wrong.”

I risk touching her outside our usual nighttime cuddling, placing my hand on her back. “Maybe hearing them will make you feel better, Cass. Something did happen, you know.”

Her gaze is angry when she looks up at me. “Yeah, I’m aware of that. I was there.”

I smile. “Believe me, I know. I was looking for you, and I’m so fucking happy that I found you.” I risk more touching, but I need...fuck that. I *want* to be closer to her. I press my forehead against hers. “I’m so fucking sorry I didn’t find you sooner.”

She lets out a shaky sigh, but she doesn’t pull away. “Stop apologizing.”

I bite back a smile. “Stop telling me what to do.”

Her smile appears before quickly disappearing. “Thank you for coming. I wasn’t sure if you would.”

“As soon as I saw the footage of what happened to you, I started looking for you.”

“Footage?” Her brows dip into a frown mixed with confusion.

I nod. “From inside your truck.” One lone tear slides down her cheek, and I don’t know what the fuck to do. “Once the shipment didn’t make it, I knew something must have happened to you.”

“Diesel.” My name is a whisper on her lips, and that whisper contains so many fucking emotions that I can’t stand it. My heart aches for her, so I resist the urge to kiss her because she’s not ready.

“I’m so fucking sorry, Cass.”

“Stop!” The word flies out of her mouth with more emotion, more force, and

hell, more volume than the past few days. “Stop apologizing. It wasn’t your fault, okay? It was those assholes who did this to me. All of it. Not you.” The last two words are little more than a wisp of breath. She pulls back, frowning at me. “Why are you smiling?”

“Because that old spark is finally coming back, and I was worried it might be gone forever.”

Her shoulders sag, and I don’t know if it’s relief or grief, but I pull her in for a hug, squeezing her tight. I pull back and place the phone in her hand. “If you don’t want to call, just text your folks and let them know you’re okay.” I press a kiss to her forehead and give her a minute alone to reach out to her parents.

“Diesel,” she says, her voice quiet but with a little more life. “I texted them. Thanks. They were worried, but now they think I’m finally being reckless and taking up with a man.”

A smile crosses my face, and I turn to her. “Get dressed. We’re going out.”

Cassidy’s eyes go wide and she’s shaking her head. “Oh no, I didn’t mean —”

I take a step forward, but the old Cassidy is there, standing her ground. She doesn’t back down. I take another step forward, testing her, and she notches her chin up a little higher.

“You can either get dressed, or I’ll dress you. Either way, we’re leaving this house in fifteen minutes, Cass.”

Twenty minutes later, Cassidy is pressed against my back, her arms tight around my waist as we leave the streets of Angel Harbor behind and jump on the freeway. I could take the side streets, but I have a feeling I’m not the only one who could use a little bit of speed and the open road. I squeeze the gas, weaving through the congested traffic common day and night in SoCal, letting the warm air hit my skin.

As we continue on Mulholland, Cassidy’s body relaxes against mine. The fresh air and scenic views are just what we need after a long day. I pull the bike over as the road becomes too dangerous to ride, but not before getting as close as possible to our destination.

“We just have a couple of miles left,” I tell her, pointing to the iconic Hollywood sign ahead. “Feel like a hike?”

Her eyes light up with amusement. “The Hollywood Sign? Isn’t it illegal to be here?”

I shrug nonchalantly. “I’m an outlaw, babe.”

“I thought you were going to take me to some dive bar.”

“Nah. Figured you’ve had enough of being stuck with strangers,” I say.

“Thanks, Diesel,” she whispers with a hint of sadness in her voice. I can tell she’s thinking back to those days trapped in that hellhole.

I lead the way to the trail, trying to shake off the heavy atmosphere. “Let’s get a better view from up top. Sound good?”

She follows reluctantly, saying, “Sure. I think.”

Finally reaching the peak, we take in the breathtaking sight of the city below us. The last light of day adds a golden touch to the skyline. “Never thought it’d look this good from here,” Cassidy says with wonder in her eyes.

I look down at the city. “Everything looks better when you’re not stuck in the middle of it.”

She nods while still gazing at the mesmerizing view. “Not too shabby,” she admits. “Thanks for getting me out of the house, Diesel.”

I wrap my arm around her, relishing the moment as the city transforms below us. “Anytime, Cassidy. I’ll do anything you need.”

She stays close and leans in, giving me a subtle signal. I press a kiss on her forehead and let the moment linger. Down below, the city’s all lit up, but here, it’s just Cassidy and me, and nothing can beat that.

The night’s still young, and who knows what the rest of it will bring.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CASSIDY

The image of myself curled up in the corner, exposed and vulnerable, is burned into my mind. I try to shake it off, but even in a deep sleep, I know it's not just a dream. This is a nightmare that I am destined to relive over and over again.

It's a never-ending cycle that plays out every time I close my eyes and try to find some relief in sleep.

But this time, as I watch from above, I see myself differently. Instead of fighting back with all the strength and determination I possess, I see myself shrinking, cowering like a wounded animal.

My screams and kicks are futile against their overwhelming strength and numbers. Each of their blows lands with agonizing force, leaving bruises and

cuts on my already battered body.

And finally, staring up at the last man with his familiar white-blond hair that matches his soulless eyes, I know what's coming next.

Ghost's large hands wrap around my throat like a vise, and I see the sickening joy ignite in his eyes as he slowly chokes the life out of me. I can feel his sickness seeping into my veins. I'm appalled by his sheer delight in causing pain and suffering. With each passing moment, the edges of my vision grow darker until he takes my last breath away.

I jackknife into a sitting position, heaving out harsh breaths and sucking down oxygen. Sweat trickles down my face and spine, and fuzzy colors blur my vision.

“Fuck,” I grunt out, frustrated and angry and embarrassed. So fucking embarrassed. I don't want Diesel to see me like this. I hate the sympathy that looks a lot like pity in his eyes. I want to be the strong woman I was when we met.

Not this heaping mess of a woman that he had to rescue.

He wraps his big arms around me. “Cassidy, babe. It's all right,” he whispers in my ear and pulls me against his chest. “You're safe. I'm here.”

I hate myself for how good his touch feels, hate that there's nowhere else I want to be these days other than in his arms, with my face or my back pressed against his chest. It's the only time I feel safe, normal. I breathe in and out slowly, deeply. Cleansing breaths that calm my racing heart.

I don't know how long we sit here in the middle of his bed in complete silence, nothing but the crickets outside as our soundtrack, but eventually Diesel speaks. “Want to talk about it?”

I shake my head immediately. That's the last thing I want.

“You can talk to me about anything, Cass. I promise.”

I nod and turn to face him, even though just a few beams of moonlight illuminate the bedroom. I can see his eyes, intense and dark, his beautiful mouth set into a grim line.

“It’s not about sharing or not sharing, Diesel. I just...fuck, I don’t want to think about it. I’m not sure that I even do remember it because the dreams aren’t...” I shake my head to toss off the last memories of the most recent nightmare. “I don’t want to remember. I want to forget.”

Suddenly, forgetting is all I want to do. I don’t want to think about where I’ve been or what happened to me, not when my gaze is fully focused on Diesel and his sexy, plump lips. I lean in, pressing my lips to his in a harsh, clumsy kiss at first while I wait for him to accept or reject my silent offer.

Eventually, his lips relax, and I take over the kiss, devouring his mouth, the taste of whiskey on his tongue, swallowing down the sensual moans he lets out. One hand grips the back of my head, and the other grabs my ass, pulling me onto his lap where I can feel him, long and thick and hard against my cotton panties.

“Fuck,” he growls as he tears his mouth from mine. “Be sure, Cassidy. I want you so fucking bad, but I need you to be sure.”

My heart screeches to a halt before it kicks up triple-time at his words, the desperate tone in them. I pull back just enough to let him see the heat and desire in my eyes. I want him to know how much I want him. “I’m not sure of any fucking-thing these days, Diesel. But wanting you is the one thing I am sure about. I want this. I need this. With you.”

His gaze is hot as it rakes over my skin, hot like coals. Then his mouth crashes down on mine in a fiery kiss that steals my breath, hell it steals every single thought I have that’s not about this man. His tongue plays with mine, dancing and massaging before nipping at my bottom lip.

“Mmm,” I moan into his mouth, gripping his hair with both hands so I can position him exactly how I want him, laying a claim I didn’t have a right to on his mouth. This man, in this moment, is my safe space, and I want to revel in it. I pull back, breathless and wild, nipping my way across his lips and licking down the strong column of his neck.

“You taste good,” I whisper as I kiss my way to his ear, nibbling on his earlobe. “So good.”

He’s in nothing but a pair of boxer briefs, and I scramble off his lap, suddenly

in the mood to taste every inch of his hot fucking body. Diesel is built like a man, solid with muscles upon muscles. I start at his pecs and work my way down to his abs, spending a long time on that panty-melting six-pack.

I keep moving down, a frantic woman on a mission to the trail of hair that disappears into his underwear, tugging them down as I kiss and lick every inch of him.

“Fuck,” he moans, and his hips buck off the bed when I drag my tongue along the underside of his cock and down to his balls before I kiss and lick his strong, muscular legs. “Cassidy.”

I love how my name sounds on his lips, all guttural and gritty like I make him crazy too. Goosebumps skitter over my skin when his hands move to my head. His fingers sift through my hair as if he just *has* to touch me while I’m pleasing him.

“Cassidy,” he growls. “Don’t tease me. Not now.”

My pussy clenches at his words, and I kiss my way back up to his beautiful cock, long and thick and so hard my mouth waters. My eyes meet his as I wrap one hand around his cock, ignoring the pain in my other hand because I’m so desperate to feel good and normal, while my tongue flicks over the bead of liquid at the slit of his cock. “Mmm,” I moan and wrap my lips around the tip, sliding my lips slowly down his length.

“Fuck. Yeah.” His head falls back against the pillow, but his hands continue to hold me and play with my hair. “Cassidy.”

I take him deeper and deeper, fully in control, and that thought makes me feel better, gives me a confidence boost. That sense of control and power is flowing through me as I take him to the back of my throat and moan.

“Fucking shit, Cassidy!”

I smile and suck him off in long, slow strokes, taking him as deep as I can. His balls pull up tight, and I know he’s close. So, I keep going, increasing my speed and intensity until my eyes close, and I lose myself in the deep, masculine sounds of pleasure that echo against the walls.

“Fuck, woman!”

My eyes fly open when he grips my hair right, crashing right into his dark, seductive gaze. “Yes,” I ask innocently.

“Up here. Now.”

I shiver at his commanding tone so at odds with the playful, laidback guy he is usually. I slip off my panties and crawl up his body, straddling his hips, dragging my wet pussy along his hard length. “So hard,” I moan as I move back and forth, the hard ridge of his cock applying just the right amount of pleasure to my clit.

Diesel’s hands move to my hips, pulling me back and forth along his cock, the pressure against my clit so much I explode within minutes. “So fucking beautiful,” he growls. “So fucking hot, Cass.”

I smile and shiver once more. “That was fast.”

“Hot,” he says again. “I can feel your juices coating my cock. Ride my cock, Cassidy.”

The second I slide down and his cock fills me up completely, I grind like a mad woman. I want him. I need him. I ride his cock like it’s my job like I grew up sitting on top of a horse like I knew how to country line dance. “Diesel.” I say his name in a warning as another wave of pleasure tears through my body.

His fingertips sink into my flesh, holding me while his hips pump up so deep my vision blurs. “Ah, fuck, Cassidy. I can feel your pussy clenching around me. Such a greedy cunt.”

My hips move faster at his dirty words, and smaller but still intense aftershocks pulse through my body, gripping his cock possessively. “Diesel,” I moan again as another wave crawls up my spine and explodes out of me.

“Let go. Come all over my cock like I know you can.”

His words go straight to my clit while his thick cock gets harder inside of me. The last burst rips my chest apart, and pleasure takes over. I tremble and shake, convulse violently as a rush of liquid coats us both. My hips keep moving, hoping for one last aftershock, one last shiver.

“Oh fuck, babe,” he roars. His hips shoot up, and his cock pumps into me, filling me up until all I can do is collapse on top of him.

After a few minutes of trying to come back down to earth, he says, “Fuck, Cassidy. That was...I don’t think I’ve ever come that hard.”

A smile spreads across my face as I hear the rapid thumping of his heart beneath my ear. “It was pretty intense,” I say, trying to downplay how much he affects me.

