



HAIDEE

LADIES OF THE MC

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

CREA REITAN

Hadise

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DRAGON FIRE FANTASY

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Haidee

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 Created with Vellum

Welcome to my first MC book. What you'll find within these pages is a whole lot of dark and dreary, heavy plot, and some kink to go with it. This book takes place within the demon states, a place that is heavily if not exclusively inhabited by demons. There are other species here from time to time, but not often.

Demons are volatile and can be violent but usually, that's the energy they give off to those around them while living among themselves they can be domestic and peaceful.

While the main character of this story is female, the steam is almost exclusively MM. There is a very clear reason for this that will be made apparent early on. While I'd intended for our girl to get some good lovin', it just didn't make sense for her character. When I say she's lived a traumatic life, I mean that.

Within these pages you'll find reference to past rape, the threat of rape, trafficking, the sale and acquisition of people, abduction, abuse, lots and lots of blood, gore, and death (to the right people). You'll also find rope play, orgasm denial, restraint, breath play, blood play, and a few more questionably gray areas of sexy time.

Having said that, this is not a single-lady-gets-all-the-men story. This is a polyamorous romance, a whychoose book that concentrates on all relationships being equal and just as important as each man's is with our female lead.

If anything that you just read bothers you, it isn't what you're interested in, or you find might be triggering, please do not read this book. Otherwise, enjoy this story of fear and new life!

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Sadist Soul



My eyes narrowed on Shimmer as he, once again, argued for something stupid and bloodthirsty with no reason behind it. I tried not to look at him because I knew I wouldn't be able to keep the irritation off my face if I had to look at his.

Instead, I concentrated on Denial. He was a master at keeping a neutral expression, never letting anyone know what he was thinking unless the words came out of his mouth. Even then, with his even tone and the inability to get a rise out of him, it was completely possible that he was lying. His poker face was on point.

But I knew him. I could read his eyes in a way very few could. And his dark blue gaze, pinned on mine, said one thing—he really hated the vice president.

Sighing inwardly, I agreed. There were reasons I kept Shimmer in the position he was in without argument. My crew was split in two. Those who wanted to keep things barbaric without any growth—Shimmer and his followers—and those who wanted progress.

Meanwhile, while we had our issues in-house, the rest of Ash Hollow could feel the turmoil. Our borders were getting sloppy. Other crews were moving in, trying to claim our territory, inch by fucking inch. And we couldn't stop arguing about dumb shit. Like who let their ol' lady put the seat down.

"It's not a rule," Secret said, blandly, his fingers tapping on the black book. As the keeper of the rules, he would know. I appreciated that this demon had my back, and was not a crony of Shimmer's.

But as I studied the room, I thought that maybe half the crew would solidly stand behind me; while a little less than half had Shimmer's outlook. And the handful remaining just wanted to ride and were thinking that this whole club thing was more of a hassle than it was worth.

These days, I didn't blame them. They were right.

But I was going to change that. I was going to change it all. Ash Hollow has been falling into chaos for a decade now. When I took over the presidency of the Dirty Devils, I swore that I'd change that. I'd secure our spot as owners of this territory. I'd make sure that this club was respected and feared. Then I'd grow our club. Secure our reach. And make sure everyone paid their fucking taxes.

But I was also about being fair. Ruling by fear is one thing. But when your minions are so afraid of you they'd just as readily turn you over to your enemy to save their own skin for even a smidgen of promised reprieve from the terror they live in, you're no longer truly in charge.

I didn't realize that progress was going to be like pulling fucking demon teeth. Those bitches had roots that were welded in.

Shimmer thought that to fix these issues, the rules and consequences needed to be stricter. More severe punishments. Longer sentences. He thought cruelty was the way to go. Make them live in such poor conditions that they wouldn't have a choice but to submit.

What he didn't want to hear was that if he had it his way, they'd be the first to share any weakness we may have. Exploit any sign of animosity within our ranks. And that fault line was beginning to show outside of the clubhouse.

"Enough," I said, having listened to Shimmer bitch for the last ten minutes. Shimmer quieted, but he glared at me as if he could kill me with a look. Too bad for him, that wasn't in his power. But it was in mine. When I met his eyes, he flinched at the pain I caused him. And that was why he shut up. And why he feared me.

Taking a frustrated breath, I sat forward. "We can raise the taxes," I said. "All in favor of a 2% increase, say ay."

It wasn't unanimous. Soon, the protection tax would be too high for the citizens of Ash Hollow to afford. And that meant they'd leave. The more that left, the less funding we had, and the more rebellion we had from those who stayed.

Though not everyone agreed, enough did that the tax was now up to 36%

of all wages on every resident in Ash Hollow.

“Settled,” I said.

Before I could speak further, the door burst open, and Licks stood there, eyes wide. “I’m sorry,” he said. “You said to come if there was an emergency.” His gaze was on Shimmer. His sponsor. I already wasn’t a fan of this kid.

“What is it?” Shimmer hissed, anger flaring in his eyes.

Licks flinched. “There are some Sticks and Bones in the back alley. Messing with a family there that doesn’t have a target on their door.”

He didn’t have to say it. If Sticks and Bones were in the back alley, they were very, very far from the border. Only further evidence that the Dirty Demons weren’t as feared by opposing crews in neighboring cities as it should be.

But that’s not what Shimmer and his cronies heard. They heard the challenge, alright. But not the reason behind it.

“Go,” I snapped.

Shimmer leaped over the table and plowed down Licks on his way out. The others followed as I got to my feet. Sticks and Bones wouldn’t be here in full force. But as I thought this, I wondered if maybe they would be. Maybe they were here to try to put an end to the Dirty Demons.

The bitter part of me thought maybe they should succeed. At least a little. Give Shimmer an ass kicking he wouldn’t soon forget.

But Shimmer was a flashy fucker. A strong demon. And thus why I keep him close. He *is* strong. And therefore, he needed to be watched.

I wasn’t in a hurry to get there. I knew that by brute force alone, we’d push all the Sticks and Bones out of our city. They might be the bigger crew, and ballsy to boot, but their demons weren’t as powerful as mine. That fact alone was the reason we kept Ash Hollow.

But sooner than I’d care to admit, that wouldn’t be enough. Sticks and Bones to the north were always slipping into our territory. Looking for a flaw. Any frail, vulnerable crack in our stronghold. And those cracks were beginning to show.

Maple Roots to the south and east, and then KOK Suckers to the west were equally pushy, but smarter than Sticks and Bones. They were waiting and watching in the wings. Waiting for shit to go down between Dirty Demons and Sticks and Bones. Something bad enough to weaken both crews so that the two remaining crews could come in, take us both out, and split the

territory.

“That went well,” Denial said; his tone was light. Even. As usual. But I could see the irritation burning in his eyes.

“Mm,” I answered.

This hadn’t been a true gathering, as we were missing a handful of our members. Church would be held in a few days. But Shimmer was becoming more vocal and nearly outright belligerent about stupid shit, so I needed to appease him.

At one point, just letting him rant had been enough, so he knew he was being heard, even if he didn’t get his way. When it became apparent that he was being ignored, that was no longer enough. But I wasn’t going to fine or punish one of my demons for something stupid like their ol’ lady putting a toilet seat down.

It’s that petty bullshit that really pissed me off. If it wasn’t specifically against the rules, I’d just kill Shimmer, dispose of his body, and be done with this rebellion. Unfortunately, because of something that happened in Dirty Devil’s past that I’m not fully aware of, that exact scenario is explicitly forbidden.

“Raise in taxes is not going to go over well,” Bone Breaker said as he strode up on Denial’s other side. Denial gave him a bland smile.

“Where’s Bounce?” I asked.

“He went with Shimmer to keep his stupid ass under control. Sweet Love is with him.”

Bounce and Bone Breaker were my enforcers. Big, bulking demons who could crush anything. And they could get bigger than the image that they normally put out. Which I believe was one of the only reasons Shimmer never outright challenged either of them.

Sweet Love was just that. The sweetest damn demon I’d ever met. It’s nearly sickening. But he also likes peace among the crew. He knew that we were supposed to be family. Our bickering should be like that between siblings. Not hostile. Not conspiratorially. So, he was willing to look beyond his need for peace to use his means to set those who were stepping out of line back on their path.

Really, he should be an enforcer too. But I already had two who were so in sync with each other; it was both mesmerizing and frightening to see. Pretty sure that was from years of being lovers.

Instead, Sweet Love remained our Road Captain.

The only reason Shimmer wasn't more of an issue than he was and could be forced to back down was because the strongest demons on the crew were loyal to me and me alone. They could not be swayed, bribed, or bullied otherwise.

Shimmer learned that the hard way. He probated for four months because of it. You'd think he'd have learned his lesson.

Not so.

"I think we need to talk about him more seriously," Denial said as we stepped outside. Though the back alley that Licks spoke of was nearly a mile away—and eight miles from the fucking city border—we could already hear the chaos of the fight. I sighed in frustration. We didn't need this right now. "We need to make a contingency plan."

I nodded. "Agreed. We can talk later." Meeting his gaze and then Bone Breaker's, they nodded. Then we jogged down the streets, shuttered up by concerned and fearful residents until we got to the fray.

Sticks and Bones came with more than I thought they would. And yet, not in such force that they were a true challenge. They were here to annoy. To test us. What we really should be doing is showing a united front.

Instead, there was Shimmer and company working together and then those who didn't want to work with Shimmer. Both sides were efficient, but they also got in each other's way. Snapping at each other. Growling and snarling amongst themselves. Something that Sticks and Bones didn't miss.

A frustrated growl left me as I scrubbed my hand down my face. What the actual fuck is wrong with these demons?!

I didn't join, though. I didn't need to. Watching as Denial and Bone Breaker joined the fight, I leaned against the wall at the end of the alley we just ran through. Studying them. Watching the way Shimmer moved. How he flashed in and out of positions, appearing just a few feet away.

He'd be a lot more dangerous with that skill if he learned not to flash like a damned rocket before he used it. I'd heard many brothers offer to help him hone it, but he was far too arrogant to take anyone up on that offer. Instead, he gave away his own weaknesses.

Especially when you watched him long enough and could predict the position he'd show up in based on the way he shimmered. Three steps to the left. Unfortunately for him, the demon he'd been fighting had either learned it already or knew it. He shifted three steps to his right and slammed his fist into Shimmer's skull before he'd ever fully appeared there.

Shimmer stumbled backwards, snarling.

I should have been angry. Angry at the man who'd hurt one of my crew. My vice president. But I hoped that he'd land a few more blows. Since I wasn't allowed to knock some sense into Shimmer physically, perhaps someone else could.

Doubtful, but it was still worth hoping for.

I was going to get Ash Hollow under control. To do that, I needed to fix Dirty Demons. And I would. But that change needed to begin with Shimmer. Therein laid my problem.

Orehid



While the clubhouse wasn't specifically designated for us to live there, the set of apartments out back was where I usually stayed. It kept me close to the clubhouse. Close to Bounce and Bone Breaker. And close to the president.

It's not that I was crushing on them or anything. I mean, yeah, I was on Bounce, but that's fine. We're good together. I don't even mind that I'm his side piece. Actually, I kind of liked it.

The apartment I stayed in was a one room. I didn't need anything bigger. A bedroom, bathroom, and living area with a small kitchenette. My only complaint was the small kitchenette. I loved to cook, and it was difficult when I didn't have somewhere to do so.

Not that I couldn't use the kitchen at the clubhouse. It was enormous, with a six-burner stove and two wall ovens. But Shimmer was always there. Which meant I didn't want to be there often. He was a black, angry cloud that I'd rather not be around.

The only reason he left me alone was because I played with the big boys. AKA, Dirty Devil's enforcers. They were my friends first and foremost. It had only become a bit extra these last few months with Bounce. I wasn't complaining in the least.

A knock on my door before it opened made me look up. I smiled as Bounce stepped inside. He was tall, dark, and broody with a broad chest and arms. His smile was even dark. "Ready?" he asked.

I nodded, getting to my feet. Slipping into my boots, I met him at the

door. Instead of letting me through, he wrapped an arm around my waist and pulled me in. I grinned against his mouth when his lips touched mine.

“You’ve been hiding,” he accused. A pout in his voice, which I grinned at since it was damn adorable for such a big demon to pout.

“Nah,” I said. “You know I’m here when I’m not at the clubhouse.”

He sighed and scowled. “We’re going to do something about him.”

There was no need for either of us to name the reason I didn’t hang out at the clubhouse more often. It went without saying. He was the reason many of us didn’t hang out there often anymore.

I shrugged, though I hoped it was true.

Bounce kissed me again, tracing my lips with his tongue. I didn’t open for him; because if I did, we’d never leave my apartment. Instead, I smiled against him and wrapped my arms around his neck. I wasn’t overly small for a demon, but I was smaller than Bounce, something I really enjoyed. The arms he wrapped around me held me secure as he stood straight, pulling my feet off the ground. He grinned at me.

I think it was me being smaller than him that first made him look at me differently. Bounce and Bone Breaker were matched in stature. In height, bulk, and density. Though I’ve never asked, I thought that the reason Bounce got with me and Bone Breaker took Denial to bed was that Denial and I were both smaller than them.

Although, I often wondered why they didn’t find someone to share.

“Come on. Before Bony comes tracking us down,” I said, tapping his big biceps so he’d set me down again. He kissed me before he did and shut my door behind him as I stepped outside.

Bone Breaker was already at the bikes waiting for us. He rolled his eyes when he saw us coming and made a show of checking the watch that he didn’t have on his wrist.

“Hush,” Bounce said as he swung his leg over his ride. “I didn’t say anything when I had to wait for you this morning.”

“The fuck you didn’t,” Bone Breaker said, flashing me a grin.

I liked that they were both my friends. My best friends. I’d been concerned when Bounce and I changed the dynamic of our relationship that it might impact the three of us. I wasn’t sure that Bone Breaker would be okay with it, despite them both assuring me he wouldn’t care. And then, would it be awkward when the three of us hung out or worked together? Would I start to get jealous when I saw them together, even though I’ve seen them together

since the day we met?

That nothing between us changed was my favorite thing.

“Where to?” I asked before we fired up the loud engines.

“Pebble Street,” Bounce said. “Everyone should have gotten notice of their tax increase notice by now. Time to collect.”

While I’d argued that it would probably be easier for residents if we collect taxes weekly, giving them less time to spend it and therefore not have it when the time came, I was outvoted. Mostly led by Shimmer. Because, in his opinion, we weren’t here to make life easier for Ash Hollow. We were here to rule over it.

The words never left my head, ever, but that’s not what *I* was here for. I didn’t want to be taxed or live in fear. That’s why I joined Dirty Demons.

I nodded at him, and we started our bikes, the roar filling the air and bouncing off the brick and concrete buildings surrounding us. Bone Breaker took off first, and I followed until I was riding next to him but slightly behind. While Bounce took up the rear.