It’s more than just physical exertion or the rush of pleasure. It’s Diesel. He’s been so caring, helpful, and kind that I feel drawn to him.

I like him. A lot. But deep down, I know that it’s probably just the situation combined with amazing sex.

Or maybe it’s something more.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

DIESEL

The early morning sun sneaks through the blinds, throwing stripes of light across the kitchen. Cassidy's standing at the stove with a wooden spoon in hand. It's a domestic scene that would be ordinary if not for her attire—or lack of it.

She's in a black tank top and tiny panties, and damn, it's a sight that's hard to ignore. But it's not just the allure that catches me; it's the bruises painting her skin, a harsh reminder of the hell she's been through. It stirs a mix of anger and protectiveness in me, seeing her so vulnerable yet trying to find some normalcy.

“Cassidy,” I say, my voice edged with a rawness I can barely keep in check. I'm teetering on a razor's edge of fury, wanting to track down every last one of those bastards who hurt her.

She turns slightly, giving me a look that's a mixture of defiance and pain. "I don't need to cook, I know. But I want to," she says with a half-hearted laugh. Her attempt to keep things light doesn't quite mask the shadow in her eyes. "You've at least earned these basic scrambled eggs after everything you've done for me."

I can't help but crack a smile at her attempt to joke. "Just basic eggs?" I step closer, trying to inject a bit of lightness into the moment. "Looks like I've got more work to do to earn the gourmet stuff then."

Her laughter, more genuine this time, fills the room, softening the edges of my anger. It's a reminder of why I'm here, why I did what I did. "Yeah, breakfast is on me," she continues, her smile reaching her eyes this time as I lift her onto the counter beside the stove. "But don't expect a feast. I'm a one-trick pony with these scrambled eggs."

"Too late to make changes," I growl and lean in to kiss her neck, loving the way she can't control her reaction to me. "I'll earn gourmet fucking eggs."

Her next few words come out with a breathy moan. "You earned Michelin five star eggs, but I can't make 'em. Feel free to earn away, though." She gasps when my fingers hook inside her panties, brushing over her pussy lips. "You wicked biker," she whispers in my ear, bucking her hips forward when I slide a finger deep.

The doorbell rings, and we let out simultaneous groans. "I'll kill whoever it is."

Cassidy laughs. "It might be important."

"I don't give a fuck," I growl as the bell rings again, multiple times in a row. "Yep. Death." She laughs again, but it dies on her lips when my finger slips from her pussy and goes right between my lips.

"Death is too good for whoever it is," she says, eyes glazed over with lust.

"See? I knew we were on the same page." The smile I'm wearing grows at the taste of Cassidy on my tongue, but it fades when I open the door and find Wild Man on my doorstep. "What's wrong?"

"I need to talk to your girl," he said, brushing past me and heading straight

for the kitchen. “It’s important.”

The hint of a smile that had been curling her lips dies quickly at the sight of Wild Man. Her skin pales, and the plate of toast tips over onto the floor. “What is it?”

Wild Man stills, taking a look at Cassidy with a frown. “Oh shit. I’m interrupting. I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” she assures him, bending down to pick up the toast.

That’s Cassidy. Unflappable. And coming back to normal, slowly but surely.

“I’ll, uhm, leave you two guys to talk biker stuff. Or whatever.”

Wild Man slides directly in front of her. “I actually need to talk to you. Please?”

Her gaze shoots from him to me and back before she nods and sits at the opposite end of the table. I rush to the bathroom and grab the robe on the back of the door.

“Okay. What about? I don’t know anything about those guys other than the few bits I heard from the closet.” She closes her eyes and shivers as just mentioning that fucking shithole takes her right back there.

“I saw the video from inside your truck, so I have a good idea who took you, but it would help if you could confirm it.”

She takes the robe and wraps it around her. “You want me to describe them or something because I can’t really draw for shit.”

Wild Man’s lips curl into a reluctant smile. “No, I just want you to look at some pictures and tell me if you’ve seen any of these people.”

“Okay.” She shrugs, stiffening when Wild Man shifts to a chair closer to her, turning his tablet screen in her direction. She glues her gaze to the screen, shaking her head at every unfamiliar face. Then, she points to the screen. “Him, with the white hair, he took me. He’s also the one who,” she lifts her hand to show off her wrapped hand.

She points out Olivera and Tiny. “The fat guy did the hand and the nail,” she

says softly. Cassidy looks at me and asks, “Do you know what happened to the guy I shot?”

Wild Man’s expression goes soft. “Nope.”

I’m relieved he doesn’t tell her what I did at the hospital. “Serves that fucker right,” Wild Man grunts, shaking his head.

The fact that she cares about that fucker’s well-being is proof she’s too good for the likes of me, but dammit, I like her. I like fucking her. I like being around her. I even like talking to her.

“That’s good, I guess.” She looks down at the eggs I put in front of her. “They, well, the guy called Ghost, asked a lot of questions about you. I didn’t know anything, and that’s why he got mad and did this.”

“Fuck!” I smack the table and push away, getting up and storming out because I can’t hear anymore. All of it is making me fucking sick to my stomach.

“Diesel,” she calls out in a hesitant voice. “Come back. Please. I need to know what all of this is about.”

Her tone instantly stops my pacing in the living room. It’s full of anguish and desperation, so I reluctantly return to the kitchen. “Sorry,” I say because this isn’t about me, it’s about Cassidy and all the shit she’s been through. Because of me. “What do you want to know?”

“Everything.” That one word rushes out with a heavy sigh. “Tell me everything you can about who did this. And why.”

The why hangs heavy in the air, and my gaze smacks right into Wild Man. He’s been in the MC a hell of a lot longer than me, and he’s probably had to do this even before Maven became his Old Lady. He gives an imperceptible nod and I sigh again, sitting beside Cassidy.

“Okay. We have a problem, an *ongoing* problem with a local gang, The Bloodthirsty Devils, and now, a new problem with the Latin Mafia. Both clubs are violent, and they don’t have a problem going after people close to their enemies.”

“And worse,” Wild Man adds with a grim expression. “The Latin Mafia have cartel ties.”

Cassidy gasps, and her face goes pale. “The cartel as in *the cartel*?”

“Yeah, Cassidy. But the cartel hasn’t been involved in this. Yet.” I put my hand on top of hers. “This is just between us and them, but *us* also means those close to us.”

She frowns. “But, no offense, we’re not close. Not really, and when I left Angel Harbor, I had no definitive plans to return.”

“I know, but I’m guessing they saw us together, maybe accidentally, or maybe they were following us. I’ve been trying to figure it out since I realized you’d been kidnapped.”

“Stop beating yourself up,” she says with a bit more steel in her voice.

“They likely saw you with Diesel and figured you were his Old Lady.”

“Yeah, okay. That makes sense. But what doesn’t make sense is how they connected me to my truck. When I was out with Diesel, we were on his bike, and my truck never left Morgan International until *I* left.”

“Shit, that’s a good point.” Wild Man says exactly what I’m thinking. His eyes meet mine, and we’re both thinking the same thing. *How the fuck did they know?*

“It’s not like we were zooming around the city in her eighteen-wheeler. Fuck, how did they find you?”

Cassidy’s shoulders rise and fall in a shrug. “They must have been following me because it was them, not the police, pulling me over.”

Wild Man’s energy changes, and he grabs the laptop, closing it while he gets up. “I’m going to see if I can track them by tracking you. I have your black box and your dashcam, plus the hard drive with your internal cameras. I’ll see what I can come up with. I just needed to know for sure it was Ghost and Olivera who grabbed you.” He looks at me with a serious expression.

“I’ll keep her safe,” I say instead of answering his unspoken question. I’m not sure what I’m doing or feeling when it comes to Cassidy, but I am sure that

I'll keep her safe. And get revenge on her behalf.

"Shouldn't we go to the police?" Her question is cute. Adorable really.

We both laugh, but it's Wild Man who answers. "No, Cassidy, we're not going to the police. We're taking care of this shit on our own." His tone is blunt and unyielding. "Are you planning on going to the police?" It's a fair question, and thankfully, Cassidy isn't offended.

"Not if you aren't," She scoffs, shaking her head. "If you're confident you can handle it, I think I'd prefer your method of justice."

Wild Man grins. "Good answer. I'll check in with you guys later."

With her answer, I'm sure as fuck about one thing. Cassidy is the perfect woman for me. She has attitude for days, and with each passing day, more of her spark returns. The sex is hot as fuck, and it's only getting hotter. Most of all, she understands the MC life in a way that a lot of women don't.

Or won't.

I walk Wild Man to the door, and he flashes a knowing grin before leaving. As I head back to the kitchen, I know without a doubt that I want her.

But what I don't know yet is how to get her to *want* to stay with me.

That's a whole 'nother problem.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

CASSIDY

It's been a week since I attacked Diesel in his bed, fucking him until we both pass out from orgasmic exhaustion, and I'm starting to feel normal again. I want to think it's nightly sex fests that are allowing me to sleep through the night, but I have a sneaking suspicion that it's more than the big dick and the great sex.

It just might be the man himself.

I can't deny that being in his arms, having his dick buried deep inside of me, his dirty words, and the way he holds me after an orgasm are all helping.

The nightmares still occur, but I'm exhausted enough to sleep through them. When I do wake up, it's Diesel who's here, soothing me and holding me until I drift back to sleep again. It's nice. Scary nice. I don't know if anyone but

my parents have ever taken such good care of me, and the small, kind gestures are getting to me.

And then I worry about what my life will be like when I leave Diesel's bed? What if the nightmares never go away, and he tires of me, or I tire of him, or we tire of each other?

"I need to get out of the house." I need fresh air and a change of scenery. Maybe that will change my perspective. Maybe it'll give me some clarity about what I'm starting to feel for Diesel.

"Come with me today." Diesel's voice is deep, and then his chest is pressing against my back, his arms band around my waist. "I have to work at Morgan International."

I gasp in surprise because I was so in my own head that I forgot I was still in bed. Once my heart is no longer trying to beat out of my chest, I find my voice. "You wouldn't mind?"

"Not at all. Aria is always there, so you'll have someone to talk to other than me. And it'll get you out of the house."

I sigh and weigh my options. Getting out of the house sounds wonderful, but I'm not sure that hanging around Morgan International is what I need right now. "Okay. I'll go with you. Maybe I can get a load out of her."

"Are you sure?" he asks.

"Yep. I need to start making some money. Get over to my parents to check on them. So much to do. I can't just hang out here the rest of my life." That came out snarkier than I wanted it to.

"You know if you leave the house, you leave with me, right?"

"You're bossy," I say half-heartedly.

He laughs and presses his hips forward, his morning wood hitting my ass. "You like it."

"Are you trying to give me some dick, or are you just teasing me?"

He laughs, pressing his lips to my neck and his cock against my opening. "I

would love to give you some dick, but then we'll definitely be late. Aria won't mind, but my brother will bitch about it until the end of time."

Damn. "Then I'd better put on some clothes, I guess."

"Unfortunately. But feel free to take them off the minute we get home. Better yet, I'll take them off you."

I suppress a shiver and quickly shower, throwing on a pair of jeans from the stack of things Diesel brought from the girls at the clubhouse. Riding on the back of his bike again feels surreal. I've been cooped up in the house so long that the wind in my face is exhilarating.

We roar down the freeway, the vibration of the engine between my legs. I tighten my arms around Diesel's waist, pressing my cheek against his back. I can almost forget everything that's happened over the past few weeks. The terror, the violence, Tiny and Ghost. Out here holding on to Diesel, I feel free.

The bike leans into a curve and Diesel's hand comes down to squeeze my thigh. My breath hitches at the contact. He's been patient, not pushing me for more than I can give. But his touch ignites a longing inside me. I want to feel okay again.

The bike slows on the concrete right before coming to a stop across from the bay where my truck is. "Have you looked at it?"

"Not much, since it was on the side of the highway. Why? What are you thinking?"

I step inside the oversized bay made for truck repairs and stare at my truck. It looks the same too. Everything is the same. Everything and everyone except me. "I'm thinking that maybe someone put a tracker on my truck," I finally answer.

Lucky is there, and he slides out from under my truck with a grunt. "Finally. I thought you decided to take a personal day."

"Told you," Diesel whispers in my ear. "Find anything?" he asks instead of responding to Lucky's jab.

“No, but I just got started. I was waiting for you.” His gaze lands on me.
“Cassidy.”

“Lucky, hi. Thanks, uhm, for your help before.”

He stands, stroking the back of his neck. “Not a problem. You here to check out your truck or keep my brother company?”

“Both? I think there might be a tracker somewhere.”

Lucky frowns. “Why would you think that?”

Diesel gives him a rundown of yesterday’s conversation with Wild Man. “Even if the Bloodthirsty Devils connected me and Cassidy, how did they connect her to her truck?”

“Then the tracker would have to be on her, not her truck.” Lucky says and then asks, “Where’s your purse or go-bag? Have you checked in there?”

“No, but how would anyone get near my bags? That doesn’t make sense.” I take my backpack off my shoulder and start searching.

Lucky stands taller, squaring his shoulders. “I don’t see how anyone could even get in here to add any kind of tracking device. Maybe they just followed the tractor/trailer from here?”

My shoulders sink in defeat. “Well, I haven’t found anything in here. How did they know?”

Lucky steps forward. “Think back to that day. Where you were, where you parked. Did you get out of the cab? Fuel up?”

“Yeah, I did fuel up. But I paid at the pump and never left my truck. I was hauling butt up the five freeway, and those assholes in the fake cop car pulled me over. You know what happened after that. They grabbed me and shoved me in a trunk. Seconds later, the car was moving.” There wasn’t time for anything. “It has to be something else.”

“What else could it be? They could have just tied you to Morgan and not anyone in particular.” Lucky sounds as confused as I feel, which makes me feel a little better, maybe a little less crazy.

“Hiya, boys!” The feminine voice hits me weirdly, and I freeze. It’s kind of familiar, but not quite. “What’s going on out here?”

My eyes slam shut, and instantly, I’m jolted back to the small dark closet. I know that voice. I’m positive, but it’s taking me a moment to place the voice. My instinctive reaction tells me a lot, but I’m frozen in place.

“Brooke, what do you need?” Lucky’s gruff voice poses the question, but that doesn’t help.

“Just walking around and getting some exercise,” she says, giggling.

That fucking giggle. I *know* that sound. I’ve heard it before, and as I’m jogging my memory to figure it out, it comes to me.

I’m doin’ so good, aren’t I, baby?

That voice posed that question to a man I know is Ghost, leader of the Bloodthirsty Devils. She was there at the house while I was locked in the closet.

“Oh shit,” I whisper to myself, still locked in the closet and unable to open my eyes. I never got a look at the chick. I only heard her voice. A hand grips my forearm, and I gasp, opening my eyes wide to find Lucky looking at me in concern.

“I know that voice,” I say automatically before I can think twice about whether or not it’s a smart move.

His brows dip into a confused frown, and I can’t say that I blame him. “Yeah, it’s Brooke. Aria’s assistant.”

I shake my head because none of this is making sense. Her voice. Does it mean that Diesel and his guys were behind what happened to me all along? Or does it mean something else my traumatized brain can’t quite figure out?

“What’s going on?” Diesel whispers the question, but he asks Lucky.

“Says she’s heard that voice somewhere before,” Lucky answers with a shrug.

“Not *somewhere*,” I spit out angrily. “I heard it when I was locked in that

damn closet for a week. Or more.”

“Brooke?” Diesel lets out a noise that sounds suspiciously like a scoff. “She’s Aria’s assistant.”

His words, diminishing my statement, piss me off, but I push, feeling like this could be important. “I’m telling you, I heard that exact voice when I was in there.”

Diesel reaches for my hand, but he’s shaking his head. “You’re still in shock, Cass. It’s not Brooke.”

And just like that, my patience flies out the proverbial fucking window. I look to Lucky first. He’s still frowning, trying to process it all before my gaze swings to Diesel. I’m so angry. Why don’t they believe me?

“Fuck you for using this against me. I didn’t ask for this shit to happen,” I growl.

“I know—” Diesel begins, but I don’t let him finish.

“—No, you obviously *don’t* know because your instinct is to stand up for *her*. To protect *her*. I know what I heard. I can’t say she was there because I saw her, because I didn’t see her. But I heard that voice saying, *I’m doin’ so good, aren’t I, baby?* And she said those words to Ghost, your supposed enemy. Believe me or not, I no longer give a fuck.” I storm off, feeling angry, hurt, and disappointed.

I’m angry with myself for thinking that a guy like Diesel is what I’ve been missing. He’s too good to be true for a reason. He’s not good. Sure, he’s been here for me, and he did rescue me, but when it comes down to it, I’m nothing more than the chick who’s currently warming his bed.

“Whoa, who pissed in your Cheerios?” a familiar feminine voice asks.

I stop and turn to find Kenna, half frowning and half grinning in my direction. “The better question is, who hasn’t pissed all over my Cheerios,” I mutter and keep marching across the parking lot.

“Want to talk about it?”

“No.” Absolutely not, because then she might think Diesel means more to me

than he does.

I sigh, and against my better judgment, I tell her what just went down. “He doesn’t believe me, and that’s fine. I don’t need him to believe me. I don’t care. This place isn’t my home anyway.”

She gets in her car, and I keep walking, fuming about everything that happened since my truck broke down and I had the misfortune to end up in this place. Then I notice Kenna following alongside me.

“You want a ride home?”

“My home is in Nevada, so thanks, but no thanks.” I have a full head of steam, and I’m in no fucking mood to be reasonable.

“Okay, smart-ass, do you want a lift back to Diesel’s or not?”

I stop and turn to Kenna. There’s something in her tone that starts to calm me down, so I say, “Yeah, I’d love a ride. Thank you.”

Still, I brace myself for the hard sell on the way back. I figure she’ll tell me all the reasons I’m wrong about Diesel, but surprisingly, she doesn’t.

“I’m sorry about what you went through. It’s shitty, especially when you didn’t know what you were getting yourself into, but I hope you find a way to get through it all.”

“If that ever happens, I’ll let you know.”

“The nightmares don’t ever really go away,” she says quietly, flashing a sympathetic smile when I turn to her with shock in my eyes. “Yep. I’ve been there, too,” she sighs. “It’s not pretty, and I don’t want to go into it, but I know where you are right now, and I fucking hate it for you.”

“I’m sorry for you, too,” I whisper softly as she approaches Diesel’s condo. “Thanks for the ride, Kenna.”

“If you ever need to talk, you know where to find me.”

“Thanks,” I tell her and get out of the car as fast as I can before I do something crazy like cry in front of a chick I don’t even know. I wait until I’m inside Diesel’s place before I let the tears fall. I’m not much of a crier,

but hearing that Kenna understands unlocks something inside of me. I let the tears flow while I plan my next move.

An hour later, I think that maybe a trip back to Riverbend is just what I need to put California and Diesel behind me. A healthy dose of my parents and their love will help me get over this hump faster.

“Yeah, that’s just what I need,” I say out loud and start making a mental list of what I need to do to make my getaway.

The clothes I’m wearing aren’t even mine, nor are the ones stacked on one of the shelves in Diesel’s closet, so I leave them behind. I have my purse with all of my credit cards, my bank card, driver’s license, and the keys to my rig. That’s all I really need.

With nothing more than that, I leave Diesel’s house, slipping the keyring he gave me into his mailbox, and then I make my way to the motel I stayed in the day I met him.

I wait until evening until I’m sure Diesel isn’t at Morgan International before I tell the ride-share driver where I’m going. The place is mostly quiet aside from a few security guards and some bikers I haven’t met yet. I’m just a driver picking up her ride, and no one is the wiser as they let me inside.

It’s already dark when I pull my truck out of Morgan International and put Angel Harbor—and Diesel—in my rearview mirror where they both belong.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

DIESEL

“You fucked up. Big time.” Lucky crosses his arms over his chest and glares at me.

I brush him off because he’s being just as dramatic as Cassidy. “Brooke is a dumb blonde, not a double agent. Cassidy still has nightmares. She’s not thinking clearly.”

I should know. I’m the one who’s with her every night. Holding her. Soothing her.

“I’m not so sure,” Lucky answers with a shrug. “Her reaction seems genuine.”

My entire body goes cold at my brother’s proclamation. “You thought Cassidy stole our shipment.”

“Yeah, and I was wrong. So what? I’m not saying I believe her, but her reaction is enough to convince me that we should look a little deeper into Brooke’s background. You fucked up, little brother. Fix it or don’t.” He shrugs and walks away, going inside the clubhouse and leaving me to my thoughts.

About Cassidy.

And how seriously I might have fucked up.

I grumble to myself and join Lucky and the rest of the guys inside. I’ll talk to Cassidy when I get home so we can get beyond whatever the fuck happened earlier. But I put that out of my mind for now, confident that Cass and I will talk and figure it all out later tonight. Right now, though, my first priority is Church.

Banger walks in. “Any idea what this emergency meeting is about?” I ask.

“No fucking clue,” he says. He offers a teasing smile and says, “Hopefully, it means some shit is going down soon.”

We all stop abruptly at the sight of Stone leaning against the wall. Stone is cool as fuck, a guy who always has our back, but it takes me off guard. What’s he doing here, I wonder, because he’s not patched. Church is *only* for patched members of the MC.

I offer my hand and say, “What’s going on?” He smiles and shakes my hand, then gives me a bro hug.

But before Stone can answer my question, Ace walks into the room, flanked by Dix and Coop. He takes his seat, quickly calling Church to order.

“Stone has an update for us,” he announces, clearing up my confusion.

“Yeah,” Stone says and clears his throat. “I’ve been watching Mayor Song for a while now, and I have a good handle on his comings and goings. I know when he eats, sleeps, shits, and meets up with his sidepiece. With what Wild Man and Gia have also provided, I’m confident about where he is and what he’s doing on any given day.”

Tank nods. “So when do we act? Time is ticking on this shit, and I’d feel a

hell of a lot better if it was just done.”

“Tonight is his regular poker night with some City Council members, but he didn’t show up. No one in his circle knows where he is, but I do. We can get in and out unnoticed. Tonight.”

My hands ball into tight fists, and I feel the anger and frustration of the day pulse through my veins. I’m ready to fuck some shit up. Bad. “Tonight it is,” I agree. “Before he gets back to Tig Heights.” I ignore the odd looks my brothers shoot at me.

“He also owns the house his side piece lives in,” Stone offers with a hint of a smile.

“What do you need?” I ask, maybe a little too eagerly.

“A lookout,” Stone answers easily. “I have a spot picked out and a path we can take without being seen.”

“I’ll do it,” I say to him, but my gaze is on Ace, willing him to simply agree and let me help Stone take out the mayor.

“Fine, Diesel. You go with Stone and Lucky, and when you come back, the only news I want to hear is that Reggie Song is dead, so I can let the Iron Reapers know we’ve paid our debt. Got it?”

“Got it,” Stone and I answer at the same time.

Lucky’s lips twitch. “Yeah, Ace, we got it.” He looks at me, grinning like he knows exactly what’s going on in my mind.

Ace adds, “And Stone, I need to see you when you get back. Alone.”

“You got it Boss,” Stone replies and I wonder what that’s about. The other guys look at Ace in confusion too. Is he getting patched in? Is something going on we don’t know about?

Shit I can’t think about that now. I’ve got a mayor to kill.

As soon as the meeting ends, we pile into the van with Lucky at the wheel and speed toward the outskirts of Tig Heights. My heart races with a mix of adrenaline and anxiety, my mind unable to shake thoughts of the secret

meeting between Ace and Stone. Do I ask him? No. We have to focus on the task at hand.

As we approach the massive mansion that belongs to the mayor, my jaw drops in disbelief. It's just as extravagant as Aria's mansion, yet this man is only a mayor.

We pull off onto what used to be a service road, now an abandoned stretch of dirt leading to a patch of dry land covered with dry brush that looks like it could ignite in flames at any moment. The mansion looms ahead, its intricate details visible from our vantage point on the hill overlooking the backyard. We're close enough to see the grotto and blue tiles of the pool but far enough away to avoid detection from any security cameras.

Stone instructs Lucky to turn off the engine and points to a small rise where we can get a clear shot at our target without being seen by any surveillance cameras. "That's where we'll take him out," he says grimly.

My disappointment shows in my furrowed brows. "So, no hand-to-hand combat? I was hoping for some personal vengeance."

Stone smirks and pulls out his massive rifle from under the back seat. "This will do the job just fine without risking ourselves or the MC."