Pebble Street was half a mile from the clubhouse, but we didn’t take the direct route. It was nice just to ride sometimes. Let the wind grab at your hair and cut. Bite at your bare skin. To allow the roar of the engines to fill your ears.

It was easier to maneuver when it was just the three of us and not the whole crew. Not that I didn’t enjoy riding with everyone. I’d like it better if I could choose who was in the crew, but I suspected everyone felt that way.

When we finally turned onto Pebble Street ten minutes later, we parked at the end and shut off the bikes. We’d move up one side and back down the other. I pulled the clipboard from under my seat and followed Bounce and Bone Breaker to the first door.

I marked the number on my sheet and waited for the door to be answered. The demon there handed Bounce an envelope, waited for him to count it and nod with a wide grin, before she rushed back inside and shut the door. Then I heard the distinct snap of a lock.

Not that it would keep us out.

Bounce turned with a pretend pout. “I smiled and everything,” he complained, handing Bone Breaker the envelope of cash.

He chuckled, cupping Bounce’s cheek. “I know, honey. Just keep being cute. Someone will smile back eventually.” He kissed Bounce’s lips quickly before patting his cheek and moving down to the next house.

Bounce grinned at me, winking. I smiled back and marked that number three had paid in full.

The next two houses were much the same. Quick answer at the door, payment, confirmation, and ducking back inside.

“They know we’re not going to hurt them, right?” Bounce asked, frowning again.

“We’re not the only ones who collect taxes,” I said.

Though the task was below Shimmer’s self-appointed importance, it wasn’t for all his minions. I could only imagine how they collected taxes.

It wasn’t until the fourth house that we encountered the first issue. The demon opened the door and handed Bounce an envelope. Bounce counted and shook his head when he looked up.

“You can’t just raise taxes for no reason,” the demon argued, voice tight. “We don’t have that kind of money.”

Bounce tilted his head to the side, waiting for me to check my records. I thumbed through my sheets until I could cross-reference street and house number with household income. When I looked up, the demon’s face paled.

“Fine,” he snapped. “We *shouldn’t have* to pay that kind of money for no reason. There’s more of us than there are of you.”

The way he sneered at Bounce made Bounce sigh. “Very well.”

The demon in the door’s eyes went wide in surprise, thinking that remark was Bounce giving in. Agreeing to let him pay less. But when Bounce’s hand was suddenly around the demon’s neck and he was dragged from his house and to the front lawn, he realized his mistake.

While I watched Bounce make sure this man knew exactly who called the shots in Ash Hollow, Bone Breaker walked jovially inside his house. A bounce in his step and whistling something jaunty. I shook my head.

They don’t necessarily look alike, but because they’re together all the time, I often wondered if their names were reversed during the vote. Bone Breaker was always the one with a slight spring in his step, making it look like he bounced while he walked. And Bounce tended to do more of the roughing up. Yes, that almost always included breaking bones.

Speaking of. The *snap* that met my ears, followed by a pained cry, made me wince. Yep, there was a bone break. I shook my head.

Bone Breaker came out of the house with a few bills in his hand. I looked beyond him and caught sight of a small child cowering by the side of a couch, staring at me in terror.

I was that kid once. Not here. Not in Ash Hollow. Somewhere far worse.

Looking away, I followed the two demons as we walked down the street, leaving the bruised, bloodied, and injured demon on his front lawn where he curled up.

Nope. No room for guilt. I'm not that man by choice. I did what I needed to do so I didn't live that life.

Swallowing, I followed quietly while we collected from the rest of the houses on this side of the street. When we turned to the opposite side, we began again. While this wasn't the worst way to spend the day, it was exhausting.

I soon forgot about the man we left on his grass and the scared kid inside when we didn't meet any more resistance. Just fear. Compliance. One person even thanked Bounce before scampering inside and slamming the door.

Bounce turned to us with a huge grin. "Did you hear that? She's thankful for our protection!"

Rolling my eyes, I checked off that house and followed to the next. Yes, thankful is one way to put it. I mean, there are worse things in the world than us. Worse criminals. Because we're not upstanding, law-abiding citizens. We own law enforcement in Ash Hollow.

But we make sure that we protect those who pay the protection tax. We do so at whatever cost. And those who have benefited from it are actually very grateful. Practically friendly and happy to see us when we come around to collect.

Two houses down, almost directly across from the house where the demon was no longer huddled in his front yard, we met the next offender. Bounce knocked, and the door didn't open. There was movement inside. A curtain fluttered. A lock snapped home.

"Last warning," Bounce said cheerfully and knocked again.

When we were still ignored, Bounce shrugged and stepped off the stoop. He was replaced by Bone Breaker. With a dark glint in his turned eyes, his demonic face flashed into existence. Only a handful of our crew knew this spell because Sadist Soul didn't want it misused. And it would be. Especially by Shimmer and his band of idiots.

With a thin sheet of paper, he held the design to the door. Laying his hands over the claw marks in the design, he hissed in his home tongue a string of syllables that went straight to my balls. A dark flash blinked behind his hands and the scent of burned wood and charred magic filled the air.

When he stepped back, licking his fingers and admiring his work, the image was left on the door.

Crossbones and a halo. A magical beacon for every nasty in the world, letting them know that the people behind this door have wronged someone, which made them a target with no consequences.

We passed the next house. It was empty. No life inside. Last month there had been. But they'd refused to pay too. I glanced at the door. While the whole building looked like it'd been hit with a wrecking ball, the door was in one piece. And the seal on the door was perfect as the day we put it there. Still letting the world know that they deserved what they got.

Sadist Soul



Denial was a good six inches shorter than me and at least thirty-five pounds lighter. Where I was tall, leanly muscled with long, dark hair, Denial was the opposite. Not exactly short, but shorter than me. His short hair blond, his eyes light, his body bulky with muscles earned from physical work.

His hand curled in my hair and pulled my head back as he slammed inside me. I grunted, my cock throbbing as I gripped the bedsheets with white-knuckled fists. He pulled back quickly and snapped back inside, his hips slapping loudly against my ass. And then his hand followed, smacking my ass cheek too.

I sucked in a sharp breath as the sting went straight to my dick. He yanked me up by my hair until I didn't have a choice but to follow or have my neck snap. I was pulled from my hands and knees position until I was just on my knees, my back pressed against his chest. With his knees, he shoved mine apart.

My teeth gritted and my breath caught at the ache in my groin muscles from the near split. Denial let go of my hair to wrap a hand around my neck, cutting off my breath until my eyes went wide.

He slammed into my ass again at the same moment he slapped my dick. Tears stung my eyes at the pain that flickered through me. My cock didn't just throb with the need to release, but also with the warm sting of where he'd hit it. He did it a second time. And then a third. A fourth.

"Ready to come?" Denial murmured in my ear. His voice a soft purr, gentle. Sweet. Loving. In such contrast to how he abused my body.

Another slap on my dick, this time barely hitting my balls too, and the gasp that left my mouth forced out the rest of the air from my lungs. He held my throat in such a way that I couldn't pull in a breath.

My balls drew up, ready to explode. My body was tight. Aching. Vibrating with arousal. Tears streamed down my eyes. I nodded. Unable to speak.

“Are you?” he asked again, gently. Soothingly.

‘Yes’ formed on my lips, but I didn't have the breath to speak. Blackness licked at my eyes.

Denial pushed me toward the bed, and I fell as if in a free fall. I did free-fall, my entire world disoriented from the state of near suffocation and the heightened arousal. My face slammed into a pillow as I collapsed, Denial's dick coming out of me when he didn't follow me down.

But he was there. His hand in my hair, taking another fistful, forced me to turn my head so I could suck in a much needed breath. I might not have had the strength to breathe in on my own otherwise. And then he was back, his body on top of mine, his thick dick slamming back into me in one long, quick thrust.

A cry lodged in my throat at the sudden intrusion. At the way he stretched my body, forcing it to make room for him. Letting go of my hair, he brought my arms up, wrapping his hands tightly around my wrists to pin them above me.

Several hard, deep thrusts had me gasping, my body spasming as I tried to hold off my orgasm until he said I could let it go. His teeth sank into my shoulder, and I choked, my dick leaking. My balls throbbed and nearly burrowed inside my body as they drew up tightly.

His hands slid from my wrists to my hands, his fingers curling between mine. His harsh pace didn't lessen as he whispered in my ear, a clear command. “Come for me, my fire. Come hard.”

I did. I didn't have a choice. My eyesight shut off as my brain short-circuited. My entire body convulsed as pleasure crashed through me. It wasn't waves. There was no ebb and flow. No tides. It was a constant, continuous SLAM. SLAM. That didn't let up until I was nearly unconscious with how much energy it took from me.

When I finally opened my eyes some time later, I'm curled in Denial's much smaller frame as he gently runs his fingers through my hair. Softly working out the snarls he put there.

“Hi,” he said, brushing his lips against my forehead. “Feel better, sweetheart?”

“I think I died a little,” I croaked, my throat so damn dry it’s like a desert.

Denial smiled, nodded. We didn’t move for a minute more as he continued to smooth out my hair. When he does, it’s after another soft kiss, but this time, he pressed his lips to mine. He’s stingy with kisses and I’m so damn greedy for his. I’ve learned by now that if I want him to kiss me, though, it has to be on his terms.

It’s too quick. Too soft. Too impersonal. Over before I’m ready.

I tried to stifle the frustrated sound that worked its way to escape me. By the way he chuckled, I didn’t think I succeeded all that well. He disentangled himself from me and moved from the bed, returning a minute later.

He’d already cleaned me of my cum, as he usually does after I spill. But everything else waits until I’m conscious again. Denial handed me a bottle of water and let me drink it as he rubbed lotion between his hands, his light eyes never leaving mine. Watching me. Studying me as he always does after we fuck. Looking for any signs that he’d gone too far.

He didn’t. He never does.

When I finished the bottle, he plucked it from my hands and then pushed me onto my back. I went willingly, closing my eyes as he rubbed the lotion everywhere he slapped repeatedly. Since I was on my back, he started with my cock, gently soothing the raw feeling. Though he only grazed my balls once, he didn’t leave them out.

If I’d not come so hard that I’d passed out only moments ago, his touch would have had me stiffening again. As it was, my heart rate spiked. My breath hitched. It’s not like his touch was clinical. It was sensual, sweet.

Denial rolled me onto my stomach. I listened as he squirted more lotion on his hands, and he took his time massaging it into my ass. Not missing a single spot where he slapped me. Over and over. My cock tried to rally for a second round, but there was rarely a round two with Denial. He was too good for his own good.

When he was done, he brought me another water and made me drink it all. Only when he was satisfied that I wouldn’t pass out from dehydration and my skin wouldn’t remain burning and raw, did he lay back in my bed and pulled me into him.

“You alright?” he asked.

I took a breath, wondering if I had bruises around my neck. I really loved

when he left marks on me, though he was usually careful not to. Then again, I thought I might have a bite mark on my shoulder, too.

“Yep. You know I needed that.”

Denial snorted, his fingers once more going through my hair.

We never actually spoke about what we were doing. The conversation was far overdue, considering these hookups had been happening for more than two years. As soon as he became a full member of Dirty Demons, he was in my bed. Using my body. Giving me orgasms that I didn’t think I’d survive. Ruining me for any other living being.

It was time. And yet, I couldn’t get the words out.

“Go ahead,” he said, amusement in his voice. “Say whatever you’re trying not to.”

I laughed, closing my eyes. His fingers tangled with mine and I held my breath. “Soul,” he said gently. “What are you thinking about?”

Sighing, I said, “It’s not really the right time for this.”

“Oh?”

“Dirty Demons is a fucking mess. I swore when I became president, I’d get our shit together. I’ve made fuck all progress in that.”

Denial didn’t argue. His agreement stung. But when he spoke, I realized his silence wasn’t because he agreed, it was because he didn’t know what that had to do with anything.

“Alright.” I didn’t have to look at him to know that his eyes were narrowed. Trying to connect the dots. He sighed and pushed me backwards until I was laying flat. He followed, draping his body over mine. Folding his arms across my chest, he rested his chin on his forearms and looked down at me. Seeing his face did not make it any easier. “Talk, Prez. Whether it be about the crew or... whatever you’re alluding to and also not alluding to, I don’t care. Just start talking.”

Deciding to be a chickenshit, I took the easy way out and began bitching about Shimmer. “All the fucking rules we have prevent me from taking serious action against him. It’s like our forefathers saw this exact bullshit coming and want me to suffer through it. How am I supposed to fix this if I can’t get rid of the poisonous thorn that just keeps injecting his bullshit into our crew? He’s making us weak. Infecting our clubhouse. What am I supposed to do with that? How do I *make him* back the fuck out? What is this between us?”

My mouth snapped shut when I heard the last words leave me. My eyes

went comically wide as I stared at Denial.

He blinked lazily at me. Either he hadn't kept up with my rambling stream of shit about Shimmer, or he was still processing how the last question fit in.

I waited, my cheeks heating, as I stared at him. Waiting for him to catch up. For him to say something. Anything. Or not to say anything and just leave.

A smile touched his lips as he took in my expression. "What do you want it to be, Soul?"

Shivering, my muscles tensed as I stared at him. I may try to have my shit together concerning my crew, but right now, I was ready to bleed out. "I know you're hooking up with Bone Breaker too," I said quietly.

He didn't deny it. Just nodded. "I am. You've never expressed concern about it before. Not even when I brought it up."

"To be fair, I was a little surprised you said anything to me about it at all. I didn't know what to say."

He made a clucking noise with his tongue, shaking his head slightly. "I realize we're more about action than words, but I thought it was pretty clear that I'd only been sleeping with you."

"Until Bone Breaker," I said, wondering if that was a bad sign that I should have picked up on. It suddenly stung in a way it hadn't before.

Denial shifted up my body so his face was over mine. "You're a fucking awesome president, Soul. You're slow as fuck in your relationships."

I narrowed my eyes, glaring at him. His laughter made my insides jump since it was a rare sound. When his mouth came down on mine, I forgot I was beginning to get annoyed with him. Especially when he forced my mouth open and truly took my fucking sadistic soul through his kiss. Taking it for his own. Marking it. Branding it.

My body rocked on its own though my cock was still down for the count. I grunted, gripped his hips before running my hands up his back until I wrapped my arms tightly around him.

Still not sure where we stood, he never kissed me like this. Ever. Not once. I was going to soak it up while I could. He could have my last dying breath if I left this world with his mouth on mine.

Denial pulled his mouth from mine. I chased him and he licked me. My tongue, my lips, my jaw. I grunted again, trying to pull his mouth back to mine.

“You’re so greedy,” he muttered.

“You’re stingy,” I complained. “I feel like I have to beg to be kissed.”

He paused and I opened my eyes. He was looking at me, a brow raised. “I like that. You beg for it and I’ll kiss you.”