"Sounds good," I say absently and take in the details of the mansion. The infinity pool with a separate hot tub takes up most of the backyard. There's an outdoor kitchen area and a small cabana, all dwarfed by the expansive home with floor-to-ceiling windows.

"Don't look like any public servant's house I've ever seen."

"Right?" Stone huffs, shaking his head. "This guy was a fucking insurance attorney before getting into local, small-town politics. That money is definitely dirty."

"No wonder the Iron Reapers want him dead." Sounds like every other politician on the planet, doing dirt himself while trying to fuck up someone else's shit just to prove he's tough. "What's the plan?"

"I'll set up my shot, and then we wait."

So we wait. And wait. And wait.

Finally, a light comes on inside the house, and then another. A million fucking years later, Reggie Song steps out. He's talking on the phone, probably to his wife, and dipping his toe into the pool.

"Look at that motherfucker. Not a care in the world."

"Soon, he won't have any," Stone grunts and gets down on the ground near his gun, looking through the scope to line up his shot.

"There's movement in the downstairs window," I tell him when I catch the figure moving back and forth.

"Keep an eye on her," he instructs, his tone more serious than I've ever heard before.

I nod, even though he's not paying attention to me. I keep my gaze on the woman walking by the window. A minute later, she peeks through the blinds, getting antsy about his call.

"Careful, she might come out to check on him."

"That's rich," he chuckles. "The sidepiece is jealous of the wife."

"The way he's smiling it might be another sidepiece," I shoot back just as she steps out of the sliding glass door.

Song drops down on his ass, letting his legs drop into the pool. He notices the woman and a second later ends the call.

"It's now or never," Lucky says.

"He'll fuck her again to stop any questions," I add.

"Got it." Stone adjusts his body behind the gun and takes several deep breaths before squeezing off two shots. The first is a shot to the head, and the mayor goes still. The second shot hits his chest, and he falls forward into the pool.

His sidepiece screams her fucking head off, and I drop down on one side of Stone, collecting the discarded shell casings and shoving them into my pocket while Lucky is already heading back to the van.

“We won’t have much time to get away,” I warn. “In about sixty seconds, maybe one-twenty, she’ll get her shit together enough to call the cops. We need to stay low and out of sight until we get to the van. Got it?”

Stone nods, slinging the gun across his back as we crawl away, then he slowly but efficiently dismantles the gun before tossing it into the van. He looks at me with a smile. “That was fun.”

“Fun? I was hoping to make a mess.” I’m just as wound up as ever, maybe more because I thought I might get to work out some of my frustration.

Stone laughs. “Go home to your woman and make a mess with her.”

Together we watch and wait while the sidepiece continues freaking the fuck out, but then, just like I predicted, she rushes inside to call the cops. I jump into the passenger seat, and Stone slides into the first row just as Lucky hits the gas.

It’s done. We’ve paid our debt to the Iron Reapers, and it’s one less thing the MC has to worry about, but it doesn’t give me the relief I thought it would. Maybe I needed to get in there and get my hands dirty, or maybe I just need to clear the air with Cassidy. Either way, I’m restless when we return to the clubhouse and confirm that Reggie Song is dead.

That same restlessness gnaws at me as I head home. The place is dark, no lights flickering, and it’s damn too quiet, like nobody’s here. This isn’t right.

“Cass! We gotta talk,” I shout, half-expecting her to storm out, ready to rip my head off. But nothing. Just silence. “Cassidy!” I call again, checking each room. But she’s not here.

No sign of her. The clothes the girls dropped off for her are still on the shelf. But her backpack is gone. “Shit. Double shit.”

I scour the house twice more, then it hits me like a sucker punch. She left me. Not even a lousy note. My phone’s just as empty. No text, no call, nothing. Not a single clue where she’s headed.

Panic’s first on my mind, thinking someone’s grabbed her again. But deep down, I know it’s different this time. She left because she wanted to. Because of me.

She bailed before I could come up with a plan to make her want to stay. “Fuck,” I growl under my breath, realizing it isn’t just her leaving. I pushed her away. Gave her every damn reason to leave when all I wanted was for her to stay.

Anger bubbles up inside me, then bursts out in a yell that does jack shit to ease the rage. Makes me want to tear something apart.

But I don’t. Instead, I head over to Ace Motors and throw myself into fixing up the Shelby. It’s the only thing that makes sense right now.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

CASSIDY

A part of me feels bad about leaving Diesel the way I did, without a goodbye, but fuck him. He didn't even try to believe me.

I liked him. A lot. More than I should have let myself like him since he thinks I'm a liar. Just thinking about it pisses me off.

He doesn't believe me or even try to believe me. And without trust, we're nothing more to each other than sex buddies. Okay, that's fine with me, but my poor, stupid heart didn't get the memo and let herself get involved beyond the naked, sweaty times.

"It's fine," I say out loud because I need to hear it. "Mom always says that heartbreak builds character." Dad always says that she's too romantic for her own good, and he had to save her from herself. But...and this is a big but, he

always has stars in his eyes when he says it. I want what they have, so I've been lying to myself.

I thought Diesel might be that guy who ticked off the items on my list. He's spontaneous, fucks like the dirtiest of gods, and has his own life. So he wouldn't trip about me being on the road and away from him for weeks at a time.

I allow myself to dwell on my time in Angel Harbor with Diesel until I reach the Nevada border, and then I vow to put the man out of my mind for good.

Soon, the California desert turns to the Nevada desert, and as soon as I see the sign welcoming me home, I give myself a pep talk.

"No more dwelling on my time in Angel Harbor and no more thinking about Diesel. It was a fun fling full of amazing orgasms and nothing more. Focus on seeing Mom and Dad again and being home."

It's easier said than done, but I have sixty more miles to make it happen and figure out how to explain the fading bruises and fucked up hand to my parents.

I can't tell them about the kidnapping, or they'll never let me leave the house again. So I focus on my excuse, which, of course, only leads to thoughts of my rescuer and protector. Thoughts of how he comforted and soothed me through the nightmares.

"And the nightmares." There's no way I can explain waking in the middle of the night screaming without telling them everything. Suddenly, I realize home is the last place I should be, but it's too late. I'm already here.

The house sits on the outskirts of town on a huge lot, roomy enough for both Dad and me to park our trucks. The low glow bouncing off the windows tells me that Dad is still up, but I don't see Mom's car in the driveway and figure she's at one of her many meetings.

"I got this," I say and jump from the cab, making my way to the front door, where I slide my key into the lock.

"Cassidy? Is that you?" Dad is on his feet as soon as I walk in the door, the TV forgotten as he crosses the living room to wrap me in a fierce hug.

“Where in the hell have you been? And don’t say *nowhere* because I know that’s not true.”

I frown. “I’ve been working, Dad. I sent you a text.”

He flashes a sad smile and wraps an arm around me, escorting me to the kitchen table or, as he likes to call it, his office. “For so few words, that message was full of bullshit. Now tell me the truth.”

“There was a little trouble on the road, Dad. Nothing I can’t handle.” I lie easily because an outright denial will only cause more questions. “And then there was a guy. Didn’t work out, and here I am.”

He studies me for a long time, but I resist the urge to squirm. Dad isn’t an easy parent. Worries too much and notices everything. So, his steady gaze makes me uncomfortable. “And the hand you’re trying to hide. Is that from the trouble or the man?”

Both. “The trouble. The man only broke my heart.”

“I’m sorry, honey. Want me to kick his ass?”

I laugh at the idea of my dad, with a growing spare tire around the middle, going head-to-head with Diesel.

“I’d love that, but it would be pointless.” Diesel doesn’t care and definitely not enough to fight for me. “Thanks, though. How are things here?”

Dad throws up his hands at the futile suggestion. “Good. Same as they always are. I’m thinking about taking your mom on a cruise if I can get her to take time away from work.” There it is again, the stars of love shining in his eyes.

“I’ll help you convince her while I’m here if you want?”

He stands, grabbing two beers from the fridge. “Thank you, but not tonight. When she comes home, she’ll shit a brick if she gets a look at you like this.”

I know he’s right. On top of the bruising and the bandage on my hand in need of changing, I look like I haven’t been sleeping—because I haven’t—and Mom thinks food cures all. “Good point. Thanks, Dad. I missed you.”

“I missed you too. Thought you were either dead or eloped.”

I laugh; a bit more bite in it than humor. “Ha! Neither, thank you very much.” Eloping is as foreign a concept to me as, I don’t know, deep-sea diving. I finish off my beer with a final swig and get up.

“Good night, Dad.” Heading to my room, I can’t help but notice how it’s getting more and more cluttered with mom’s hobby stuff. Not that it matters tonight.

After a quick, almost mechanical shower, I crash into bed. But sleep decides to play hard to get. I just lie there, staring at the ceiling for what seems like forever. I hear Mom come in, the muffled sounds of her and Dad chatting, a bit of laughter, the TV buzzing in the background. It’s weirdly comforting but not enough to knock me out.

Nightmares again, yanking me out of sleep and into the too-quiet dark. No warm arms, no soothing voice to mumble me back to sleep, no heated moments to make me forget the bad dreams. Just me, the night, and a mind that won’t stop.

And then, like a broken record, it’s Diesel time. His face, those damn hazel eyes that can’t decide whether they’re mad or just don’t care. Ridiculous, really, how I’m lying here missing him. It’s barely been a day—how’s that for pathetic? The more I think about him, the more it gnaws at me. Makes me feel all kinds of weak, and I hate that. Hate it more than admitting I might actually be hurt.

But tonight, I’m done with tossing and turning. A restless energy takes over, itching in my bones. No more moping around. I throw off the covers and jump out of bed, a crazy idea forming in my head. I’m going for a run. Yeah, a run to nowhere, just to burn off this...whatever this is.

I snatch my sneakers, practically flying out the door. The night air hits me like a slap, but it’s just what I need. I start running, pounding the pavement, each step pushing Diesel and his confusing eyes further away.

The streets blur past me. I’m running away from everything—the nightmares, Diesel’s stupid face, all the mess in my head.

Tonight, I’m in charge of me. I’m the one calling the shots.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

DIESEL

I fucked up. I fucked up big time, and I realized it too fucking late. Cassidy is gone, and I have no clue where she is. She's not at the motel where she stayed before the kidnapping, and none of the girls have seen or heard from her. I know because I spent all night hunting her down.

My instinct is to go after her, but where would that be? My guess is she either took a new load or she's gone back to Nevada. With all the shit going on with the MC, there's no fucking way Ace will let me take a road trip to track down a woman who isn't even mine yet.

But she will be.

I'm fresh out of ideas, so I make another call to Cassidy, and of course, she doesn't answer, so I head to work. Arriving at Morgan feels surreal as the big

repair bay sits empty, confirming the one fucking thing I know to be true. Cassidy is gone.

Yet, the place buzzes with activity like usual. Still, it's all a blur to me as I check the delivery logs and schedule to make sure everything is going how it should. It is because the men and women who work here know that I don't suffer fools or slackers. I don't fuck around when it comes to the work. Period.

But I'm too distracted to focus on anything but the basics, and I know exactly what I need to do. I head to Aria's office, but Brooke stops me first, so I bite back a groan and stare at her. "Is Aria in?"

Brooke nods and pushes her tits out even further than they already are, smoothing her hands over her curves to draw my gaze.

"She's in, yeah. What's up?"

Is she fucking serious? "I need to talk to her."

Brooke pouts, taking another step closer into my personal space. "What's wrong, Diesel? That trucker girlfriend of yours not doing what she should?"

My glare goes from dark to pitch fucking black, and I get right in her face. "None of your fucking business," I snarl at her because part of this feels like it's her fault, even though I told Cassidy and my brother differently.

"It's just a question," she replies, not bothered at all by my outburst. "That's usually why men are, ya know, assholes."

"I need to talk to Aria."

"Yeah, okay," she says with a smile, brushing off my anger. "If you need a few hours to unwind, I'm happy to assist. I promise you a really good time."

"Not interested." My words come out cold and angry. I step around her and enter Aria's office. "You decent in here?" I ask with a grin.

Aria looks up from her laptop screen and smiles at me. "If I wasn't decent, you'd find out too late. Then again, maybe Lucky is under my desk practicing writing the alphabet with his tongue." She arches a teasing brow.

I shudder. “Please stop.”

She tosses her hair back with a dirty laugh. “Come on in, Diesel. What’s wrong?”

“Who says anything is wrong?”

She points at me. “The frown darkening your face. You’re probably scaring my employees.”