“You like to torture me a little too much.”

Denial shrugged. “I’m a demon. I thrive on torture.”

He wasn’t wrong. He truly did thrive on torture. My gaze traveled his face, settling on his swollen lips.

“Look at me,” he said, voice quiet. That soft tone that made my heart melt for him.

“I am,” I told him, not taking my gaze from his mouth.

“Soul, I’m going to bite you and you won’t like it this time,” he warned. Joke’s on him though, because I’d take any bite he’d give me. However, I met his eyes. “I love you,” he said, and my eyes went wide. I choked on my tongue. Seriously choked until he pulled me up, laughing, as he tried to clear my airway of my tongue.

“What?” I croaked.

He was still laughing as he pulled me into his lap. It should have been awkward because in this position, I basically loomed over him. But he took my face in his hands and pulled my mouth to his. He didn’t kiss me, much to my chagrin but he left me no room to look away. There’s no way I wouldn’t hear his words, feel his lips say them.

“I love you,” he repeated. “I love you. I love you. I love you.” He repeated it a dozen more times until I was slightly dizzy. Panting. Ready to fall.

“Really?” I asked.

Denial rolled his eyes. “You’re impossible. Yes, Soul. Fucking hell.” His lips pressed to mine again, briefly.

“Why didn’t you—why—I just don’t—”

He rolled his eyes again. “You’re so eloquent sometimes. I didn’t say anything because I didn’t know where you were at and I wasn’t sure if you were ready for something more than fucking. I mean, it’s good. And I didn’t want to push you away because I love you and want to keep you. To possess you.” All the oxygen in my lungs whooshed out at his words. His declaration. “Up until recently, I was kind of convinced that you were just looking for a hookup.”

“I’m sorry?” I said.

Denial laughed again. He shifted our bodies once more, so I was sitting and he was straddling me, his arms around my neck. I immediately pulled him close, hugging him tightly. Our faces still pressed together so I was staring in his eyes, though they were far too close to see clearly.

“So, you want to know what this is between us? It’s real, Soul. You and me. I’m going to take care of you until you take your last breath, honey. And you’re going to let me. Are we clear?”

I nodded, because fuck yes. That’s exactly what I wanted. More than anything.

“And if Bone Breaker is a problem, tell me.”

While I thought it should be, something about it should bother me knowing that he’s with someone else too, it didn’t. Maybe because of who it was. Bone Breaker and Bounce, they’re possessed demons. I’m not sure which possesses the other, but I knew without a doubt that they’re possessed.

“Denial.”

He smiled at me saying his name. Probably because my voice was all high pitched and pathetic.

“I don’t care about you two together. And yes, you can possess me whenever the fuck you want.”

His smile widened. “And yet, you’re not confirming or denying—”

“I love you too, fucker,” I snapped.

HIS ANSWERING dark laughter was still echoing in my head, as my heart and body and soul still floated somewhere fucking happy when we stood outside the temple where we’d make our first stand to bring Ash Hollow to its knees.

I hadn’t shared much of my plan with anyone. But it began right here, right now. Sticks and Bones were smug, thinking they could hold one of their wedding ceremonies on my territory. Well within the city limits of Ash Hollow. Their vice president, no less.

That wasn’t going to happen.

Because my plan was bloody and brute force, I even had Shimmer’s full cooperation. His full, loud support. He liked violence. He thrived on it. If he had his way, that’s how Ash Hollow would look all the time. It would be a smoking barrel, always filled with screams, bodies littering the ground, the

air rank with blood.

I had a better vision than that. I wanted to thrive, not live in squalor. I wanted expansion, not just in our crew but in our businesses, and in our lives. I wanted to make this world know our fucking names.

Sure, that all should start within the confines of our clubhouse. Weeding out the poison and growing until we were strong. An unshakable unit. But with my hands tied by club rules, I needed time to work out how to do so.

Instead, I was going to focus energy where I knew I'd have my entire crew's support. And that's securing our borders. Going on the offensive instead of waiting to defend all the time. Striking back when we've been snubbed or outright attacked.

Showing these fucking clowns that we are not going to lay down. Showing them that even though we have some cracks in our foundation, we *are* the demons to watch out for.

"In position," Sweet Love's voice said in my ear.

I nodded. "Wait until we hear the pronunciation of husband and wife," I repeat for perhaps the eightieth time. I needed this to go exactly as planned. I wanted to make the vice president's new ol' lady a fucking widow on her wedding day while simultaneously taking out their VP.

"Listening," Sweet Love said.

And then we counted down the minutes. Seconds. Breaths. Denial moved to my side, his demonic eyes staring straight at the church.

I smiled without looking at him more than through my peripheral vision. It's been a good day. And it was about to get better.

"Time to object," Sweet Love said.

I waited just a beat longer before giving the word. "Go. Kill them all."

Haidee



It didn't matter how many times I said the words, no one believed me. Why would they? I was a child stolen in the night and sold, claiming to be someone other than who the abductors said I was. But they didn't understand that of course the guy would lie when it assured him more money.

And so I've sat in cells, moved from one location to another. When I was young, that's all my life consisted of. And no matter how many times I told them that I wasn't who they claimed I was, I was always lying.

When they got tired of hearing it, they began hitting me. I stopped speaking. Stopped entirely. Until that also got me beaten. It was a fine line that I learned to walk by the time I hit my teen years. But then, life got even worse.

I was no longer a child. I was becoming a woman. And that meant something else entirely.

It didn't matter how long or how hard I protested, I was not of my own faculty. I didn't have command over my body. And if I fought too much, I was tied down. If I didn't fight at all, I was used harder.

There was no way I could win.

But then things changed again a handful of years ago. I wasn't sure if they finally figured out I wasn't, in fact, who they thought I was. Something I'd have liked to say 'I told you so' to, but didn't because I knew the horrors that I faced if I was snarky. But they stopped using me quite the same way. Though not entirely.

It took me a month of being instructed how to please a man when they were forcing me to do what they wanted, before I realized I was being

groomed as a breeder. More than that, a bed warmer. I was to procreate and please whoever the highest bidder was. That would be my sole purpose in life.

When that realization dawned on me, I cried in a corner every moment I was alone. This couldn't be my life. What had I done wrong to deserve this? Why me? And if they finally figured out that I wasn't who they wanted me to be, why not let me go?

Because they couldn't make their money back if they just dumped me on the side of the road. They bought me as a child, thinking I was important.

I wasn't. But now they were going to make me valuable.

Two years ago, demons began visiting me while I was locked in a cell like an animal. By the way they dressed, I thought they were in gangs of some kind. There was something similar about them, but each group was also different.

They looked at me as if I were produce. And if I didn't turn or bend over when they asked me to, one of my handlers would come into my cage and make me. Those days were worse. Sometimes they'd even make me demonstrate what I had learned on one of the visitors.

It was better if I just did as I was told. Became the object that they studied.

I wasn't sure if they admired me or not. Whether they liked what they saw or not. But the small groups of demons never stopped coming. And I was always shown off. When they'd leave, I received more lessons in pleasure. In their pleasure. Mine, if I was able to have any, didn't matter.

But it all stopped six months ago. I was moved to a bedroom with barred windows. Given a wardrobe and a female attendant who worked with me to make me stronger. She taught me how to tame my hair. To make my face presentable. How to dress. How to sit, stand, eat, talk.

Talk only when spoken to. Never have an opinion. Never have a voice.

I had no idea what was going on.

She spent a lot of time healing the wounds I'd sustained over the years. Using whatever kind of magic she had to smooth out scars.

While I didn't find that she spoke non-stop, there was a steady stream of dialogue in which she taught me how to answer. How to pitch my voice so it was pleasant. What kinds of things not to say.

It wasn't until I'd been enduring this new reality for a month that I realized I was being groomed for something else entirely. Sitting curled up on

my bed shortly after the sun rose, knowing that this female demon assigned to me would be back any minute, I bit my lip and considered my options. Would it be too much to demand to know what lay ahead? What my future was?

Watching the light in the sky rise, I turned toward the door a half a second before the lock clicked and the demon entered. She never smiled at me. Not so much as greeted me.

“Up,” she said. “Choose your clothing for the day.” I watched as she shut and locked the door behind her.

Carefully getting out of the bed, I moved to the drawers. “What kind of day is it?” I asked, keeping my voice soft and mellifluous.

In my peripheral vision, I saw her nod of approval. “Casual.”

She didn’t like it when I bit my lip, so I made the conscious effort not to. Instead, I opened the drawers and pulled out a pair of uncomfortable lace underwear, a bra that was so tight it hurt, but pushed my breasts up so they looked much bigger than they were. A pair of sheer stockings so I looked barefoot while not being bare.

Everything under my clothes was to be pleasing to the male eye. Just in case he wanted me somewhere, anywhere, at any time. And thus, I knew life was never going to be comfortable.

The pants were a harder decision to make. They all looked the same to me, so after a minute of studying them, I chose a pair. Thankfully, when I peeked at her from the corner of my eye, she nodded.

Relaxing a little, I chose a shirt. I’d learned that most could be casual or somewhat more formal depending on how they were dressed up. This one was cotton. The neckline fell just over the crease of my breasts. The bodice was loose until it clung to my waist and around my upper arms.

“Very good, Haidee. Now wash.”

She followed me into the attached bathroom and watched as I washed, making sure I didn’t miss any steps she meticulously taught me. Once out of the shower, she watched as I dried thoroughly, then lotioned myself even more thoroughly so that I was always smooth. Before I had a chance to begin dressing, she ran her hand along my arm and then my thigh.

“Very good,” she said, nodding curtly. “Always make sure your skin is pleasing to touch.”

I nodded and went to dress. Then I attended to my long hair. When that was done, I painted the colors on my face that she said made my feminine

features shine. My best qualities. Gazing at myself in the mirror, I wasn't sure what those qualities were.

Because I wasn't being used at all hours, the bags under my eyes were gone. She insisted I get a full night of restful sleep. Once or twice, she even gave me cough syrup to put me to sleep.

When I was presentable to her standards, I followed her out of the bathroom. "Now, we're going to have a conversation." She sat and I took the chair opposite her, making sure my spine was straight and my shoulders back. I tucked my legs and crossed my ankles, then folded my hands over my knee.

"Can I choose the topic?" I asked.

She studied me for a minute before nodding.

"Why am I going through all this? Are you grooming me for something?"

I was surprised when she offered me a half smile. "Very good. I'm glad you're able to put patterns together." Though I tried not to be, I actually was a little proud of her compliment. I really shouldn't be. She was getting ready to drop a bombshell on me and the kind words were a means to make that happen. "Yes, I'm grooming you to be a bride."

My eyes went wide. "Why? Who would want me?"

She chuckled, but her smile was sympathetic. "Sometimes, demons just want a trophy wife. Even though you were presented covered in other men's juices, battered and bruised, and far too damn skinny to be healthy, a very important demon saw something promising in you. As long as you can behave as he needs you to."

"And so you're here to train me," I said.

Nodding, she said, "I am. I cost a pretty penny, but they're hoping to gain that back with your sale."

I didn't know why that deflated me. Of course I was being sold. And right now I was being molded, so that I was worth the sale.

"You know, I'm not who they think I am," I said, almost pleading with her.

The demon nodded. "No. You're not. Something you've been telling them since they purchased you, no?"

I nodded, relieved that someone finally understood. "My family was no one. We were just common demons in..." my voice trailed off. Tears stung my eyes when I realized I no longer remembered where I came from. The faces of my parents that I'd so meticulously committed to memory were now

blurry. Knowing I wasn't allowed to shed tears, that's a big rule, I took a deep breath and swallowed the ache inside me.

"Correct," she said. "Though it's not uncommon to hide important people among common folk. However, they learned that the demon you were sold as was, in fact, where they'd always been. Home. Safe. Protected. The politicians just kept her hidden from the public eye while she was growing up, basically erasing her from existing."

I snorted before wincing at the sound. "Sorry," I murmured. "Just the irony of that."

She smiled again. "These conversational skills are good, Haidee. I'm glad you're paying attention and connecting dots. That might serve you well later."

"Can you tell me who bought me?"

"Who is going to buy you, you mean," she corrected. I nodded. "His name is Jab. He's the vice president of the Sticks and Bones motorcycle club."

"Is that who all those people in leather were?" I asked, cocking my head. "I thought they were a gang."

It was the first time I'd seen her flinch. She sighed. "Okay, we're going to have to move this conversation into proper club etiquette. Rule number one: *never*, under any circumstances, refer to these clubs as gangs! They get incredibly offended."

My brows knit together. "Okay. They're not gangs. Though I think I'm going to need to know the difference."

She chuckled.

For the next several months, I was taught all there was to know, at least all that she was allowed to share, about being the 'old lady' of a very important member of a motorcycle club. Though I could technically read and write, she concentrated a lot on those skills to make sure I wasn't an embarrassment by being illiterate. By the time I woke up on my wedding day, having been ogled through the window of my door by who I could only presume were members of said club, I thought I could do this.

I had never had hope that my life could be turned around. That I'd somehow go from being beaten and abused daily to living a good, happy life. But as the demon taught me how to behave and I grew more comfortable in my skin, I had found just a spark of hope.

That all came crashing down when I saw the leers and greedy eyes rake

over me through my bedroom window. And now, stuffed into a white dress that I had to admit was actually quite lovely, I was once again dreading what came next.

Haidee



On the day of my wedding, it wasn't the same demon who'd been coming to me for the last six months. I was disheartened by it. Her presence had been familiar and comforting. I knew her personality and what to expect.

The two females who showed up to dress me and get me ready were almost silent. As I looked at them, studied them in the quiet as they bathed me and groomed me until I was nearly shiny, I tried to determine who they were and if I was allowed to ask.

Deciding that I couldn't stand the silence anymore, I gathered the courage to ask when they began rubbing lotion all over me.

"My name is Haidee," I offered.

One of them looked up at me, a brow raised. "Okay," she answered. "I suppose that's good to know."

I waited a beat before asking, "What are your names?"

"I'm Jill. That's Jackie," the same one, Jill, answered.

"And do you know the demon I'm supposed to be marrying today?"

Jackie's hands paused. I caught them share a glance before getting back to work. Neither answered. And I knew, even before I pressed the issue. This demon wasn't going to be unlike the others.

Sighing, I asked, anyway. "Please, just tell me. Trust me when I say my hopes are not very high that he'll be a good demon."

Jill snorted, shaking her head. They were silent for so long that I was sure they were still not going to answer me. But Jill finally did.

"Jab is one of the biggest assholes to ever exist," she murmured. "He's

abusive in all ways and enjoys... watching what he thinks is his being possessed by others.”

“Gang bang fun,” Jackie muttered under her breath as if she didn’t want me to hear her.

“He’s ‘owned’ Jacks and I for years but we’re not pretty enough to be his old lady.” She looked at me and I swear, there was sympathy in her eyes. “I’m sorry to say that he saw your beauty even through the condition he found you in.”