“Good,” I growl. “Scared means I don’t have to run around making sure they do what I expect them to do.”

“Fine, but that still doesn’t tell me what’s wrong with you.”

“I need a favor.” I don’t usually ask for favors because I don’t like owing people, but Aria is family. I inhale slowly and let it out while I wait for her answer.

“I’m listening.”

My jaw clenches, but this is the opening I need. “I need you to request Cassidy for a new load because I need her to come back to Angel Harbor.” I know she’s gonna give me shit because that’s what Lucky would do, and it’s what I would do.

“So,” Aria taps her fingers on the desk one at a time in a rhythmic cadence and looks me up and down. “You have a thing for Cassidy.” It’s not a question, so I don’t bother with an answer. “I’ll consider it, but first, I want to know what’s in it for me?” Her eyes sparkle with mischief. I’ll allow it because I’m asking for a favor.

“Well,” I begin and tap my chin. “If you and my brother ever get around to making babies, I’ll babysit for free once a month.”

Her cheeks turn a bright shade of pink. “I’ll take it under advisement.”

“So you’ll do it?” I sound eager as fuck, and I don’t need to see the surprise in Aria’s eyes to know it.

“Yes,” she nods. “I’ll do it, but only because I think it’ll be so much fun to see you all twisted up over a woman. Good for Cassidy for making you work

for it.”

“It’s not that simple. I was an asshole,” I admit, but I don’t give Aria any details. Even though I don’t think anything will come from Lucky’s look into Brooke’s background, I don’t want to alarm Aria for no reason.

“There’s too much shit going on now for me to go after her, so I have to get her back here. Thanks to my lovely sister-in-law.”

“Yeah, all right. No need to sweet talk me when I already agreed. Good luck.”

“Thanks, Aria.” She and my brother make a strange couple. She’s rich and prissy, and calling him *rough around the edges* would be an understatement, but she’s a good choice for him. I like her, anyway.

“See ya later,” I say and leave her office, and Brooke is right fucking there.

She smiles from her desk and says, “Offer stands. You don’t have to be such a dick.”

I ignore her and keep walking, not in the mood for her bullshit today. She’s been here for two years. How can she be a mole? Are we that stupid? Compromised? No, can’t be. We’re smarter than that.

I walk through Morgan International like an angry fucking bull, making the other employees divert their gazes, pretend to be busy, doing anything to avoid catching my eyes.

Yeah, well, the feeling is fucking mutual.

I have plenty of shit that I need to do today, including basic maintenance on some of the newly acquired specialty vans for moving art and antiquities, whatever the fuck those are, so I can’t just fuck off for the rest of the day. I need to get my head on straight, so I step out into the parking lot and pull out my phone.

“This is Cassidy. Leave a message.”

“Dammit,” I growl, even though I don’t expect her to answer my calls at all. That’s why I had to go to Aria. Cassidy is as stubborn as they come, and I know that she’s done with me because otherwise, she would have stayed and

fought it out.

“We need to talk.”

I don't see or hear Lucky approach. “Hang on a sec,” I tell him and try Cassidy again because, apparently, I am a fucking glutton for punishment.

“Now,” he growls before plucking the phone from my hand.

“What the fuck, Lucky? I'm not in the mood for your shit.”

“Yeah? Well, that's too goddamn bad. The MC comes first. Always. Remember?”

I shove him. “Of course, I fucking remember. You think I'd forget that shit?”

He smiles. “Just checking. Put your pussy away. We have a problem. A big one, and we need to act quick.”

“Shit.” Lucky is usually an asshole, but the serious expression on his face tells me shit is about to hit the fan.

“No time for freaking out or questions. Clubhouse. Now.”

It's not the break I need, but even a few minutes on the road with the wind whipping at my body helps.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

CASSIDY

“Yes, Dad, I’m sure that I want to take this load.” I roll my eyes as I exit the freeway toward Angel Harbor a little over a week after I rushed away like a fugitive. However, Aria’s call came in right when I was getting restless, so I jumped on the offer.

Dad’s sigh sounds through the interior of the cab, the speakerphone serving to amplify his worry. “Just try to avoid any...trouble if you can.”

A laugh bubbles out of me. “I will. I promise.” This is exactly why I’m glad I made it through Mom’s interrogation about what really happened to my neck and my hand. The damn bruises are still visible. My hand is healing, but the bruising is ugly as shit, so there’s no effective means of hiding it other than wearing gloves.

“The haul is from California to Georgia, Dad. I’ve never been to Atlanta. It’ll be fun.” And more importantly, it’ll put thousands of miles between me and a certain hazel-eyed biker.

“Okay, but call me every hundred miles or so, okay, honey?”

Warmth spreads through me whenever Dad gets mushy. “I promise, Dad. Oh, hey. I found a cruise with dance lessons, and you know how much Mom wants you to dance with her.” I laugh at his guttural groan.

“Thanks,” he said. “I’ll let you know how it goes.”

“Can’t wait.” Mom will definitely agree to the cruise because Dad isn’t what you might call a romantic, and this idea is above and beyond romantic.

“You have your piece?”

I nod even though he can’t see me. “Never leave home without it.”

“Good. Stay safe.”

Smiling, I disconnect the call just as the Morgan International building comes into view. It’s late in the evening, but I can still see lights winking at me from inside, so I pull into the parking lot and sit inside my truck, giving myself a few minutes to steel my emotions.

I doubt Diesel is around, but just in case, I take the time I need to get my shit together. I’m not angry; okay, I am, but it’s a *me* problem, and I refuse to get emotional.

I double-check the gun at my waistband and jump from the rig. I know I shouldn’t have it on me here in California, but I feel safer with it. Besides, this isn’t a public place. At least, that’s my justification as I go in through the front door.

“Aria, are you here?” Thankfully, her big-titted assistant isn’t around, but I briefly wonder if she’s still working here. I knock on her door hesitantly.

“Aria?”

“Cassidy?” I understand her confusion since she’s expecting me sometime tomorrow. “Come in.”

I step inside and give her a friendly smile. “Hey. Is this a good time?”

She glances at her computer screen and then back at me with a smile. “This is a perfect time. If not for the interruption, who knows how long I might stare at the screen.” She closes the hot pink laptop and motions me to sit. “Have I worked through the night? Because I swear, you’re supposed to be here tomorrow.”

I laugh. “I got on the road early, and here I am. I just wanted to drop in to get the details on the load. Is there anything I need to know?”

“Nope. It’s pretty straightforward, and it’s not all heavy, so the trip should be easy.” Her brows twitch, and I know she’s thinking about my last trip. “How are you doing?”

“Good,” I answer quickly because I don’t want to talk about the kidnapping or Diesel. “Spent some time with my parents, which was nice.” I don’t tell her about the nightmares. I didn’t even tell my parents, but I’m sure Mom heard me crying during the night a few times.

“So you’re okay to do this trip?”

I frown at the question. “Yeah. I wouldn’t have agreed if I didn’t think I could do it. And what are the chances I’ll get kidnapped twice?”

Aria’s eyes go wide as a loud laugh bursts from her lips. “I wasn’t expecting that response, but I guess that’s a good point. I’m glad you’re all right, Cassidy.”

“Yeah, me too. And I’m glad you called when you did. I was starting to get a little stir-crazy being at home.”

“Are you not close with your parents?” Her brows dip in concern, which surprises me.

“The opposite. Pretty damn close, but I’m not used to being home so much anymore, and with all the bruises and stuff,” I point to myself. “They were hovering and doting. That’s nice. Up to a point.”

We share a laugh. The moment is light and free, and then Aria’s office door flies open, startling us both. We both turn to the door to see Ghost standing

there, looking like a madman. His white-blond hair is sticking up, his eyes are crazed, and he's breathing heavily like he ran to Morgan International.

"Monica," he growls, pulling out a gun. "Where the fuck is Monica?"

Aria looks like a gorgeous, pink ball of fury with her hands fisted at her hips. "Are you high? You must be to come here alone looking for someone who isn't here. Go now, and maybe you'll live to see the sunrise."

Ghost steps inside the office, his gaze scanning the room like we might have whoever the fuck Monica is hidden in a corner or something.

"Just tell me where she is, and I'll leave without hurting either of you." His gaze lands on me, menacing but somehow gleeful. "Again."

"Asshole," I spit out.

He keeps coming toward us, but more accurately, toward Aria, probably because he realized too late that I'm nothing to the Reckless Souls MC. "I'm looking for Monica. Fuck, Brooke. That's who I'm looking for." He's close enough now to be a real threat, and I step between him and Aria.

"Brooke? What do you want with my assistant?" Her confusion means Lucky and Diesel didn't tell her about my suspicion.

"She's not here," I say instead, putting my hand on his chest.

"Get the fuck out of my way," he growls before slamming me with a gut punch.

I fall to my knees because, goddamn, that fucker can hit hard. "She's. Not. Here."

"I'm not talking to you, bitch." He pushes me hard just as I make it to my feet, sending me back down.

I really hate this motherfucker.

Ghost grabs Aria by the hair, and she screams. "Let me go," she shouts. "I already called Lucky, so you better get the fuck out of here."

Ghost grins, tightening his grip on her hair and yanking her backward. "I don't give a shit. Just tell me where Monica is."

“I don’t know,” she answers with wide eyes, full of fear, when he presses his gun to her temple.

“Wrong answer, biker slut.” He laughs and drags Aria around the room. “I should wait until he gets here and shoot you right in front of him.” That sinister laugh that still haunts my nightmares bounces off the walls of Aria’s spacious office. “Or maybe I’ll let you watch me kill lover boy, and then I’ll kill you.”

I pull out my piece and get to my feet slowly.

“Drop the fucking gun,” I say, aiming at his head.

“Cassidy, don’t,” Aria pleads with me, tears forming in her eyes.

“Yeah, listen to the princess here before I do worse to you this time around.” He’s laughing again, and if I never fucking hear that laugh again, it’ll be too soon.

“You and what army?” I taunt, smiling even though my hand is shaking. I grip the trigger and inhale slowly.

“Just me, bitch.” He releases his grip on Aria’s hair, flinging her toward the wall as he charges in my direction.

I exhale with my gun pointing at him, taking a step back since he’s closing the distance quicker than I realize, and squeeze the trigger. Once. Twice.

Aria screams again, hands covering her ears, and her body slumps into a tight ball.

“You fucking shot me,” Ghost whispers, the shock on his face putting a smile on mine.

“Turns out you’re not the army you think you are.” My aim isn’t great, though. One bullet went through his thigh instead of his chest, and it looks like the other missed him completely.

“You need target practice.”

I aim and shoot again, but the bullet flies right by his head, and he topples to the ground with a grunt.

“You need a hospital.”

“Aria!” The male voice is so frantic with worry that I know it’s Lucky, so I step back against the wall, not wanting to get caught up in whatever happens next. “Aria, where the fuck are you?”

“In here,” I call out when she’s too emotional to answer. “It’s okay, Aria. Lucky’s here.”

She looks up at me as if I’m speaking a foreign language. “You shot him,” she stammers and gets to her feet just as Lucky, Diesel, and Tank rush into the office.

All three men take in the scene. Aria’s tear-stained cheeks and mussed hair, Ghost moaning in agony on the floor, and me shoving my gun back into my waistband. Lucky runs right to his woman. “You okay, babe?”

She wraps her body around his, sniffing as she shakes her head. “He was looking for Brooke, but he called her Monica.”

I say nothing as I look away, and my gaze slams right into Diesel. He stares at me like I’m a ghost. We stare at each other for what feels like an eternity, neither of us saying a word because there are no words to say for what’s between us. We both made our choices, and that’s that.

“Come on,” Tank growls. “Let’s get this piece of shit out of here.”

His words snap Diesel out of his shock or fog or whatever it is that just passed between us. His gaze slides to Ghost, and in the next moment, he’s marching toward the man who knows he’s beat but still tries to fight the inevitable. Diesel gives him one hard punch that knocks him out, and they drag him from the office.

The drama is over nearly as quickly as it began, though it feels like the last ten minutes have lasted a week. My hands start to shake, and I’m cold as shock starts to set in, or maybe it’s just the adrenaline wearing off.

Aria leaves with the guys, and I’m alone. Again.

I go back to my truck, park in the corner of the lot, and lock it up tight before I climb in back and settle in for the night. My thoughts go to Diesel. He

looked good tonight, but it doesn't matter because he didn't say a word to me. I was right.