“When you say gang bang...” I ventured, but I already knew.

Another sympathetic smile. “It means that if you fight too much, he’ll happily restrain you while he encourages his patch brothers to fuck you. Like it or not.”

So, no different from the life I’d already led. Although, I suppose the group activity was new. Usually they came to me one at a time. Two at the very most.

“Great,” I muttered, feeling my shoulders fall.

Neither offered me any words of encouragement or comfort. They finished making me in the image that would please Jab the most. My face, my hair, my body. Then dressed me in a dress that I like a whole lot. Grudgingly.

I didn’t recognize myself in the mirror. I wasn’t overly covered in makeup, but perhaps it was the resignation that shone in my dull eyes. Lifeless. My life of abuse would continue. These last six months had been the best I could remember.

Jill and Jackie traveled with me, rattling off the names of the people I needed to know. They had such names as Road Grime, Sticker, Cappy, and Driver, among other strange things. Who wanted to be named after a sticker? Even knowing that these were given names as the trainer demon had taught me, still. They seemed rather... weird.

The temple that we stopped at was large. Or I thought it was. What did I know? I can’t remember ever seeing one. Probably not since I was a child living a carefree life. Not that I remember that life. I remembered nothing anymore. I’d locked those memories away so nothing would taint them, but I’d literally thrown away the key.

“Okay,” Jill said, standing at my side from where we hovered just inside the door. We were in shadow, unseen. The room beyond, lined with bench seating and facing a group of men at the front, was riotous with laughter. All

these people wore the garb of what I thought marked them as a gang. But now I knew it was the symbol of their club. On their backs, I could see the patches denoting that they were all together. One group.

For a second, I wondered what that would be like. The demon that had trained me in all things motorcycle club said that they were a brotherhood. Friendship, camaraderie. Support. Protection. All things I'd never had or known. And I'd never have them either.

I was owned property. And I always would be.

"The man furthest to the left, the one waiting for you, is Jab," she whispered. "Thankfully, he's not awful to look at."

There was a frown in her voice, but I could see what she meant. He wasn't horrendous. There were some ugly faces in the crowd, including some of those standing alongside him. In those ugly faces was cruelty and hardness. There were harsh lines and sneers. While the pretty ones could hide that behind something shallow, like their looks, the ugly demons had nothing. And so they were making up for it by being... them.

"You answer to him, first and foremost," Jill continued. "You'll find yourself in some precarious situations because you aren't allowed to say no to anyone, but if you say yes without Jab's approval, your life is going to be hell for a while."

"More so than you're even anticipating," Jackie said.

I nodded.

"Learn to get creative," Jill said. "Next to Jab is the president, Diamond. He's actually the nicest demon in the club, which I think is incredible, considering he lets his boys behave like complete and total barbarians. But he'll never touch you. He has his own old lady and he never lets anyone touch her, either."

"He'll also not protect you, so don't bother turning to him for anything," Jackie said.

Jill continued down the line with the last three. One was an enforcer while the other two were patch members. Not holding titles.

Then we stood in silence as I counted down the seconds until I was stripped from one abusive life into one that might be worse. The room beyond us quieted on its own and everyone turned to the front. I studied the room, the jackets they wore. What did the demon tell me they were called? Cuts? Learning their patches.

When I looked up at the front, Jab was staring into the place where I

stood. A cruel little twist on his lips. Greed in his eyes. I wasn't sure if he could see me, but somehow, I thought his gaze was penetrating my soul.

I tried not to bite my lip and give in to my nervous habit. Somehow, I kept myself still and calm, my shoulders down and relaxed, my spine straight.

Then the music started. Jill and Jackie walked out first, side by side. While I wanted to watch them, my gaze remained trained on Jab. His attention moved to the demons walking toward him, their heads held high. I knew it wasn't in confidence but what was expected of them.

Jab's eyes on them trailed down their bodies. Hungry. Heated. Possessive. Greedy. My stomach rolled. Fear clawed its way up my back.

I could run. I was left alone, right in front of the door.

If I'd have been wearing anything else, I might have tried. But I wouldn't get far in this. Besides, if what the training demon had told me was correct, this was their city. I'd never get far. No one was going to help me or hide me.

And then my life would be worse.

When Jill and Jackie moved opposite the line of men and turned to face me, the music shifted and it was my turn. The congregation of biker demons shifted, turning to face me. My cheeks heated.

Somehow, I forced myself to take a step forward. I was steady. No tripping or stumbling. Not even when so many demonic eyes were trained on me; roving all over my body. I could feel their arousal. Their greed. Their want for me.

My fingers shook around the bouquet that had found itself in my hands. Only because I didn't have a choice was I here. I kept reminding myself of that. This isn't a choice. This is a new set of chains.

I stopped beside the girls and turned to face Jab. His smile was smug. His gaze hooded. He unabashedly licked his lips.

Words in my head kept my breathing somewhat even. I wouldn't freak out. I wouldn't break down. It wasn't an option. So I wouldn't do it. I would be the little trophy wife he purchased. I would hopefully become boring to him and his brothers.

A demon stood between us and back a few steps, facing the audience as he said some words. I was surprised by the show of this. He literally purchased me. Why go through this at all? Why pretend like this is a fun, happy occasion?

It's a cruel twist. A taunt.

The first time I heard his voice was when Jab answered a question. His

simple “yes” sounded raw and hungry. I swallowed, trying to tune into the demon’s words. Try as I may, I didn’t hear his words, but I knew when he paused. I waited a beat, just to make sure I was supposed to answer.

“Yes,” I said, carefully keeping my tone neutral and submissive, just as the trainer demon had taught me. I must have pulled it off, because Jab’s lips curled up a little more. Pleased.

I relaxed slightly. If I pleased him, hopefully he’d not hurt me. Maybe Jill and Jackie were wrong about me. That might be their fate, but he was making me his wife, his old lady. While I knew it was unlikely, I begged whatever might be listening that this would be the case.

I startled slightly when Jill took the flowers from me. When I nodded and turned back to Jab, he reached for me. His hands just closed on my waist when the entire room broke out in chaos.

Screaming, I was thrown to the side. Not knowing what was happening, I dodged feet as demons ran about and moved as far away from everyone as I could as glass shattered around me. Wood splintered. Something fell from the ceiling and made a loud *crash* that shook the building.

There were shots, more screaming. The unmistakable sounds of pain and death. The smell of blood invaded my lungs, making it difficult for me to breathe.

I pulled my dress in close, tucking it under me, and curled in on myself. Not sure where I was, I somehow tunneled myself into a dark hole under something. Around me, loud crashing and angry yells filled the air. Something slammed against my hiding place, making me jump. A scream lodged in my throat. Years of holding in my screams was the only reason I was able to keep it in.

While I’d like to say that I was immune to fear at this point, the terror that filled me was absolute. I was so lost in it, shaking violently, that I missed when the chaos ended. Not daring to move, I wished with everything in me they’d all just go away. Or that they were all dead and I could eventually walk out of here. Ditch the dress and escape to my freedom.

But of course, that wasn’t going to be the case.

My hiding place had been good. I wasn’t dead. But it was pulled up and over me and I was suddenly doused in bright light. I blinked up, curling in on myself further. It took me several moments to focus on the demons standing over me.

They were equally split. Half smiled cruelly while others only looked at

me. One thing was clear: this was not the club that had been in the temple waiting for me. Not Sticks and Bones.

“There’s the blushing bride,” one of the demons with a nasty smile said.

I swallowed and closed my eyes preparing myself for whatever cruel fate lay ahead of me this time.

Haidee



The trainer demon had told me about the different motorcycle clubs in the area. I could barely make out a patch on one of them. This one was an enemy of Sticks and Bones—Dirty Demons. The name alone was meant to frighten.

“She’s awfully pretty,” one of those sneering at me said.

I flinched. Being pretty was not an advantage. At all. The first one who’d spoken, also sneering with a nasty grin, reached for me. His hands on my upper arms were punishing as he pulled me to my feet. With such a tight hold, I wasn’t able to so much as stumble.

He brought me close, the smell of his breath rank. But I’ve grown up with gross smelling demons all over me. I knew how to keep a neutral expression. What I wasn’t good at was not shaking in fear. That wasn’t something I’d learned how to hide.

My fear pleased him.

“Let her go.”

The words made the demon holding me angry. Anger flashed in his hard gaze as he looked away, over my head, at the demon who spoke. “We’re not letting her go.” It wasn’t so much a statement as said in disbelief.

“No. *You’re* letting her go. Release her.”

I didn’t dare turn back to see who was speaking. Instead, I didn’t fight. I couldn’t fight. I was one individual and had spent my entire life being beaten. Even if I wanted to fight back, I didn’t know how.

The demon with his fingers bruising my flesh growled. Two more demons came up, one on either side of him, and I could *feel* them in a strange

way. Like they were taking up far too much space. Barely daring to look at them in my peripheral vision, the only thing I could see were two muscled demons. Neither happy. Both with challenge in their gazes as they stared at the one holding me.

A gasp escaped me as the demon shoved me away. The heel of my foot landed on my dress, disallowing me to straighten. In a windmill of arms, I started to tumble down.

Simultaneously, the demons who challenged the one holding me moved. One came after me. The other went for the demon who'd had me. I caught a glimmer of the nasty demon disappearing. While the demon who'd gone after him should have been confused, he shifted his stance and as soon as the shimmering demon materialized again, the challenger slammed his fist into the first's stomach.

Hard.

The first one sputtered and keeled over, dropping to his knees.

"You forget your place," the challenger said.

By this time, my eyes were wide. I was stiff. And not flat on my ass. The second challenger had me on my feet, his hands gently at my elbows to steady me.

When I could look away from what was happening in front of me, I glanced at the demon holding me. He'd been watching the exchange, but his dark gaze dropped to mine.

Eyes are very telling. I've seen everything reflected in a demon's eyes. Lust, hunger, disgust. Every nasty cruel look that could ever be named. Arrogance, pride, self-righteousness.

I didn't see any of that in this demon's eyes. Yes, they were hard, but as soon as they landed on me, I saw... concern? I was startled enough by the look that I tried to back away. And, of course, nearly tripped again.

He caught me, an amused smile flickering over his mouth. "You okay, bunny?" His voice was deep, but gentle. Soft like his touch. And I swear, I could hear concern there too.

Whatever look I gave him made his smile fade into something sad. "It's alright. We're going to get out of here."

Based on his tone, I was sure it was meant to be a reassurance. It wasn't. I was being taken by the men who just crashed my wedding. The mental reminder had me looking beyond him to the rest of the temple.

My eyes went wide. That's when the scent of blood hit me, and I choked,

stumbling back again. There were bodies *everywhere*. Mangled. Tortured. Bloodied.

All of them—dead.

“Oh my gods,” I murmured, tears stinging my eyes as I tried to scramble further away. Between my dress, debris, and the demon next to me, the only thing I accomplished was *again* nearly landing on my ass.

The demon held me up, stabilizing me before I could fall on my face.

“It’s okay,” he said again, his voice soft and assuring. Quiet so he’d not startle me. “It’s okay, bunny. You will not meet their fate.”

I heard a mumble that sounded suspiciously like ‘yet’ that was quickly followed by someone else being hit. Then an ‘oof’ and choked sound as they sputtered in anger. My cheeks heated as fear soaked through me.

“Let’s go,” the voice of the demon who told the nasty one to let me go said. I still didn’t dare look at him. I didn’t want to see. “Take her with you, Bone Breaker.”

The demon holding me nodded. He released me and offered me his hand. I just stared at it, not sure what he was demanding from me. There was literally nothing on my body to give him unless he wanted this dress.

“Don’t make her walk through this,” someone else said. “She’s been traumatized enough for the day.”

The absurdity of the statement nearly made me snort. Sure, it’s the first time I’ve seen a bloodbath, but not the first horrors I’ve seen. But then, maybe I have seen this kind of massacre. After the initial shock, I don’t feel nearly as horrified as I should. Maybe some deep-rooted memory was trying to resurface that I really didn’t want to think about.

“This way,” the demon with his hand out said.

I turned immediately to move in the direction he indicated. If nothing else, I was ready to get out of this place that was covered in death. Not sure that’s what a temple is for. I’m not sure I was supposed to live through that. Only because I hid did I survive. I should be among the corpses.

But fuck if I wasn’t going to find a way out. This demon that was leading me to a back door with a steadying hand on my lower back as I held the skirt of my dress up so I could toe my way through obstacles without falling on my face seemed to not have such a tight grip on me. But even as the thought filtered through my head, the one who’d punched the mean one sidled up to my other side once we stepped out of the building.

The air was cool and dry. And blessedly not filled with blood. We were in

a quiet part of the city where there was greenery and even some flowers. A little rabbit poked its head out of a bush at the side of the temple, its nose twitching in the air before it dove back to safety.

Probably smelled all the blood.

The demons on either side led me away from the temple, down a street. There were people milling about who stopped to stare with wide eyes and then turned away quickly.

“This is Ash Hollow,” the one not called Bone Breaker said. I glanced at him. “And your crew got a little ballsy to hold your wedding in our territory.”

I swallowed and shook my head. They’re not my crew.

“No?” Bone Breaker asked. “Which part of that did you disagree with?”

“They bought me,” I whispered. “I’m not a part of them. Just their property.”

Both demons suddenly stilled, and I took two steps beyond them before stopping and glancing at them in confusion. Ah, there it was. The anger I was used to seeing. I turned away, looking ahead again, and waited.

They joined me again several seconds later; the one that’s not Bone Breaker was almost vibrating with anger. I didn’t dare speak again, unsure which of my words made him mad. Trying to contain my fear, I let them guide me until we stopped at a row of bikes.

Bone Breaker climbed onto one and started it, kicking up the stand that held it upright when no one was on it.

“This might be a little tricky with a dress, but we’ll make it work,” the other one said, nudging me towards Bone Breaker. He helped me climb on and then wrapped my skirt around me, tucking it in where he could. “It isn’t a long ride. You’ll be safe enough.”

I wasn’t sure safe meant the same thing to him as it did to me. I’ve never been safe.

“Hang on,” Bone Breaker said. But I wasn’t sure what to hang onto. When I didn’t respond, he chuckled and reached back to take my hands. Setting them on his sides, he grinned at me over his shoulder. “Hang on, bunny. I don’t want to lose you off my bike.”

I nodded, letting my hands rest on him. Waiting for him to move my hands further down into his lap.

Before I could work myself up to respond to what he’d demand of me, he pushed the bike backward, walking it out of the row it was lined up in. The

other demon was waiting. He nodded at me, a feral grin on his face.

The bike I was on revved, the loud sound making me jump. And then we were moving. Slowly at first, but when he picked up speed, I gripped him tighter. Gravity made me slip and a completely new wave of fear sliced through me.