There's nothing left between us.

CHAPTER THIRTY

DIESEL

Coop and Preacher are the last to arrive at The Chamber, wearing serious expressions. “You got him?” Coop asks as he looks around at all the brothers gathered.

“Yeah, we got him,” Lucky growls. “Fucker went in search of his bitch and threatened Aria.” He’s still pissed about it, and I don’t blame him. If Cassidy hadn’t been there, who knows what might have happened. He glares at me hard, and I look away.

It’s not my fault, but he has to be pissed at someone, and for now, that someone is me. “Cassidy was there, and she shot the fucker in the thigh.” I didn’t even know she was in Angel Harbor because she didn’t reach out to me.

“We owe her,” Lucky grunts, his gaze still on me as if to tell me not to piss her off again. “And right now, I owe this fucker a beatdown.” He crushes one fist into the other palm, and I almost feel bad for Ghost.

Almost.

Ace clears his throat. “Let’s get in there and handle this shit. I’m sick of BTB.”

We all echo that sentiment, and when Dix opens that metal door, we go into the darkness, down the stairs, into the belly of The Chamber. It’s dark except for one bulb hanging above two figures slumped over with black hoods over their heads. We surround the two metal chairs on all sides so they know there’s no place they can run in here. They are at our mercy, and we have none for them.

Ace snatches the hood from Ghost’s head, scowling down at him. “Got anything to say?”

He blinks a few times, letting his eyes adjust to the light. When it does, he grins up at Ace and shakes his head. “Not one fucking thing. What do you want to know?”

“Nothing,” Ace replies coldly and steps back beside Dix.

Lucky steps forward, and Ghost laughs. “Oh, big man here is mad I fucked up his bitch. Don’t worry, I didn’t hurt her. Only roughed her up a bit.” He laughs again, but when Lucky balls his meaty hand into a fist, the asshole flinches.

Then Lucky laughs, stepping in front of the chair next to Ghost, snatching off the hood covering Brooke’s head. “Only roughed her up, is that right?”

Brooke’s head snaps up, eyes wide and frantic as she takes in her surroundings, looking to see where all her hard work has gotten her. She mumbles behind the duct tape I strapped across her big fucking mouth myself. I took care of her when Lucky updated me on what he found out about Brooke, also known as Monica Sanchez.

“Babe.” Ghost snaps his head to the side to look at her with wide eyes full of fear. “Babe, fucking look at me.”

Brooke turns to him, and she's got real fear in her dark eyes. I can see the moment reality sinks into her thick skull, the moment she realizes Ghost won't be saving her because he's right beside her.

"You okay?" His question is frantic, and that's when I realize he didn't just use her to spy on us. He actually cares about her.

She nods, but the fear doesn't leave her eyes. We haven't hurt her. Not yet.

He turns to Lucky and then me before he shifts his attention to Ace. "You won't get shit out of me. Do whatever you want to me, but I don't have shit to say to you." He smiles again, but it's dimmer because we have his woman.

"I don't need you to talk," Ace tells him in that voice that says he has ice water coursing through his veins. "I already know everything I need to know."

"Good," he spits out. "Because I won't talk. You can torture me, and I won't talk. Kill me, and I'll die knowing that my boys will retaliate." He goes on and on, puffing himself up because he's fucking terrified.

Ace steps forward and backhands him. "Do you ever shut the fuck up? All you do is talk, talk, talk." The words roar out of Ace, echoing around the cement room.

Brooke, or Monica, squeals behind the duct tape.

"I don't want shit from you, Ghost. I don't need shit from you or your soon-to-be-dead *boys*." Ace flashes a terrifying smile that shuts Ghost up. "I know where your stash houses are, where you keep your money, and most of all, who you do business with. I know who your enemies are."

"Then what the fuck is this?" Ghost is rocking frantically in his chair, trying to dislodge the zip ties around his wrists and ankles.

I move in closer, stopping behind Brooke and letting my hands curl around the back of the chair. A clear threat that Ghost quickly recognizes.

"Hey, what the fuck man? She's got nothing to do with this."

"Doesn't she?" I snarl and yank her chair backward, making her scream. "You used her to kidnap Cassidy. Right?" I can't fucking believe I didn't

listen to Cassidy, that I brushed off her concerns, her very real fears about this bitch.

Ghost snarls, “She’s not even your bitch, so what the fuck do you care?”

I grip Brooke’s hair and pull her head back. “Wrong answer, asshole.”

“Look, she was only supposed to get info about the MC. But your bitch shot one of my guys, and plans changed.” He laughs. “Can’t blame me for having a little fun.”

“Fun?” Lucky shouts, holding his hand out for the dagger that belongs to Ace. Lucky takes a step forward, gripping Ghost’s hair and holding him in place while plunging the dagger deep into his side. “Now, *that’s* fucking fun.”

Ghost screams in pain, letting out quick, shallow breaths to stop the pain. He laughs, rolling his eyes as if the pain is nothing. “Leave her out of it.” He struggles, but Lucky’s grip is tight.

I laugh. “You want us to leave a spy out of it? A woman who gave private company information to the enemy. Who pretended to be on the up and up and put an innocent person in danger?”

“She only did what I asked her to,” he says, gesturing at his woman. “You did good, baby.”

“I think your skanky little bitch has a lot to do with it.”

Ghost can’t hide his grunt when Lucky slowly pulls the blade from his side, blood seeping out and dripping around their feet. “That’s for scaring my woman,” he growls, plunging the dagger right into the bullet hole Cassidy put through him and yanking it out quickly.

This time, he doesn’t hold back the anguished roar. “Fuck!”

“That’s right, motherfucker,” Lucky growls. “Feel that shit.” He chuckles, and it turns into a laugh. “You don’t like it much, do ya?”

He shrugs. “Fuck you. Fuck all of you. Let her go, and let’s get on with this shit.”

“Let her go?” I ask when Lucky smacks the dagger in my palm. “Yeah, we’ll let her go, Ghost. Right now.” My hand tightens on Brooke’s hair, and she’s squirming and wiggling as if that’ll make a damn bit of difference.

“You won’t fuckin’ kill her. You pussies don’t kill women, remember?” He struggles, but Lucky is holding him, forcing him to watch.

“We don’t kill *innocent* women, but you made sure she wasn’t innocent, didn’t you? Just remember, Ghost, you did this to her.” Without any hesitation, I slide the blade across her throat from ear to ear, watching the look of horror and devastation on Ghost’s face as life drains from Brooke’s body.

“Monica!” he roars as if his horrified scream can stop the blood squirting down her body. “You motherfuckers. You’ll pay for this,” he threatens in vain.

“Maybe,” Ace says, stepping forward as Lucky releases the grip on Ghost. “Maybe we’ll pay for this. Maybe we won’t. It’s just too fucking bad you won’t be around to see it.”

Ghost opens his mouth to say something, but before he can utter one fucking syllable, Ace whips out his gun, presses it to Ghost’s forehead, and pulls the trigger. His head snaps back and then forward, propelled only by the force of the bullet before he stills.

Motionless.

Dead.

“Good fucking riddance.” Dix shakes his head, and a slow smile creeps across his face. “We ought to drop him in one of the fucking stash houses me and Banger emptied out today.”

But Ace shakes his head, a disturbing look in his eye. “No. We chop them up and burn every last trace. No evidence left behind.” Me, Lucky, and the probies are ordered to dispose of the bodies while Ace watches with satisfaction.

As the sun begins to rise, we finally finish the grisly work. My body is covered in a thick coat of blood and other ungodly fluids, and I’m desperate

for a shower.

Stone and Olly appear in the van, ready to transport the remains to a crematorium owned by one of Aria's shell companies. The smell of burning flesh fills the air as we watch the evidence of our ruthless actions disappear into ashes.

Another two down, so many more to go.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

CASSIDY

Aria stands near the truck, watching me with worry in her eyes. “Are you sure you want to take on this second load?”

We watch the guys doing double-time to get my truck ready to roll.

“It’s going to slow you down and extend your time away,” she says.

That’s exactly why I’m taking the extra load. “I’m sure. This is what I do, Aria. I’ll be fine unless you’re worried about something else?” I step aside so I’m not slowing down the guys loading the trailer. “Well?”

“After everything that happened yesterday, I don’t know how you can be fine.”

I smile. “I appreciate the concern, Aria, I really do.”

She shoots me a sheepish grin. “Why do I feel a *but* coming?”

“Because you’re smart?” We share an awkward laugh. “What happened yesterday is nothing compared to what I’ve been through,” I say with a wry smile, “so there’s no need to worry about me. Besides, the open road and time to myself is just what I need.”

The trailer is only half full, so I have at least another hour before I can leave Angel Harbor.

“Thank you,” Aria says eventually. “For last night and saving me. If you weren’t here, he probably would have killed me.”

“You’re welcome.” She’s probably right. Ghost is a crazy son of a bitch who gets off on hurting people. I have no doubt hurting someone who actually matters to the Reckless Souls would have gotten him hard instantly. “I’m just glad it all worked out.”

“I owe you,” she says, her tone suddenly serious and so at odds with the pale pink dress she wore with sparkling pink stilettos. “Anything you need, come to me. Day or night. I mean it, okay?”

“Sure. Okay,” I say, though I never intend to take her up on that offer.

“I don’t believe you, but I mean it.” She flashes a smile before walking away.

I turn my attention to the trailer and the guys loading it, silently willing them to hurry up.

A shadow crosses over me, and I don’t need to look up to know it’s Diesel. The air is charged between us, and his scent wraps around me, forcing me to face him.

“Diesel,” I say, keeping my voice low and even, with no traces of emotion.

“Hey, Cassidy. Can we talk?”

Now he wants to talk? It’s the last thing I want to do. “Go ahead. Talk.”

He sighs, “I owe you an apology, Cass. I’m sorry I didn’t believe you, that I didn’t listen to you.”

I shrug off his apology, not because I don’t believe it, but because it doesn’t

matter. “It’s fine, Diesel. Thanks for the apology.”

“Cass, please,” he sighs. “I was an asshole about the whole thing, and that wasn’t what I wanted. It isn’t what the fuck I want.”

I swallow because now we’re getting to the truth. “Okay, then. What is it that you want? You need me to accept your apology? Fine, I accept it. I think you’re sorry, and I appreciate that.”

“Uhm, we’re just gonna give you guys a minute.” One of the guys helping load the trailer looks between us, clearly uncomfortable.

“No! We’ll go someplace else. Sorry about that,” I say with a smile and walk away from the truck, Diesel close on my heels.

“Cassidy,” he growls and the deep sound rushes down my spine, producing goosebumps all over my skin. “What I want is you.”

His words stop me in my tracks and makes my heart leap, whether I want it to or not. *You totally want it to*, my heart taunts. I risk looking over my shoulder, and the affection and desire I see in his eyes catches my breath. “Me?”

“Yeah,” he grins, nodding as he circles me, not stopping until he’s standing in front of me, close enough that I can see the gold strands in his hazel eyes. “You, Cass. I want you. I like you a lot, and,” he sighs, rubbing a hand over his scruff.

“And what?”

“And I want you to come back to Angel Harbor when you’re not on the road. I want to be the one to make your return special, each and every time, Cassidy.”

My heart pounds like a jack hammer in my chest, his words everything I’ve ever wanted to hear from a man. I shake my head. “You don’t have to say this out of guilt. I’ve already forgiven you.”

“You don’t believe me?” He closes the distance between us and hooks one hand around the back of my neck, pulling me in until our foreheads meet. “I think you do believe me, and you’re scared.”

I scoff at his accusation, pulling away from him but not out of his grasp. I roll my eyes. “What do I have to be scared of?” Besides everything?

“I let you down. I know that, and I’ve been kicking my own ass since I came home and found you gone,” he says, the sound low and deep, and fuck me, so sexy. “I’m going to make it right.”

“And what if you can’t make it right?” I want to believe the words coming from his mouth because the truth is, I haven’t stopped thinking about him since I left Angel Harbor, but I can’t let myself believe him.

“I can,” he replies quickly and with certainty. “I know I can. You just have to give me a chance.”

Yes, please. “Why? Why should I trust you again? More important, why should I give you the chance to hurt me again?”

“That’s fair,” he answers, still gripping me like he’s scared to let me go, like if he blinks, I’ll be gone again. “I care about you, Cass. You care about me too, I know it. And you know as well as I do that we could be something really fucking good if we don’t fuck it up.”