I was going to be thrown off!

With adrenaline pumping through me at that thought, I gripped him tightly and wrapped my arms around him, gluing myself to his back. I felt the rumble in his chest as he chuckled again. One of his hands patted mine where they were locked around him.

I waited for him to push me off. Or bring my hand down to his dick. For anything. But after a few pats, he removed his hand and returned it to the bike.

My eyes were tightly closed as my heart raced. But when the moment of terror that I was going to fly off the back passed, I eased my eyes open and watched the world pass by.

There were buildings close together. Shops with big windows displaying what customers could find inside. People milling about. Children playing. People stopped to watch us pass. One kid waved excitedly.

We moved deeper into the city, where the buildings got taller and more domineering. The streets were colder as the buildings blocked the sun from reaching them. There were more people here. Cars moving and horns blasting as pedestrians crossed the street in front of them with no concern for being hit.

A quick waft of something good blew into my face and my stomach growled. I couldn't remember when I'd eaten last. My mouth salivated before feeling dry like sandpaper. The events of the day left me dehydrated. Or maybe I was always a little dehydrated and underfed to keep me too weak to fight. I'd heard that once or twice. When I was still young and strong enough to push back.

We turned into an alley, the roar of the bikes becoming louder as they echoed off the surrounding stone. When we flew out the other end, it's like the world around us had transformed. The buildings were smaller now, residential. They began right on top of each other, but as we wound our way through the serpentine roads, they became more spread out. With yards and flower beds and even a pool here or there.

Finally, we pulled up to a residential house that looked a lot like those

around it. Except it was a light blue and gray opposed to the standard beige, yellow, and white.

“Home sweet home,” Bone Breaker announced when he cut the engine. There was a smile in his voice.

But ‘home’ meant that I was now someone else’s prisoner.

Orhid



The temple is silent as we watch Bone Breaker and Bounce take the girl away. Shimmer is seething, ready to throw down. But even with our enforcers out of the room, there's still Sweet Love, and he's a goddamn bear. Though Soul continued trying to make him a third enforcer, he refused, claiming he'd rather keep the run itineraries efficient because anyone else would just have us traveling to fucking Egypelli on the opposite side of the damned country.

He wasn't wrong. I thought Sweet Love actually really enjoyed planning our trips. He always had side excursions for us when the ride was long, like a water park on a blistering day. Dinner at a ground pit barbeque right before we became ravenous.

Once the three of them were out of the building, Sweet Love shifted to face Shimmer, his eyes hard, arms crossed over his bulky chest. Ready for Shimmer's bullshit.

"Licks, Baba Yaga, Achilles—clean up this place. I don't care if you have to burn it down to do it. Make sure you get the keys so we can sell the bikes," Soul said.

Licks and Baba Yaga were our prospects. Both were made potential members around the same time. Baba was a week past his minimum three-month period. Licks was a week before he hit three months.

And Achilles was our one and only probate. He'd been a full patch member for eight years but because he couldn't keep it in his pants and was constantly fucking whoever he could find in the club room—in front of the cameras he *knew* were there—the fines just weren't cutting it. He needed an

actual punishment.

Having his patch revoked had been like someone had taken away the sucker from a toddler. His big eyes filled with tears. Heartbroken. Soul nearly gave it back, just so we didn't have to see it.

It's been six weeks, and he's been on his best behavior. No fucking in the clubroom. There'd been some close calls, but he managed to pull himself together and drag his flavor to one of the bedrooms in the back.

See? It's not so hard.

"Got it, prez," Achilles said.

Baba Yaga nodded, and the two of them turned to get to work. Licks didn't move for a minute. He glanced at Shimmer, his sponsor. When Shimmer didn't do anything but continue to stare hatred at Soul, he turned without comment and trailed after the other two.

I shook my head. He wasn't going to be brought in. Not at this rate. I didn't think he had any true loyalty to Shimmer, but Shimmer was his sponsor and so he felt like he *had to* commit himself to the vice president dickwad.

"Move out," Soul said, waving everyone to the doors. I waited with him, Denial and Secret standing back as well.

Shimmer was the first to leave, storming out like he was a hurricane. His cronies followed. But I noticed that there were a few that normally went with him, instead stalling for a bit. I smirked as I observed them glancing at the door and pretending to be absorbed in something else should anyone glance back at them.

"We need to do something about him," Denial said, his voice quiet, and not for the first time. Not even the first time this week.

Denial was a short, stocky demon. Built like an ox, but not more than five-foot-eight. He was cute in his serious way. Always stoic, unsmiling. His mask hides the crazy dangerous demon that lived inside. I loved to see when he lost his shit. I was waiting for Shimmer to be on the other end.

"We do," Soul said. He sighed, shaking his head. "That he's pissed over this girl? I don't even know what to make of that. Why?"

"He doesn't like our rule where he doesn't get to own a pussy," Secret said. "Do you know how many times he's had me recite that rule just so he can try to find a loophole? He hates that you're not like other presidents and will bend rules when one of your crew wants to."

"We're not owning anyone," Soul growled.

“He probably thought because she was part of Sticks and Bones that you’d think differently,” I volunteered.

Soul’s gaze was tracking Licks. We weren’t close enough for him to hear the conversation and the rest of our crew had left the temple. It was the four of us watching the probate and prospects. Not that we were really watching them. They’d do their thing as they should.

“You think they were all here?” Secret asked.

I glanced at him to see he’d tilted his chin to indicate he spoke of the offending crew.

“Based on their numbers, I’d wager a guess that most of them were. If there are any left, there aren’t many. And likely not the ones who ran it,” Soul said.

I glanced down at Jab’s body. We knew for sure the vice president was dead. As was the president and an enforcer.

“There’s a part of me that wishes we could bring them back to life, just for a minute, and kill them again so they can see that they fucked up by trying to move into our territory,” I said, using the toe of my boot to nudge an arm of a girl.

From what I’d seen, there’d only been the two women in attendance. The two that stood next to the bride were now just as dead as everyone else. I thought the bride was meant to be killed, too. Only because she hid right away was she spared the demon storm. But then, maybe I was wrong.

“We going to do something to make this a warning for the other crews?” Secret asked.

“I have an idea,” Licks said, proving he’d been listening to that question at minimum.

“What is it?” Soul asked.

“The titled members’ heads on spikes around the city. Concentrating where we know that KOK Suckers and Maple Roots like to push against our borders,” he said.

“Yes, let’s do that,” Denial agreed. “We’ll take their bikes and lay their decapitated heads on the seat for the world to see.”

Soul chuckled. “Make that happen, Licks.”

Licks grinned. “Yes, prez.”

We watched them for a while longer before heading to the doors. The walk to where we parked our bikes so the engines wouldn’t tip off Sticks and Bones that we were there was a short way away. There were only our four

and the three bikes that belonged to those back at the temple left. I wasn't sure where Sticks and Bones had parked theirs. I knew Achilles would find them. He was a damn good tracker.

Arriving back at the clubhouse, I could feel the tension within. A quick look said Shimmer wasn't there, but I could feel the defiance thick in the air. The anger that shouldn't be there. In all honesty, what Shimmer wanted was against the rules.

Part of me almost wished Soul hadn't interfered. If Shimmer broke the rules, Soul could take his patch and put him on probate. Which would only piss Shimmer off more, and he'd become belligerent and get out of control. Kicking him out would be easy at that point.

I followed Secret to the back office where he kept the black book. No one was allowed to touch it besides him and the president. The rules weren't a secret. But he took his position very seriously and wouldn't allow the rules to be changed while he wasn't looking.

He looked up when I closed the door behind me. A brow raised, he tracked me as I neared him. "I'm not into cock, Orchid."

My feet froze, and I almost fell forward. "What?" I asked, wide-eyed.

Secret laughed. "Your expression is hilarious. But why are you here and shutting my door?"

Glaring at him, I dropped into a chair. "You know every single rule we have." He gave me a curt nod. "And Shimmer hasn't broken any of them since his stint on probate years ago."

He frowned, sitting in the chair behind his desk. "No, unfortunately. He's very careful about what he does. Pushing just so far before he can be considered out of line."

"How can we push him to break a rule so important that Soul has the grounds to kick him out?" I asked, leaning forward.

Secret leaned forward as well, grinning. "I like how you're thinking, but unfortunately, Soul stopped one of those from happening just now."

A knock at the door had us both sitting up. Secret told the demon to enter. Denial walked in, his critical gaze falling on me. He paused, just for a second, before stepping inside and shutting the door behind him.

Taking the seat next to me and facing Secret, he eyed me again before looking at Secret. "I think Orchid and I are here for the same reason."

"He wants to push Shimmer to break a rule that will get him kicked out," Secret supplied.

Denial nodded. I could never read him. The fucker was always blank faced. Stone-cold and eerily silent. “Good. And I think we now have in our possession the means to make that happen.”

“We do?” I asked as Secret raised a brow.

“We all know that the longer the girl is here, the more Shimmer is going to do everything in his power to either possess her or do something else heinous. We need to let it happen.”

“You want to use her as a tool?” I asked, incredulous. “Denial, she could get hurt.”

He looked at me, his lips pursed. This girl wasn’t anything to him. Hell, there weren’t many demons alive that meant anything to him. Everyone was a pawn. Anyone could be used to become a means to an end.

“She’s a living, breathing person,” I insisted. “Soul isn’t going to agree.”

“No, he’s not,” Denial said. “Which is why I’m not telling him what I plan.” His look was significant, telling me that I am not to speak of it either. I didn’t need that warning. There was no way in hell I wanted to be on the receiving end of his crazy. Turning his attention to Secret, he said, “I think Soul is going to keep her with Bounce and Bone Breaker as much as he can until we determine who she is and what to do with her. But we need her here if we’re going to tempt Shimmer into acting.”

Secret frowned, his eyes dropping to the black book in front of him. I could see him mentally carding through the rules, trying to find one that would bring the girl here.

I had a really bad feeling about this. “Are you really going to keep this from Soul?” I asked Denial. His sharp gaze drifted to me. It took everything in me not to flinch. “Should you be keeping secrets from him?”

It’s even more unsettling when Denial smiled. The look he gave me made me shudder. “I should not. I’m breaking a cardinal relationship rule right now, but if it means we’ll be able to weed out the bad in our crew, Soul will eventually forgive me.”

“Don’t take this offensively, but I think you need to really reconsider that. Plotting behind your lover’s back when you know he’d object is a surefire way to lose your relationship,” I said.

He frowned.

“I know your reasons and I know that you think you’re helping Soul by doing this. But you’re severely miscalculating the fact that you’re undermining his authority and intentionally doing something that he wouldn’t

approve of.”

Denial’s eyes narrowed. He pursed his lips, and I subtly leaned back in my seat. Away from him.

They were very private about their relationship. I had no idea if they were serious or not. All I knew was that they’d been seeing each other for a couple years now. That led me to believe that it was at least a little serious.

“Fine,” he said, his voice dangerously quiet. He stared at me for another minute. “You now have a plan. It’s up to you to make it happen, Orchid. I won’t ask about it again. I won’t be involved in any way.”

Denial stood. He met Secret’s gaze before leaving the room and shutting the door behind him. I looked at Secret with wide eyes. He chuckled, shaking his head. “I’ll have a list of possible reasons she needs to be here by tomorrow.”

Numbly, I stood.

“Orchid.” I turned as he said my name. “Be careful. Shimmer won’t think twice about making you collateral damage.”

I nodded. What had I just gotten myself into?

Haidee



I peeled my eyes open and tried to look around, but my body was so stiff from the bike ride, afraid I might fall off, that I couldn't convince my muscles to move. Bone Breaker chuckled and patted my hands again.

"It's okay, bunny," he said, his voice smooth and quiet, as if I really were a bunny and he was afraid to spook me.

"You've never been on a bike before, huh?" the other demon asked.

It was difficult to pull myself off of Bone Breaker, even knowing we were sitting still and the engine was off. I could totally still fall and crack my head open. It was very, very possible. Instead, I allowed the other demon to help me off the back of the bike.

They led me to the front door and opened it. Stepping inside, I wasn't sure why I felt so surprised that it looked like a typical house. Then again, the only instances I remembered of a house were from my early childhood and those images were vague at best. Still, it wasn't lined with cells. There weren't doors with muffled cries behind them.

"I'll get you some of Orchid's clothes," the demon that's not Bone Breaker said as he headed down the hall.

"Why does Orchid have clothes here, Bounce?" Bone Breaker asked, eyes narrowed as his gaze followed.

A chuckle answered him from the hall. He returned and stepped into Bone Breaker's space, a smile on his lips. "Don't be jealous, my fallen angel. You know who owns my soul."

The other demon's eyelids lowered. As if I were looking at someone's reflection in a mirror, they came together in synchronicity, their lips

connecting in a short, intimate kiss. When they pulled away and opened their eyes, again in complete unison, they flashed a murky, pearly glow before dying away.

I caught my breath. They were possessed demons. My eyes widened in awe. Fascination. When I was young, the only dream I had was that the demon who was always meant to be my possessed would happen upon me and rescue me. Obviously, that didn't happen. And when the world just seemed to throw a crueler demon than the last each day, I lost that dream. It became more of a myth than anything.

Bounce turned to me and smiled, offering me the articles of clothing in his hand. He nodded toward the hall when I accepted them. "The bathroom is the first door on the right. Go ahead and change."

Without talking, because it wasn't necessary to do so and you don't talk unless prompted, I nodded and moved into the hall. I flicked on the bathroom light and closed the door. There was a lock but I wasn't sure if I was allowed to use it. So I didn't.

Setting the clothes on the counter, I went to work trying to undo my dress. It didn't take me long to figure out that I couldn't reach the buttons down the back. I struggled, attempting to pull my arms through the sleeves and turn it on my body. I tried ripping it. I tried simply forcing it over my head.

By the time I had exhausted all my options, I was panting, tears stinging my eyes. If I couldn't get out of it, how was I going to change? Were they going to be angry that I didn't do what I was told?

Taking a deep breath, I pulled the door open and turned back to the room we'd come in. There was a couch against the long wall facing a large screen opposite. Perpendicular on either side were large, cushy chairs. Bone Breaker and Bounce were on the couch, Bounce, leaning into Bone Breaker's chest in a very cuddly way.

Their eyes turned to me when I came out and tears blurred my vision.

"What's wrong?" Bone Breaker asked.

"I can't get it off," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. Ready to accept whatever punishment they inflicted.

I wasn't prepared for gentle hands on my face. Cupping my cheeks. Thumbs softly rubbing away the tears that escaped.

"Take a breath," Bounce said, quietly. I did, pulling it in deeply and holding it until I could open my eyes to look at him. He wasn't angry. He

almost looked concerned. But that can't be right. "It's alright. We'll help you if you need it, hunny. It's okay. See? All done."