“You think I care about you?” I do, but he can’t know that because I haven’t been obvious about it. Have I?

He shakes his head. “No, I don’t think you do. I know you do.” A slow grin spreads across his face. “You fucking adore me the way I adore you. I don’t even know when it happened, but the moment I found out you were kidnapped, all I wanted was to bring you back to me. And watching you walk away from me damn near killed me. That doesn’t happen to me, Cass, not ever. I’m not the guy who cares like that, not about anything but my MC. And now you.”

I open my mouth to deny his words, but he puts a finger over my lips, and rakes his hand through my hair, letting it linger.

“Don’t even fucking think about denying it, Cass. For now, you can lie to yourself, but don’t lie to me. I can see it in your eyes even now that you give a damn. I saw it last night in Aria’s office. The happiness and then the pain.”

I look away but not for long because he turns my chin back until I’m looking

in his eyes.

“Last night I had MC shit to take care of, and I couldn’t say everything I wanted to say in that moment. You deserve better than a fly-by apology, Cassidy.”

“Okay, maybe I *do* care about you, Diesel.” It’s more than maybe, and his stupid, sexy, smug smile says he knows it, too. “Dating a trucker isn’t easy.”

“Life ain’t easy, babe.”

“I’ll be gone a lot.”

He shrugs. “And you’ll be back. Maybe I’ll go on the road with you or meet you somewhere.”

“You have answers for everything, don’t you?”

He nods. “When I want something as bad as I want you, Cassidy, I find a way.”

My heart is pounding so hard I can hardly breathe, or maybe the look in his eyes makes me breathless. “I want you, too, Diesel.” The words rush out of me.

His grip tightens on my hair, and he gives me a gentle tug that I feel down my spine and between my thighs. “Prove it.”

“How?”

His lips curl into a mischievous smile. “Let me go on the road with you. Right now.”

My eyes go wide. “Right now? You had pretty serious MC stuff to handle last night.”

“It’s handled.”

“And your work at Morgan International?”

“They can do without me for a week or two. Let me go with you.”

Can I do this? *Yeah, I can.* Do I want to? *Hell, yeah, I do.* I gather my

courage and nod. “Okay, let’s do it.”

“The open road with my girl. This is gonna be fun.”

I soak it up, leaning into his embrace and succumbing to the intoxicating effects of his kisses. His tongue is magic, and it’s taking every ounce of willpower I have not to jump him right here, where everyone can see. It’s a kiss that holds a world of promises, and I’m not sure he can keep them or that I want him to, but I want time to figure it out.

Diesel pulls back slightly and pulls me against his chest before whispering in my ear. “Please tell me that cab has someplace we can celebrate.” He wiggles his eyebrows as if I don’t know what he’s asking.

I laugh. “It’s a tight fit, but yeah, we can christen it. Tonight, when we stop.”

His shoulders fall in disappointment. “Later?”

“Yep. We have a schedule to keep, so if you’re coming with me and we’re doing this —”

“—I am,” he growls. “We are.”

“Then get your sexy ass in gear because we leave in sixty. Grab some clothes and a toothbrush and come back to me.”

“Always,” he says, kissing me again, even deeper and more intense than the last kiss. “See you soon, Cass.”

“I’ll be here,” I call after him.

“And that’s the only fucking place I want to be.”

Good God, I must be crazy to agree to this. Two weeks on the road with a man? I’ll either kill him and bury him on the side of the road or worse, fall in love with him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

DIESEL

“Are you bored yet?” Cassidy laughs from her spot behind the big ass steering wheel. “I won’t be offended if you go back to Angel Harbor. Seriously.”

“I’m not bored,” I assure her, reaching over to grip her thigh. “It’s just weird as fuck to be this far from Angel Harbor.” As much as I love being here with Cassidy because the past few days have been incredible, the guilt is eating me alive. “And the guys are a man down,” I admit.

“It’s okay if you want to go back. I’ll meet you there when I’m done.” Her smile is sad, and I know she doesn’t want me to go, but she’s trying to do the right thing. “We’ve had a good few days together, haven’t we?”

“Better than good,” I admit. “Especially our first night in Texas.” I wiggle my

eyebrows, thinking about how wild we were for each other that night. It was equal parts release and relief from the past few hectic weeks. “And our first morning in Texas.”

She laughs, shaking her head. “And our second night in Texas?”

“Even better. But I like knowing that you, my big strong truck driver, is afraid of a teeny tiny little mouse.” I laugh at the outraged squeak she gives, thinking about how she’d freaked the fuck out at the sight of a little mouse. “It was cute.”

Her glare isn’t at all intimidating. “Cute. You did *not* just call me cute, did you?”

I laugh again. “You’re cute when you pretend to be tough.”

“I am tough,” she shoots back. “I didn’t run from you.”

“I’m not a mouse,” I assure her.

“You sure aren’t, are you?”

We ride in silence for a few minutes, and I turn to look at her. “You know, I’m really enjoying getting to know you, and that’s weird as fuck for me.”

She smiles, taking the exit as we arrive in Jackson, Mississippi, where we’ll stop for the night. “You don’t usually enjoy getting to know women?”

I shrug. “Not really. My life has been all about me. But you...you’re like the first real woman I’ve ever met who has a good head on her shoulders. Smarts, ambition, looks. You’ve got everything.”

Cassidy nods knowingly. “Thank you. I don’t think anyone but my mom and dad have ever said something so sweet to me.”

“I want to know everything about you, Cassidy.”

“Like the first boy I kissed was Rafael Esparza?”

“I hate him already,” I growl.

“Then you’ll really hate Bret Ellis. Beautiful blond-headed man with big blue eyes and magic fingers. Punched my v-card with him.”

“I’ll kill him.” My lips curl into a reluctant smile. “So you have a thing for blonds?”

“No, not really. It seems these days I have a thing for you,” she teases as we pull into the truck stop.

The hum of the big rig fades as I watch Cassidy maneuver us smoothly into the truck stop. There’s something about the way she handles this beast of a machine that just does it for me. “You know how insanely sexy it is watching you drive this thing?” I tell her, my voice rough with a mix of admiration and something a bit more primal.

She shoots me a wink and sends my pulse racing. “You can show me how much later. Right now, I’m starving,” she says as we lock up the cab and head toward the restaurant.

I wrap an arm around her and feel a sense of pride walking in with her. “So, what are you in the mood for, baby girl?”

She gives me a look that’s all sass and mischief. “Something warm, thick, and juicy.”

A laugh escapes as my mind goes straight to the gutter. “Got that covered right here, but I meant food.”

“I know what you meant,” she says, her eyes sparkling with humor. “Did you see that burger on the menu board?”

We settle into a booth, and the waitress comes by with ice water, taking our order. I lean back, watching Cassidy with a sense of contentment I haven’t felt in a long time.

I watch Cassidy attack her burger with an enjoyment that matches mine. “This is amazing,” I comment, the flavors of the burger hitting all the right notes.

She nods in agreement, a playful smirk on her face. “Bet you didn’t expect truck stop food to be this good.”

“Nah, I knew it’d be good, but this is next level.” I take another bite, savoring it.

I'm halfway through my burger when Cassidy looks me dead in the eyes. "So, who's Layla? She seems...interesting."

I pause, burger in hand, and meet her gaze. "Layla? She's nobody. You have absolutely nothing to worry about."

Cassidy chews thoughtfully, not quite convinced. "She was pretty snarky to me. You two...you're done, right?"

I chuckle, setting my burger down. "Layla's like a fucking fly on the fourth of July—annoying but harmless."

Her eyes search mine, looking for something more. "I just want to be sure. I don't do well with... leftovers."

I reach across the table, covering her hand with mine. "Cassidy, you're not a leftover. You're the main course, the prime cut. Layla was just a convenience."

"Ouch," she says, wincing at my brutal honesty.

I shrug to avoid her disapproving gaze. "It's the truth. She's nothing more than a club whore." My stomach turns at the thought of Layla's hands on me.

"An itch to scratch?"

I nod. "You pissed?"

"Not as long as I don't have to throat punch her," she adds with a smile, ordering a soda-to-go from the waitress. "I don't, do I?"

"Nah. Ace sent her to work at one of the other MC businesses, so she won't be a problem anymore."

Relief washes over Cassidy's face, and she squeezes my hand in return. "Good," she says softly. "Because I won't be anyone's second choice."

"Cassidy, you will never be my second choice."

"Good. I'm happy you say that. So next question."

"Anything you want to know," I tell her honestly.

“Did you become a biker because you wanted to tinker with engines or because you wanted to whoop ass?”

That’s an easy answer, and I flash her a flirtatious smile, leaning across the table. “Yes.”

“So, you’re a bad boy down to your core?”

“Does that turn you on, Cass, bad boys?”

Cassidy lets out a little laugh and says, “You turn me on. Bad boy.”

In that moment, I know, without a fucking doubt in my mind, that I love this girl. I can’t tell her now, of course. It’s too soon. But I will.

Soon.

“Hey, where’d you go?” She waves both hands in front of my face.

I blink and flash another smile. “I was just thinking how much I like being with you. Even when I’m not fucking you.”

Her smile goes so fucking wide it illuminates the inside of the restaurant. “That is, without a doubt, the weirdest and sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

“Thanks?”

Her laughter sounds again, drawing a few stares, but she’s oblivious because her gaze is on me. “You’re welcome. And thank you, again, for saving me.” She lifts her soda into the air. “To white knights on motorcycles.”

“And the beautiful damsel in the eighteen-wheeler.”

“And the ooey-gooey-on-the-inside bad boy who saved her.”

I tap my soda glass to her paper cup. “Cheers, baby! I love the way you think.”

It’s not the only thing I love, but any more and it might scare her away.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

CASSIDY

“Come on, let’s get a room. You up for spending a night or two in Atlanta before we head back?”

“More hours with you and a day or two not on the highway? Fuck yes, please.”

We arrive at the hotel twenty minutes later, storming into the room without a care in the world. “I could really use a shower,” I say, already kicking off my shoes and shoving my jeans off as quick as I can.

“Want some company?” Diesel flashes that panty-melting grin that makes my heart beat a little faster before licking his lips.

I freeze, smiling at him with a quick shake of my head. “Nah, I’m good.”

“Not fair,” he growls, undressing quickly and rushing to the bathroom, where steam fills the room.

Seconds later, I saunter in wearing nothing but a smile. “Is the water warm?”

“Tease,” he laughs in surprise. “Only one way to find out.” He wiggles his eyebrows, licking his lips with a predatory gaze.

I step under the shower first, and Diesel is right behind me, his chest against my back as the hot spray beats on us both. “Damn, this water is fucking perfect.”

“Just like you.” Diesel growls the words, nipping at my ear.

I tilt my head back, moaning when he kisses me all over, from my mouth to my neck and across my shoulder. “You’re wicked.”

“Don’t you forget it, babe.” His hands land on my hips, sliding up to my slick tits, cupping them in his strong hands. “I can’t get enough of you, Cass.”

“It’s a good thing you don’t have to,” I whisper, leaning against his shoulder while his big, capable hands massage my tits. “That’s nice. Really fucking nice.”

His hands never let up, kneading the soft flesh of my belly before dipping between my thighs, where he finds me wet and swollen. “Fuck, Cassidy.”

“It’s been too long,” I moan, pushing my hips forward so his fingers take me exactly where I want to go.

“Since last night?” he laughs.

“That’s too long for me.”

“You’re so fucking wet, dirty girl. Tell me it’s all for me, Cassidy.”

I shiver, and my head falls back as my eyes flutter shut. “It’s all for you, Diesel.” His fingers tease my clit before sliding inside, a hard thrust that has me moaning his name as water cascades down on both of us. “Oh fuck, don’t stop.”

“Don’t worry, babe. I won’t ever fucking stop.”

He curls his fingers in just right, hitting the spot deep inside that makes me see stars. “Diesel. I’m going to —”

The world spins, and my pussy clenches around his fingers as I come all over his hand. “Fuck, Diesel, shit!”

He releases me from his hold, leaving me trembling against the cold tile of the shower wall before he picks me up and slides me down on his cock. “Fuck, Cassidy,” he groans out, burying himself to the hilt. “You feel so fucking good, baby.”

Gripping my thighs for leverage, Diesel begins to move, sliding in and out of my aching cunt in a fast rhythm. “Fuck yeah, baby. Fuck me like you mean it.”

“That’s it, baby, keep those pretty legs wrapped around me.” His thrusts become erratic now, and I know he's close to finding his own release. “Fuck me, Cassidy. Shit, that feels so fucking good.”

I moan as another orgasm builds inside me. My nails dig into his back, my body tensing as he pounds into me relentlessly. Water splashes against us, and our skin slaps together in a delicious symphony of lust and need. “I’m going to come again, Diesel!” I pant out.

“Fuck yeah, babe! Come with me.”

“Oh fuck! Oh, fucking fuck. Right there,” I moan through gritted teeth. “Harder, Diesel. Yes! Yes!”

He obliges, slamming into me with abandon until my toes curl and my nails dig into his biceps. The orgasm hits me like a freight train, stealing my breath away as I see stars behind my closed eyelids.

“Fuck, baby!” he grunts out as he comes inside me, collapsing against my wet body.

We stand there, panting and spent, until the water starts to turn cold. Finally, Diesel grabs a big fluffy towel and carries me to the bed.

Diesel lays the towel down on the bed and sets me down, pinning me to the bed, and spreads my thighs with his broad shoulders. His tongue dances

across my pussy, flicking and nibbling until I'm teetering on the edge of another orgasm. The sensation is electric, sending jolts of pleasure through every nerve in my body. "Damn, Diesel. You're like the energizer bunny," I gasp.

I can feel his lips curl into a smirk against my skin as he presses my hips firmly into the bed. "Keep going, babe. Come on my face," he growls.

My hips buck wildly, overwhelmed by the intensity of his touch. "Fuck!" I cry out, unable to contain myself any longer.

But Diesel isn't done yet. He rises to his feet and grips his cock in his hand, stroking it. "You want some of this?"

I'm so worn out I can barely breathe, but I nod anyway.

Then he drives deep inside of me once again. His cock pounds into me relentlessly as he claims me as his own. "This pussy is mine," he grunts.

Our gazes lock as we move together in perfect harmony. "Yours," I moan.

Diesel squeezes my nipples with a firm grip as he continues to thrust into me with fervor. "Mine," he declares, the word punctuated by a powerful thrust that sends waves of ecstasy through my body.

"Always," I smile up at him, my body hot and clamping around him. "Always yours."

"Damn fucking right you are." He collapses on top of me, and I wrap my legs around him, locking my ankles.

I feel like I've been his for a lifetime instead of just a few weeks. This can't possibly be real, this dream sequence I'm in, traveling the country with a sexy as fuck biker, falling deeper for him. "This is unreal."

"I'm real," he whispers, kissing one side of my neck. "You're real." He kisses the other side. "Feels pretty fucking real to me."

It's the most real thing I've ever felt in my whole damn life, and it terrifies me, but I want it. More than I have ever wanted a man in my whole life. "I love this, Diesel, being here with you like this."

He pulls back, flashing that panty-melting smile at me. “I love you, Cassidy.” He freezes, and a look of panic crosses his face. “I, um...*shit*.”

I try for a smile, but my heart pounds against my chest. “You don’t mean it?”

“Fuck yeah, I mean it, Cass. I love you. I *mean* it. I just didn’t plan on blurting it out like that.”

“Yeah?” My heart swells, and my fingers slide through his overgrown hair, massaging his scalp. “How did you plan on telling me that you’re in love with me?”

“Not while my cock is buried inside of you.”

I can’t help the laugh bubbling out of me. “Definitely makes for a receptive audience,” I tease, feeling happy and full of love. Gripping his hair tight, I pull him down for another scorching kiss that I feel down to my soul. “And I don’t need a grand gesture, Diesel, not if you really mean it.”

“I fucking mean it. I love you. I’m so fucking in love with you, woman.”

“I am so fucking in love with you, too, Diesel.”

EPILOGUE

DIESEL

It feels strange being back in Angel Harbor after almost two weeks away. It's the longest time I've been away since I came to town. Though I'm happy to be back, I'm a little sad to see my time on the road with Cassidy come to an end. These past couple of weeks with her have been better than I could have possibly imagined.

They say familiarity breeds contempt, but the truth is that being with her nonstop has produced the opposite results. Fuck contempt, I'm addicted to my woman. She's everything that I would have put into making my dream woman and more. Our time on the road solidified exactly what I suspected was true, but now that we're home, I'm certain it's true.

"Wow, that silence is loaded," she says with a grin. "What's swirling around in that pretty head of yours?"

I glare at Cassidy, but she tosses her head back and laughs. "Just that it's

weird to be home.”

She nods. “Yeah, it always feels weird to come back. Like you have to get used to things again, remember life in one spot. You’ll be fine.”

“Maybe,” I growl as she pulls her rig into the parking lot of Morgan International, reaching out and wrapping a lock of her hair around my finger. “You’re here.”

“I am,” she smiles brightly at me. “Does that make it better?”

“Hell, yeah.” Just being with her makes everything better. The past weeks with her have only made me more certain about her, about how I feel about her. And us. “You make every-fucking-thing better, Cass.”

Her smile is sweet and sexy, a little bit shy like it gets whenever I tell her I love her or love having her close.

“Diesel,” she purrs.

“When you get all shy like that, it makes me want to spin you around and slide my dick deep inside until you’re moaning my name.”

“Yes, please,” she moans, turning to me and biting my shoulder.

“Later,” I say, smacking her ass, loving the way she squeals with a mixture of desire and excitement. “Come on. Let’s get this rig checked in.”

It’s late, the lights are off, and the doors are locked at Morgan, meaning nobody is expecting us. We have another night together, undisturbed, and that’s exactly what I want. Hell, it’s what I need now that I know how important Cassidy is to me.

“We going to your place?” Her lips curl into a teasing grin.

“Is that what you want?”

“You know it is, Diesel. Wherever you are is exactly where I wanna be.” She lays her head on my shoulder as we cross the parking lot, backpacks slung over our shoulders until we’re in front of my bike.

I take her home and show her in six different ways how much she means to me before we collapse on my bed, curling up together to rest before I take her

again because I just can't get enough of her.

We wake up late the next morning, and the first thing I can feel is the tightening in my chest because she's leaving again. Today. Our time together is great, but it's not enough. I need more of her. I crave more time with her, but I can't stop her. This is her job.

"There you go," she moans, stretching her arms and legs beside me. "Thinking so hard I can hear the gears churning in your head."

"I don't want you to go," I admit.

"I don't want to leave you either, but just think of how great it'll be when I come back." She kisses my jaw, wrapping her body around me.

"I'm already planning it," I tell her, turning to her and pulling her on top of me. "I'm going to miss you."

"They say absence makes the heart grow fonder."

"Impossible," I shoot back, making her smile. "But I have a plan for today before you head back out."

"Yeah?" Her smile grows brighter.

"Fuck yeah."

She pushes against my chest until she's sitting astride me, rubbing her wet pussy along the length of my morning wood. "Okay, I'm in. But if there's no food, there will be no goodbye sex." I thrust up against her, and her eyes flutter shut.

By the time we actually make it out of bed and out of the door, it's early afternoon. We get on my bike and our first stop is Ace Motors. "I want to show you something," I respond to the question swimming in her eyes.

She gasps, rushing to the front door. "Are you taking me for a drive-in the Shelby?" She goes straight to the car, running a gentle finger along the body while circling the car.

"Not yet."

She stops and looks up at me. "Yet?"

I nod. “The old dude who asked me to fix it up wants to sell it.”

“No! Why?” She returns her gaze back to the car reverently.

“He wanted me to fix it up for his fiftieth wedding anniversary. He and his wife had their first date in this car. A drive-in movie.”

“Fuck, that is so sweet.” She shakes her head, blinking away tears she’s pretending I can’t see. “But why sell it?”

I sigh heavily. “She passed recently, and he can’t bear to look at it anymore. Reminds him too much of her. He says it’s a young man’s car, and since I was a little fangirl when he brought her in, he’s giving me first refusal. What do you think?”

Cassidy stares at the car for a long time before circling it again and stopping right in front of me. “If you don’t want it, I do.”

My lips curl into a teasing grin. “I was thinking that we could work on it together. Fix it up and make it ours?”

Cassidy takes a step back like the wind has been knocked out of her. “Seriously?”

My brows dip. “Is that a shitty idea?”

“No, I’m just surprised. I would love to grab a wrench and get dirty with you under the hood of this beauty!” She wraps her arms around me, hugging me tight. “What an awesome idea. I love it!”

“That’s really fucking cool, babe, because I love you.”

She gasps. “I love you too.”

“Good, then hurry back to me.” I kiss her long and slow right there up against the Shelby, enjoying the way her fingers tangle in my hair, and she presses her body against mine.

“For the first time, I can’t wait to come back to someone.”

I kiss her again and pull back. “Come on. I promised you food.”

“Stop talking dirty to me,” she laughs, clasping our hands together.

“Never.” I laugh and strap the helmet on her head, loving the way she presses her whole body against mine when she’s on the back of my bike. A quick stop for food, and we’re back at Morgan International, sitting inside her truck and looking out over the harbor.

“This is nice,” she says when her burger is almost gone. “Really nice. Peaceful.”

“Yeah,” I say because I don’t know what the fuck else to say. This kind of peace is foreign to me and more with a woman at my side. Cassidy doesn’t feel the need to fill a comfortable silence or talk for the sake of talking, she’s wild and she’s chill. I like her.

The silence extends, both of us content to focus on the waves bouncing off each other, the late afternoon sun glinting off each crest.

“I meant what I said,” she begins out of nowhere. “I love you, Diesel, and I think you’re right. We can be something spectacular if that’s what we want. Is that what you want?”

The weight that’s been pressing down on my chest evaporates, and I’m left with a lightness that feels a hell of a lot like happiness. “It’s all that I want.” I pause. “Well, not all.”

Her brows arch, and I can’t help but laugh.

“I want you to move in with me, Cass. Make Angel Harbor your home base. Make my home, *our* home.”

She freezes for a long moment, her gaze fixed on my own before, seconds later, she launches herself onto my lap, kissing me all over. “You don’t think it’s too soon?” She nibbles her lips as if she’s worried I might actually think it is too soon.

“We just spent two weeks together in a sardine can, I think if we can survive that, we’re ready for this. Is it something *you* want?”

Her nod is quick, eager. “I wanna be with you, morning, noon and night. And yeah, every shower in between,” she says, a wicked smile playing on her lips. “I fucking love you, Cass.”

Her reply is instant, fierce. “I fucking love you too.” Then we’re all over each other, tangled up, crashing into the back of the cab, trying to get closer than skin allows, the rest of everything—our abandoned burgers included—fading into nothing.

It’s like everything outside us is burning down.

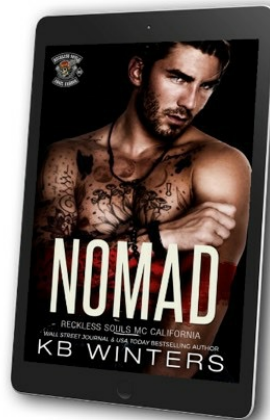
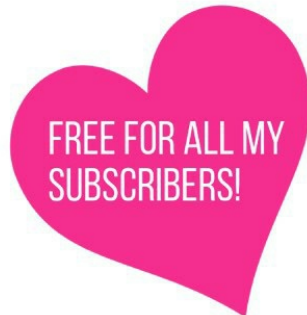
Because in Angel Harbor, it feels like it actually is. But here’s the thing—I’ll kill anyone or anything that tries to take her away from me.

And that’s a promise.

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THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Thank you so much for reading my books! It means the world to me and I appreciate all of you!
If you can leave a review, or even tell your friends, I'd be honored.
Thanks to all of my beta readers, ARC readers and [Facebook](#) fans. Y'all are *THE VERY BEST!*
And a very special thanks to Helen. You are a Godsend. Thank you for making my words make sense.
A huge shout out to the fam bam who has to put up with me at all hours of the night.
I love you all.

Hugs!
KB xoxo



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KB Winters is a Wall Street Journal and USA Today Bestselling Author of steamy hot books about Bikers, Billionaires, Bad Boys and Badass Military Men.

Just the way you like them.

She has an addiction to caffeine, tattoos and hard-bodied alpha males. The men in her books are very sexy, protective and sometimes bossy, her ladies are...well...*bossier!*

Living in sunny southern California, this embarrassingly hopeless romantic writes every chance she gets!

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