As he said the words, my arms wrapped around my waist were the only things keeping my dress from pooling at my feet. Bounce let my face go and I shifted as Bone Breaker flashed me a smile and walked back to the couch. I had no idea he was behind me, undoing my dress while Bounce said comforting things to me.

"Now, you can change," Bounce said.

I nodded and turned, scurrying back into the bathroom and closing the door. I let the dress fall and shoved it against the wall in the far corner. Then everything else on my body came off too and landed in the same pile.

When I was standing naked, I stared longingly at the shower. They didn't say I could shower. They said to change. Biting my lip, I contemplated if I would be pushing my luck if I took one. Deciding I didn't want to risk their wrath, I quickly slipped into the sweatpants and t-shirt I was given. They were big on me, but not as big as these demons were. Whoever Orchid was, he certainly had a smaller frame.

Wrapping my arms around myself again, I stepped out of the bathroom. They were back on the couch. When I walked into the room and stopped, Bone Breaker got up and wrapped a hoodie around my shoulders, encouraging me to stick my arms through. Then he handed me a pair of socks.

"Are you thirsty? Hungry?" he asked.

I nodded because I was both. I didn't think I'd had anything to eat or drink since yesterday.

"Relax and I'll make you something to eat. What do you like? Or maybe, what don't you like?"

My brows scrunched together. I'd never been asked either of those questions. Food was food. His expression softened. "Alright. Just relax and I'll bring you something."

He left the room and then a light flickered on in what I presumed was the kitchen. Bounce moved in front of me with a blanket in hand. "Here," he said, wrapping it around my shoulders. I didn't know how he knew I was freezing, but I appreciated the soft, thick blanket. "Come on. Sit. Relax."

Relax. I'd never been told that word before. I've never been allowed that luxury. In fact, I'd learned a long time ago to never get too comfortable, because the next horror was always right around the corner.

I allowed Bounce to guide me to the chair where I settled in, tucking my feet under me and slipping on the socks that Bone Breaker had handed me. Bounce left the room but returned a minute later with a glass of ice water. I took it with thanks and sipped it, leaning back and closing my eyes.

The door opened, and I nearly jumped out of the chair as two men, vaguely familiar, stepped inside. They were smaller than Bounce and Bone Breaker. By a lot. One was taller than the other, with dark hair and dark eyes. Lean but with big arms and a strong face. The other, much lighter in appearance, couldn't be more than a couple inches taller than me. But he was built like a bulldozer.

Bounce moved to them, wrapping the taller one in his arms and kissing him in a very filthy way. I flushed, looking away.

"Everything okay?" Bounce asked. "All taken care of?"

The tall one nodded. "Yep. After they gather some heads and all the keys, I think they're just going to burn the temple down. It'll be easier and quicker to dispose of the bodies."

"And Shimmer?"

There was a beat of silence before the other one answered. "Pissed he didn't get his way. Apparently, the crew agreeing to the massacre that was his idea wasn't enough for him."

"Fuck, I can't stand that asshole," Bounce growled.

Both newcomers grunted in agreement.

"Bone Breaker is making dinner," Bounce said.

The short one gave him a curt nod and headed for the direction Bone Breaker was. That took him right by me, and he clearly hadn't noticed I'd been sitting in the room. He paused, his gaze turning my way.

My breath came out in a choke as I met his eyes. Cold. Hard. Dead. Filled with all things that made up a promise of pain and darkness.

"Woah, easy, hunny," Bounce said, his hands coming over the one I was holding my glass of water in. "Denial, get out. You're creepy as fuck on a normal day. Today isn't any better."

He snorted and turned for the kitchen. Somehow, I managed not to dump the water on myself. "He's not going to hurt you," Bounce assured me. "Just breathe."

But I've seen that look before. I knew what it meant. He was cruel. Just like all the others who've touched me over the years. That dead look that said he had no conscience. That what he was going to take from me was owed to

him. I was nothing but a plaything.

“Breathe,” Bounce said and I let the air I was holding whoosh out of me. “Look at me.” Forcing my gaze to his, he smiled a little. “That’s better. I promise you, no one is going to hurt you. You’re safe now.”

“I’ve never been safe,” I murmured.

His lips pressed together. Anger flashed in his eyes and I flinched, trying to burrow back into the chair.

“You’re safe now,” he insisted. “I promise you won’t be hurt again.”

I didn’t bother to tell him I’d heard those words a few times. And promises? Those were worse experiences. The word itself made bile rise in my throat.

“Drink,” he said softly and backed away, letting me go. Moving out of my space.

He joined the other one on the couch, wrapping his arm around his neck. “This is Orchid. The owner of the clothes you’re wearing,” Bounce said.

Orchid grinned brightly at me. I tried to smile back, but it wasn’t going to come.

“The demon I banished to the kitchen is Denial. He’s a good egg, even if a little scary,” Bounce said. “He’s a crazy fucker, but he’s on the right side.”

I didn’t say anything. Remembering my trainer demon’s instructions that I only speak when prompted.

“What’s your name?” Orchid asked.

The question made me puff out my cheeks. No one had said my name since I’d been stolen. They didn’t ask for my name. They didn’t name me. I was an object. A toy to use. A transferable or loanable piece of property.

“Haidee?” I said, unsure if I even remembered my own name correctly.

“Are you not sure?” Orchid asked, his brows knit together.

A bitter laugh escaped me, and I closed my eyes, leaning back into the chair. “No. I’m not. The things I’m usually called are not names. I was told my new owner would give me a name after my wedding.”

The tension in the room shifted, and I peeked out at them. Orchid frowned, his eyes sad. Bounce was momentarily irate before he schooled his features.

Before any more questions could continue, Bone Breaker and Denial stepped in with bowls in their hands. Bone Breaker handed one to me and set my glass on the table beside the chair I was in. He grinned and turned, taking the bowl he had tucked in his arm and handing it to Denial, keeping the third

for himself. Denial had given the two bowls he carried to Bounce and Orchid.

Bone Breaker sat in the big chair opposite mine. Denial dropped to the floor and leaned back on the chair between his legs. He stared at me as he ate, his light eyes looking almost unfocused, but the chill in them never defrosted.

“Den, stop staring at her,” Bounce said, glowering at him. Denial blinked and looked at him. “You’re a scary fucker. She’s been through enough hell.”

Denial glanced my way again before dropping his gaze to his bowl. Bone Breaker chuckled, running his fingers through Denial’s hair. I caught Denial’s lips quirk a little. And then we ate in silence.

The food was so damn good. And it was easily three times as much as I was usually given. When it was gone, I leaned back into the chair with a sigh.

“How about ice cream for dessert?” Orchid asked, getting to his feet. “Want some ice cream, Haidee?”

“I... I don’t know?” When’s the last time I’ve had ice cream? Hell, have I ever had ice cream?

“I’ll make you a special bowl,” Orchid said, and moved into the kitchen. Bone Breaker stood, swinging his leg over Denial, taking his bowl on the way by. Bounce followed, relieving me of mine, and followed the other two into the kitchen.

That left me alone with Denial. His gaze was back on me. Unblinking. They were right. He’s scary as fuck. Probably because he looks so emotionless. Void of life.

Those were the scariest demons, in my experience. They enjoyed hurting me. I was pretty sure that had been their sole goal while using my body for their pleasure was to cause me the most amount of pain.

“How long were you with Sticks and Bones?” he asked.

I frowned. “Ten minutes?” I asked.

He frowned in return. “Ten minutes?” he echoed.

Nodding, I added, “For the past six months, I was being groomed to the specifications of my new owner.”

“Owner,” he repeated, his voice dark.

“Yes,” I whispered.

“New owner,” he said.

Swallowing, I nodded. Why did I feel like I was suddenly in trouble?

I sagged in relief at the interruption of the others returning. Orchid stood at the side of my chair, offering me a bowl that was overfilled with sweet stuff. “I gave you a little bit of everything we had. Five different flavors of

ice cream, three toppings, bananas, jimmies, a mountain of whipped cream, and four cherries.” He placed it in my hand and then gave me a spoon. “We will finish whatever you don’t eat. Oh, and there’s nuts in there too. You’re not allergic, are you?”

Shaking my head, I shrugged. “I don’t think so.”

His smile flickered before he nodded. With his own bowl, he rejoined Bounce on the couch. While I kept most of my attention on the heaven within my bowl, I spied on them as much as I could without looking. Denial went back to looking anywhere but at me as the four of them talked.

When this heap of sugar was gone, I thought I’d eaten so much I’d be sick. A yawn broke from my mouth and I leaned back into the soft blanket.

“Tired, Haidee? Want to go to bed?” Bone Breaker asked.

I nodded, opening my eyes. He stood, took my bowl from me, and headed into the kitchen. Then Bounce was in front of me, offering me his hands. As if I had a choice. Not sure if I did or not, I let him pull me up. He smiled and let go as soon as I was on my feet, gesturing me toward the hall.

Having left the blanket behind, I shivered as I walked. We stopped at the door across from the bathroom and he opened it. “This is the guest room. The one straight at the end is where Denial and Bone Breaker will be. Orchid and I are in the door perpendicular on the right. The left one is also empty.” I nodded. “You want more blankets?”

I glanced at the bed as he flicked on the light. Was it too much to want more? Biting my lip before realizing I was doing it and remembering that wasn’t allowed, I took a breath and nodded.

Bounce pulled open a door in the hall and carried in a stack of blankets. I watched as he laid them down, one after another, stacking them high. “There,” he said, turning to me with a smile. “There’s more in there if you need some. Bathroom.”

I followed him and watched as he pulled out a new bar of soap, a washcloth, a towel, and a toothbrush. “Get cleaned up. Then you can head to bed. We will be quiet so you can sleep.”

Nodding, I stared at the things he’d set on the counter.

“If you’re hungry in the night, or thirsty, you’re free to whatever you can find. Don’t be shy. Go get whatever you want. If you’re afraid or just don’t want to be alone, you can wake one of us.”

I nodded again, glancing at him.

“There’s a lock on your door. On the inside. If it makes you feel safer,

you can lock it. We won't bother you." He didn't promise. Those words didn't leave his mouth. In its absence, I actually believed him.

"Thank you," I whispered. "As weird as it might sound, this has been the best day that I can remember."

The smile he'd had fell. For a minute, he stared at me. Then he took my hand and squeezed it gently. "Take your time. We'll see you in the morning."

I nodded as he walked away. I didn't take my time in the bathroom. The promise of a bed, a real bed with blankets, was too much. I scrubbed my face clean and brushed my teeth before climbing into bed. Too excited for this luxury, I forgot to even latch the door. I was asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

Sadist Soul



The clubhouse was tense the next day. Shimmer wasn't there, but it felt like his poison was everywhere. Taking a frustrated breath, I headed back to my office and sent a text to Secret that I wanted to see him with his black book.

Denial was right. We needed to do something about Shimmer before Dirty Demons was so wrung out with hostility that there was nothing left to save.

While I waited for his arrival, I flicked on my computer and scanned the orders through our website. As part of our legal venture, we sold vinyl shit. Stickers, banners, anything someone can think of. Behind the clubhouse and apartments was our massive warehouse. Thankfully, I'd limited who worked there, so I knew I could trust the demons to only conduct contracted business and not do anything shady.

Which was why I'd never let Shimmer into the building. He didn't have access. The circle I personally placed around it prevented him from stepping foot inside.

There was a steady flow of orders. Nothing exciting, but definitely enough to keep our banks stocked. The cash we collected from the protection tax doesn't sit in any account unless a customer pays for vinyl in cash. Then we write up a dummy order and deposit a whole lot more than necessary.

The vault was also circled, ringed with a hex so I could see a record of anyone in and out. Because I don't trust Shimmer. Something he knows all too well. Unfortunately, he's also aware of the rules that ban stealing from the club.

Too bad, because I could certainly kick him out if he'd stolen.

I closed my laptop when there was a knock at my door. "Enter," I called and Secret stepped inside. He's tall with bulk for days, short hair that's precisely styled. Facial hair that's neatly trimmed and black-rimmed glasses. With black book in hand, I motioned to him to sit.

Shutting the door, he took a seat in front of me.

"I need a refresher of the rules," I said.

"Which ones?"

"All of them. Just begin reading, Secret." I leaned back and closed my eyes, letting his quiet, smooth, business voice wash over me as he read.

Line after line. One rule after another. Some stupid, ridiculous. Others so damn detailed that I'd always questioned what happened to make it necessary for a rule.

Dirty Demons have been the dominating club in Ash Hollow for generations. Our territory used to encompass the surrounding cities too. But something within Dirty Demons turned toxic three decades ago. They lost all the cities except Ash Hollow, which they'd only been able to hang onto by a thread.

I was born into the crew; my father was the former vice president. He died in a dispute with KOK Suckers eighteen years ago when I was a child. Since then I watched from a distance as Dirty Demons continued to deteriorate.

When I joined eight years ago, I earned my way to the presidency and when I finally made it, I swore that I'd bring Dirty Demons back to its former glory. I'd weed out all the nasty toxicity that's made its home within our walls.

Maybe a bit naïve of me to think I'd do this without any problems. But the corruption was far too deep to simply weed it out. And then there are the fucking rules that are so stupidly specific that *prevented* me from making this place right again.

Something happened in the past. Something big. Maybe right around the time that the club began to lose its power and prestige. Whatever went down, it resulted in rules that prevented me from taking out the major thorn.

If I had to take a guess, Secret had found himself in this exact position, reading the rules aloud, to Shimmer. Probably more times than I could imagine.

As if my brief thought of him summoned him, another knock on my door

interrupted us. Opening my eyes, I told the demon on the other side to enter. I knew it was Shimmer just by his knock. Somehow, even that sounded arrogant.

He looked irritated. Angry. But there was a smug excitement under his painted-on nonchalance as he entered. He gave Secret a dismissive glance as he strode inside, standing at the end of my desk, practically blocking me from seeing Secret. Stepping between us. As if planting a wedge.

“What is it?” I asked, feeling how tired the words sounded to even my ears. Maybe this was his goal. To exhaust me into stepping down as president so he could take my position and fuck up Dirty Demons.

“Where’s the girl?” he asked.

“That’s not your concern,” I answered.

More irritation flickered across his face. “Of course it is. I’m VP.”

I didn’t bother to dignify him with a response. Instead, I left my dead stare on him. Uninterested. Unmoved. Unimpressed.

A growl escaped him before he spoke again. That same growl echoed in his tone. “We need to sell her.”

“She’s a person,” Secret said, disgusted.

Shimmer ignored him, pretending that he wasn’t there at all, and he hadn’t heard his words. “There are no rules against it.”

“There are laws against it,” Secret snapped.

We all knew that was a weak argument. Our protection tax alone was enough to put us all in prison and throw away the key. But we also practically owned the police department in Ash Hollow.

For now.

I was already having doubts that we’d be able to hold on to that power much longer. Especially if we began fighting each other. The coppers would see that weakness and exploit it as a means to retake the city.

That wasn’t going to happen. I wouldn’t let it happen.

“We’ll put out word that we have the widowed wife of Sticks and Bones’s VP. There will be a shit ton of bids. Especially when they take a look at her,” Shimmer said.

“No,” I answered. Secret relaxed, his shoulders releasing the tension.

“Why?” Shimmer growled. “We can’t keep her. She’s a drain on our resources.”

“I didn’t say we were going to keep her. I said we’re not selling her. We’re not going to be involved in trafficking.”

“She’s young. She’s hot. We can sell her for top dollar as a breeder,” Shimmer argued vehemently.

“We have plenty of money,” Secret said. “We don’t need that income.”

“This isn’t about money,” Shimmer snapped, glaring at Secret. “Why are you even in here?”

“I was asked for a meeting. You are the one rudely interrupting,” Secret deadpanned. “Always where you’re unwanted.”

Shimmer flashed, his body glittering before he slipped out of existence. Secret rolled his eyes. He leaned forward just as Shimmer reappeared behind him, his hands closing in on nothing since Secret’s neck was no longer where it had been. With the butt of a blade that he pulled from his boot, Secret reared back and slammed it hard into Shimmer’s chest.

An audible crack filled the air as he snapped Shimmer’s sternum. Shimmer gasped and reared back, his body slammed into the open door frame and he slumped to the ground as he loudly cursed, demanding punishment for an attack on the VP.

Secret had already tucked his blade back into his boot and was sitting leisurely on the chair, blinking lazily at me. With his middle finger, he pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose as he watched me.

“You can’t allow him to get away with this!” Shimmer demanded, his voice strained with pain, spitting with fury.

“You mean I can’t let him get away with defending himself?” I asked.

“I didn’t touch him,” he roared.

There was a gathering outside my door now, a healthy mix of those who supported Shimmer and those who outright despised him. His buddies were becoming vocal.

“Because you’re predictable when you shimmer, idiot,” Secret said. “I wasn’t where you expected me to be and so you fumbled.”

“As per usual,” someone muttered in the hall bitterly.

“You’re a bully that doesn’t like being knocked down a peg,” Secret said, blinking lazily at him.

Shimmer still sputtered, trying to claim that Secret was lying, and I was too by not backing up Shimmer.

“How offensive is a false accusation in our rules?” I asked Secret, my voice calm. Quiet.

But it was loud enough that Shimmer suddenly snapped his mouth shut.

“Well, prez, there’s a lot said about lying. Very high fines, depending on

the severity of the crime. Especially if we have witnesses. Evidence,” Secret said as if he were in a courtroom and not in front of an audience of onlookers.

I opened my laptop and logged into the personal video recorder that was set on top of the larger monitor that I rarely used. It wasn’t even hooked up. But it was the perfect height to record everything that happened on the other side of my desk and no one thought twice about it since it appeared to be facing me. As if it sat there, ready for a video call.

Rewinding to just before Shimmer skipped space, I turned the screen around to face the onlookers. There was straining at the door so that everyone could see. I tapped the spacebar, and let the scene play out. There wasn’t audio because I had that turned off. I didn’t want that playback or for anyone to focus on Shimmer’s suggestion.

“Secret provoked me,” Shimmer demanded. “He broke my sternum!”

“If by provoking you mean disagreeing, yes I did that,” Secret said. “That’s also recorded, isn’t it?”

I nodded. “It is. As is the conversation where the vice president outright lied and accused you of attacking him unprovoked.”

Shimmer’s face went red as he stared in fury. Silently. That silence echoed in the hall. In my doorway. No one said anything.

“And what’s the punishment, Secret?” I asked.

I saw the line of his lips. Fuck, I shouldn’t have asked right here. He didn’t like the answer. “It’s at the discretion of the president,” he said carefully. “At Church, we are all to discuss the matter and propose punishment, but in the end, it’s the president’s choice to accept one of them or to deliver his own.”

“I’d like to go on record to say that while I meant to cause Secret pain, I wasn’t aiming to break a bone,” Shimmer said quickly.

“No. Just to wrap your hands around my neck,” Secret said and leaned forward, rewinding the video and letting it play again, pausing right where his hands wrapped around air, Secret having bent forward a second sooner. “It’s a good thing our president is prepared for such violence.”

If the situation was less important, I’d have laughed at the expression on Shimmer’s face. He was purply red, trying like hell to keep said violence from showing, now knowing he was being recorded.

“Is there a rule about being recorded?” someone in the hall asked.

Secret grinned, shifting in his chair to look out. “Yes. It states that all hidden cameras are there for the safety of our crew. And can also be used to

protect our club when the situation is needed.”

There aren't as many hidden cameras as Secret was alluding to. But watching the color drain from a handful of faces, including Shimmer's, suggested that I needed to check the ones that were around. And maybe consider adding more.

“Who has access to them?” Shimmer asked.

“Are you worried about what's on them?” Secret asked.

“Of course not,” he snapped. “I just think the crew should know where they're located.”

“That defeats the ‘hidden camera’ purpose, don't you think?” Secret countered.

Shimmer didn't answer. He didn't argue. Licks helped him to his feet, and he left my office. Achilles, with a grin, shut my door, keeping everyone else out. When I was confident that no one was lingering, I turned my computer around and saved the clip before looking at Secret.

“Not as many as we need,” he murmured. “And you always have access to them. It's also at your discretion on who you'd like to monitor them.” He paused. “That person doesn't even have to be publicly appointed.”

Meaning I could tell the crew that I alone monitored them while giving someone else the job. Protecting them from being a target for Shimmer and his cronies. I smiled. “We'll reconvene on the rules later. Let's shop for a while.”

Maybe, just fucking maybe, there was light at the end of the tunnel.

Sadist Soul



While I didn't take any immediate action against Shimmer, Secret and I outfitted the clubhouse with more than two dozen additional cameras. The feeds all went to my office on the monitor I didn't use. I planned to bring someone else in to watch them as well, but I appreciated only having Secret and I know the position of every camera.

Shimmer was stewing, but he was also on better behavior since he knew his ass was on the line. After making sure we didn't have a time frame in which we needed to invoke the rule broken by Shimmer, I sent the video to my phone and to Secret's phone, just to make sure that it was always on hand. Shimmer was a sneaky, vindictive fucker.

My office was always locked and while it may appear to be low security, I had written a secure ring around the perimeter. It was something that wasn't overly obvious, but you'd have to be a fool not to know it was there.

Activity at the clubhouse dwindled after the incident with Shimmer, but picked up in joviality. Shimmer and most of his cronies chose to be away from the clubhouse and while I knew that wasn't necessarily a good thing, everyone appreciated the break in hostile tension that was a constant cloud around here.

Those that remained laughed more freely. Played games. Joked. I sat back and imagined this was what it was supposed to be. This was what it *would* be. It gave me something to strive for. A taste of what my end goal was. Renewed my determination to make this happen.

Getting rid of Shimmer wasn't going to be enough. I needed to clean

house. That meant his cronies too.

Knowing that Shimmer was going to be on a rampage trying to get his name cleared, I brought Bounce and Bone Breaker back. Meaning Haidee was here, too. They took up an apartment out back, one that was the most secure, and stayed close to home.

This resulted in me spending a lot of time in my office staring at the screens. Watching Haidee. Watching my crew interact with her.

My enforcers were very obviously smitten. While they tried not to be, it was clearer by the day that they were quite fond of Haidee. As was Orchid. Hell, I'd even caught Secret watching her from across the room more than a dozen times.

I'd gathered a bit from Bone Breaker and Bounce about her. Enough to know that she's had it fucking rough. Abuse in all forms and yet, I caught her laughing the other day. The sound had startled her, and she stopped abruptly, staring wide-eyed at Orchid. This only caused him to take her face in his hands, beaming at her, encouraging her to smile and laugh some more.

She was young when she was taken from her parents' home. While I assumed her parents were dead, I put some feelers out about the girl that was taken two decades ago or more. She didn't know where she was from. Only that she was wrapped in a blanket like a straight jacket in the middle of the night, gagged, and hauled off.

The abuse began from there.

Haidee thought she was maybe four. But the years had been too long that she didn't recall. After this information, I didn't press my enforcers to ask more questions. If Haidee volunteered anything, then I'd be interested to know. But right now, the only thing that mattered was keeping her safe.

Which, okay, I didn't know why. Shimmer wasn't wrong in that she didn't really belong here. She wasn't anyone's old lady and fuck if I was going to let someone claim her after all the shit she'd been through.

But what was the alternative? Let her loose on the streets? That was a fucking disaster waiting to happen. She'd been basically caged since childhood. She wouldn't know how to survive on the street.

Then there's the option to give her away. Make her someone else's problem. But again, why? She wasn't causing any harm here. In fact, her presence alone caused Shimmer to break some rules. Enough that I could at least bring him to probate if nothing else.

A knock on my door had me looking up. I hit the button on my monitor to

turn it off before telling them to enter.

Denial stepped inside, his cold expression one I knew all too well. He was one of those demons driven by emotion and usually when it gets too much, he loses his fucking mind and there's blood on our hands. Keeping himself behind a tightly sealed exterior helped him put all those troublesome emotions into little cages on the inside. Not allowing them to get in the way.

He shut the door and watched me for a minute. Only his eyes gave anything away and yet, most demons only saw that they were cold and empty. If they could look beyond that, bring themselves to stare past the frozen exterior, they'd see the war raging inside.

Sighing, he rounded my desk and pushed my chair away. I couldn't contain my grin when he crawled into my lap, straddling me, his hands going into my hair with a stingingly tight grip.

"You look smug today," he said.

"I haven't been out of my office today. How can I look smug?"

He snorted, his gaze dropping to my lips. "You haven't been. Choosing to watch from the shadows instead."

"As is the nature of a demon."

This time, he chuckled, bringing his eyes back to mine. "I know you can see a lot at once on your pretty screen, Soul, but you should be out there so they can see you. Be with the crew."

"I know. I will be," I said, leaning in to kiss him. His smile was small against my lips. If I didn't know better, I'd say that he was indifferent to my mouth on his. But his grip on my hair tightened as he held me in place, keeping my lips against his. My scalp burned, but I didn't care at all. His hands on me, the way he handled me, was exactly the escape I needed to let go of the pressure and stress that was on me as the president of the Dirty Demons.

"What are you learning in here?" he asked.

"That I no longer have a heads up when Shimmer and his minions are plotting something," I said, sighing. Feeling the weight settle on me again. "The really irritating thing is that I know he's had Secret read through the rules for him many times. He's so fucking meticulous about pushing boundaries right *up to* the fucking line before breaking them. Like he's memorized them. But he acted shocked about the cameras."

"Maybe Secret left the rules concerning them out."

"Or he fashioned his wording enough that it hinted that the cameras were

outside, watching the clubhouse for our safety and not inside,” I said. I’ve been thinking about it a lot.

Denial smirked. “Sounds like Secret.”

My phone rang. Sighing, I reached around Denial and picked it up. Licks. With a frown, I answered. The first thing I heard, making me pause before speaking, was a bunch of ruckus in the background. The distinct sound of fighting.

“What’s going on?” I growled.

“The rest of Sticks and Bones, or what we’re assuming is the rest, showed up at the Sticky Hound looking for revenge,” he said, breathless. I narrowed my eyes. The Sticky Hound was a bar close by. Maybe three blocks east. By calling me, Licks just gave away the new gathering spot for Shimmer and company. I met Denial’s gaze as Licks spoke again. “There’s more than we thought would be left, prez. But they’re green. Practically all new guys. We have it covered. Just thought you should know.”

“Thanks. Keep me posted if you need some backup.”

“Will do.” The phone went dead.

“Most bars around here have video feeds inside, don’t they?” I asked.

Denial nodded, then shrugged. “I think so. Safety of their patrons and all that.”

“Find Arrow for me? Maybe he can break into their feed.”

He nodded. Before getting off my lap, he kissed me again. I was surprised when it was soft, his hands gentling in my hair. “You okay?” he murmured.

I wrapped my arms around him. “Yep. But thanks for checking.”

“Mm,” he answered and got to his feet. I watched his ass in his tight jeans as he walked out the door.

Flicking on the monitor, I spotted Arrow right away. He was playing pool with Haidee, Baba Yaga, and Achilles. Haidee was smiling. For whatever reason, her smile made me smile. Like even through a computer feed, I could feel it and it was contagious.

She was beautiful. Her long, dark brown hair glowed golden in the lights around the room. Her eyes were a light steel blue, her lashes long and dark, making the color of her eyes stand out. Even in the grainy video. Maybe I should have splurged on high definition.

Her lips were lined in black that bled into red. You could see them from anywhere. And when she smiled, you could feel it stroking your soul.

I wasn’t overly familiar with the kind of demon she was. And

unsurprisingly, she didn't know either. Though she didn't recall anything from her captivity that would suggest that her demonic manifestation was suppressed, she also appeared powerless.

It was possible that she was. The population was split nearly 50/50 between powerless and manifested. There's some philosophical debate as to whether the powerless are a strong breed of demon who have forgotten how to use their power over the generations and therefore they're dormant volcanoes.

The answer to that debate wasn't one that I cared about much. Except that it might encompass Haidee. Her features were unique, though it might also just be the abuse she'd suffered for so long. She was thin, still far too thin, and weak from malnutrition and dehydration. My enforcers loved to feed her. Orchid loved to feed her sweets.

Denial appeared in the feed and Haidee immediately went silent. Her smile dropped as she subtly moved away, angling her body behind Orchid's. There was a quiet exchange that I barely caught the words of. Basically along the lines of him relaying to Arrow that I needed him. Arrow handed Denial his cue stick and walked away. But not before he gave Haidee a reassuring smile.

Haidee's was weak in return. Her face now flush.

I pulled the feed up and flipped the audio higher. Just enough so I could barely make out their exchanges as if they were being whispered.

"Den sucks at pool. We're going to kick his ass," Orchid said. "Not even Achilles will help him."

I raised a brow. Denial was definitely *not* sucky at pool. But he shrugged, stepped up to take Arrow's turn, and flung the cue ball off the table hard enough that it jumped ship, slammed into a table a few feet away and then hit the floor in what sounded like a bang.

Orchid laughed, gripping Haidee's wrist. "See?"

A chuckle left me. Especially as Denial shifted, so he looked straight into the camera. He wasn't here when I had them installed, so I had no idea how he knew where it was. Because he's a crazy fuck. That's the only excuse I have for it.

His expression was stony, but I knew better. Even through the camera, I could see his smirk. The rolling of his eyes. I grinned widely.

Fucking Denial liked her! I laughed loudly until Arrow knocked on my door. I flipped off the audio and turned it to the grid on my screen where all

the views were present before I let him in.

“You wanted to see me, prez?” Arrow asked.

I nodded. “I have a job for your hacker skills. Come in.”

Haidee



I expected to be treated like a prisoner like I'd always been. Even after that first night where Bounce and Bone Breaker fed me and then let me have my own room, I thought I'd wake up to find myself naked in an empty cell as the next demon to own me walked in with a nasty grin.

My battered mind tried to put Bone Breaker or Bounce's face on that man in my mind, but it wouldn't stick. Hell, not even Denial's would stay there for long. As if my mind wasn't convinced that they were going to hurt me, while every fiber in my being said they would. Because that's all I've ever known.

But when I woke up, still alone in my room, dressed and burrowed under a mountain of blankets, I wasn't sure what to make of it. Nor what to do with myself. Bounce had told me to go to bed last night. But he didn't say what I was supposed to do when I woke up in the morning.

And it *was* morning. Though there were heavy curtains on the window, they weren't drawn tightly, so a bright strip of yellow sunlight cut across the room. It was so bright that it lit the room as if a light was on.

I had finally warmed up in the night. The ice cream probably hadn't helped to push the chill away, but being buried under blankets had done the trick. I was warm. And so damn comfortable. I couldn't remember the last time I'd felt this way.

Never. That's when.

Deciding that I didn't want to tempt them to change their minds and come after me, I crawled my way out of the blankets until my socked feet hit the carpeted floor. I took a minute to look around the room, noting the

comforting yet sparse furniture.

As I walked to the door, I noted that it wasn't latched. A moment of panic crept through me, but then I reminded myself that I was still alone this morning. No one had woken me during the night. I'd been left alone.

For an entire night. Even with strange men in the house.

I pulled the door open and quietly padded down the hall until I was peeking into the living room. No one was there. The voices were coming from the kitchen. So, I peeked in there next.

Bone Breaker was standing over the stove—and now that I heard the sizzling, the delicious smells made my stomach clench in hunger and my mouth salivate—with Bounce behind him, wrapped around him. Their voices were quiet but talking about everyday things.

“Morning.”

The voice came from behind me, and I jumped, spinning and backing into the wall. Bone Breaker and Bounce turned too, and I felt caught. Like I'd done something wrong.

Orchid raised his hands and stepped further away. “Sorry, Haidee. Didn't mean to scare you.”

My heart hammered in my chest, and I nodded, staring wide-eyed. Waiting for someone to yell at me. To hit me. Instead, Orchid gestured for me to move into the kitchen and sit at the bar. I did, and Bounce pushed a glass of juice toward me.

Still, no one yelled. Hell, all three of them turned the other way and carried on. Bounce hugged Orchid to his chest, kissing him softly before peppering kisses all over his face until he laughed. I was so enamored by the sweet affection, I couldn't look away. My heart ached longingly.

Bone Breaker huffed. “You're going to make me lose my appetite,” he grumbled.

Bounce chuckled. “Don't be jealous. Not my fault that your lover is a sour apple.”

Bone Breaker snorted, but he didn't answer.

The morning went by quietly. I spent most of the time just watching them interact with each other. It was sweet. More than anything, I wanted that. The dream that I'd always hoped for. That the demon who would be my possessed found me and took me away. He'd love me and make all the fear, the pain, the horrible memories fade. He'd heal my scars and hold me when the past became too much to ignore and I cried in my sleep.

He never came.

We spent the next couple days at the house. Bone Breaker and Bounce were constantly there. Orchid came and went, but Denial didn't come back. From the little bits of information I gathered, there'd been a disagreement when I went to bed the first night and Denial didn't end up staying.

I wanted to ask because it looked like Bone Breaker was bothered by it. While he tried not to be, I don't think he pulled it off. Bounce and Orchid spent some time distracting him with games and being weird. But it wasn't my place to ask. I maintained not speaking unless prompted to do so.

On the third day I was there, Orchid brought me some books. A stack of eight that I looked at. They were romance. Curious, I chose the one with a yellow smokey cover because it was about a motorcycle club. The girl was a cage fighter, and I immediately idolized her for her strength. No one messed with her. She was badass and everything I wasn't. This girl, fictional or not, was my hero.

Anyway, she's indebted to this leprechaun, and in order to get out of it, she turns to a motorcycle club of feline shifters for help. I was completely engrossed and finished the whole thing in one sitting, barely putting down the book to eat or drink.

I wanted to be the badass woman with so much strength. I wanted to meet my mates, though I didn't think demons had mates. We had possessed, but that was a choice. Not a fated thing. While the story was fiction, I found that hope had once more rooted itself in my chest. I *wanted* to be loved and cherished like she was. But I also wanted to find my own feet and voice. I wanted to save myself sometimes too.

Days later, Denial returned. Maybe a week had gone by at that point. I remained sitting in the corner with another book, but with his cold presence in the same room, it was difficult to concentrate. I kept eying him over the top of my book, my muscles tense.

He glanced at me as he remained in the little entry nook, his back leaning against the closed door, hands in his pockets. Waiting. Eventually, Bone Breaker stepped into the room, frowning at him. There was a silent, awkward moment (awkward for me) while they stared at each other.

Finally, Denial sighed and pushed himself from the door. He crossed the room and pulled Bone Breaker into a hug. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "You're right. Not an object or a pawn."

Bone Breaker resisted for a minute, but he gave in, wrapping Denial in

his big arms and hugging him tightly. His still expression melted away as he let out a breath. "I hate when you're being an unreasonable, conscienceless jackass," he muttered. "You don't always have to be that way."

Denial didn't answer, but his gaze turned to me in the corner. My cheeks heated uncomfortably. I didn't like being in his view.

"I know," he answered, pulling away. He kissed Bone Breaker hard, running a hand down his chest and gripping his shirt. He stepped away after I'd pulled the book up to hide them from my vision. I didn't need to watch that. It was a private moment that I had no business in. Even though it happened right in front of me, and they both knew I was there. "Soul wants you guys at the clubhouse. He's moving you three into one of the apartments out back."

His words were enough to call Bounce into the room. Orchid wasn't here today. Or at least, not yet. So it had been just the three of us.

"Why?" Bounce asked, suspicious.

Denial smirked. "Shimmer fucked up in front of a camera he didn't know was there. And while he's been on his best behavior, knowing that he's going to be in some major trouble eventually, Soul wants the two of you close." He glanced at me. "Which means Haidee needs to be there as well."

Bone Breaker and Bounce exchanged looks. I didn't think either of them were happy about it, but they nodded. "Fine," Bounce said. "We'll get some things and head over. Which apartment are we taking?"

Denial shrugged. "He doesn't care, I don't think. Make sure you choose one that's well under surveillance." He looked at me again. "Can't be too careful."

His words sent chills down my back as dread settled into my chest. Of course this had been too good to be true. This quiet peace where I was able to just live and be left alone. Untouched. Unbothered. With little or no expectations on me.

It wasn't long before I was loaded onto the back of Bone Breaker's bike and we were flying down the road with the loud roar of the engine in my ears. My hair whipped wildly behind me as I clung tightly to Bone Breaker's waist.

And then we were there. As with the last time I'd been on the bike with him, I was reluctant to let go. Afraid that my legs had forgotten how to work and I'd fall on my face. Bounce was already pulling things out of his saddle packs but Denial stopped next to me as Bone Breaker patted my hands for

perhaps the thirtieth time as he chuckled.

“You’ve stopped moving now,” Denial said, watching me. “Do you need help?”

“She does,” Bone Breaker said, a smile clear in his voice. “I don’t think she’s comfortable on bikes yet.”

“Hm,” Denial answered, offering me his hand. He was the last person I wanted to touch right now. He terrified the fuck out of me, reminding me of all the demons who’d hurt me in the past. But I also knew that the quickest way to piss one of those demons off was to not do what they wanted you to. And Denial wanted my hand.

So, I forced myself to let go and placed my hand in Denial’s. I was surprised when his touch was kind. When his fingers wrapped around me, he gently coaxed me off the bike. He didn’t let me stumble or fall. As soon as I was steady, he nodded and let go of my hand.

“You’re going to have to learn to enjoy riding,” Denial said, his voice still low and void of any life. But I got the impression that he was actually trying to be friendly. “That’s what we do. Ride bikes.”

“And collect taxes,” Bounce said. “And other things that are both more pleasant and less so.”

Denial nodded.

No one allowed me to carry anything while they loaded their arms with the bags they packed. I was also not allowed to touch the door, something I remembered from the trainer demon. No women or civilians are allowed to open the door to the clubhouse.

I followed them through a series of hallways and out the back where a handful of buildings stood with flower-lined paths connecting them and spans of green grass. There was even a garden in the back.

“Looks like they picked one out for you,” Denial said and I shifted so I could look beyond Bone Breaker in front of me.

There was a demon standing just outside an open door. He was probably one of the most beautiful men I’d ever seen. I stared, wide-eyed, as we approached, suddenly self-conscious of... well, everything.

“You want us here?” Bounce asked him as we approached.

The demon looked up, as if pointedly looking at something. And then did the same thing to several other points before meeting Bounce’s gaze and grinned. A smile that made my body tingle.

“Yes,” he said and stepped aside. His dark eyes landed on me, and his

smile softened. “Hi, Haidee. I’m Arrow.”

“Arrow,” I repeated, voice hoarse.

He nodded, his sweet smile turning wicked and teasing. I jumped when his tail wrapped around him, and the end flickered a little. “Arrow,” he said, grinning. “They were very original when naming me.”

Denial chuckled. “Your tail has nothing to do with your name.” He walked by, bringing his handful of bags inside.

“No, I suppose it doesn’t,” Arrow said, still smiling at me. But it was in such a way that suggested we had a secret. I found myself smiling back.

Haidee



The new apartment wasn't much different from the house we left except that it was smaller. There wasn't a separate living area and kitchen, but one combined room with the distinct areas separated by furniture. There were three bedrooms again, but they were smaller too.

Bone Breaker, Denial, and Bounce dropped the bags they carried with them in various rooms before returning to where I was looking around.

"This place okay?" Bounce asked.

I looked at him, brows rising. "Yes?"

He chuckled. "We gave you the big room. It has its own bathroom, so you can have your privacy." He hesitated a minute. "There are also bars on the windows. It's not to keep you in, Haidee. They're for..." he trailed off as my spine stiffened.

"You'll see soon enough," Denial said. "For your own safety, stick around someone you know. One of us, Arrow, Orchid. There are a handful of others that Bone Breaker and Bounce will tell you are safe, but be very wary of others."

I had so many questions. The most pressing one on the tip of my tongue was "Isn't this your crew? Shouldn't I be able to trust everyone?" I didn't ask, of course. I wasn't prompted to. Instead, I nodded, my gaze flickering back to Arrow in the door. When I met his eyes, he grinned. My entire body flushed, and I looked away.

Denial and Bone Breaker took a seat on the couch, sitting close, and I turned away to give them privacy. They'd very clearly had an argument, and I'd already witnessed the apology before we left the house. It was apparent

that they had making up to do.

“A little help.”

I turned to the door in time to see Arrow step aside. Someone was carrying two big boxes that he couldn't see around. Laughing, Arrow took one, revealing Orchid, then asked, “Where to, pretty flower?”

Orchid huffed at him, rolling his eyes. But when he saw me, he smiled. “These are for Haidee. So, her room.”

“Big one,” Bone Breaker said from the couch, gesturing to the hall.

Orchid led the way with Arrow on his heels. Not knowing what else to do, and a little curious, I followed them.

The room wasn't huge, but it was nearly as big as the room I'd left. There were three windows with bars on the outside. Two doors, one leading to an attached bathroom and the other to a closet. One not so unlike those I'd been locked inside shortly after I'd been taken.

Pushing that thought aside, I turned to the demons as they set the boxes on the bed.

“I changed all the bedding,” Orchid said. “And I'll bring over some more from the empty apartments.” He smiled at me as Arrow opened a box.

“Where did these come from?” he asked, pulling out a shirt that was obviously too small for him.

“Doll and Tonne,” Orchid said. “Soul asked if any of the crew's old ladies had some clothes, they'd be willing to donate. While mine look good on Haidee, I'm sure she'd be more comfortable in clothes that actually fit.”

I flushed as both demons looked at me with smiles. They weren't the predatory kind that I was accustomed to. The smiles weren't filled with greed, or nasty and cruel. Instead, they were friendly. Maybe even a little... flirty?

“Thank you,” I said, dropping my gaze to where my hands were folded in front of me. “That was unnecessary, though. I can dress in whatever you like.”

My words cut off when hands touched my cheeks. I jumped, fear skittering down my back as I looked into Arrow's face. His expression was soft, but his eyes burned with anger. My heart raced as I shrank in on myself.

“He's not mad at you,” Orchid murmured.

Arrow's eyes widened, and he took an abrupt step back. “No, Haidee. I'm not mad at you at all.”

“But you are mad,” I said, taking another step away from him. Risking

the chance that he'd haul me back or hit me.

He let out a harsh breath, his gaze never leaving mine. His eyes flashed angrily, a bright red as his tail whipped behind him before curling tightly around one of his legs. His tail was mesmerizing, and my gaze fastened on it. It was safer than looking at his anger.

I startled again when he moved closer. His touch was gentle. The anger had simmered in his eyes, though they were still slightly tinged red. "I'm not angry at you," he insisted. "I'm angry at everyone who's ever hurt you. No one should be treated that way."

My lips parted, unsure of what to say. So I didn't say anything.

A knock at the door had me flinching. There was a new demon standing there, one I hadn't seen since the day this motorcycle club murdered the entire congregation that had gathered to watch me wed the demon who purchased me.

He was tall but lean. The same height as Orchid maybe. He didn't tower like Bounce and Bone Breaker. His hair was very long, past his shoulders and brushing his biceps. His eyes were dark and while he was clean shaven, there was a dark shadow where his facial hair would grow.

There was something dark and alluring about him. Commanding but comforting. He was authoritative, confident, but his eyes were kind. It was all a very strange combination that I didn't know what to make of.

I remembered him, but only barely. That day was a bit of a blur with everything that happened and all the faces that flitted before me.

He raised a hand, running it through his long, messy hair. There was a black beaded bracelet around his wrist that I stared at until his hand dropped to his side, and he offered me a smile.

"This is Sadist Soul, our president," Arrow said.

I nodded slightly, Arrow's fingers still gently rubbed my arms in a comforting motion. I was surprised when it did comfort me. Soothed my racing heart and insecurity.

"Hello, Haidee. Your trip here was uneventful?" Sadist Soul asked.

I glanced at Arrow before nodding. "Yes?"

He chuckled.

Arrow squeezed my arms slightly before dropping them. The absence of his touch made me involuntarily take a step closer to him. He beamed as I flushed and wrapped his arms around me. I stiffened, feeling the ever-present fear surge through me. But he rocked me gently and after a minute, I relaxed

into him.

“You’re alright,” he said quietly. “Soul is a safe demon. Remember? Den said to stay near safe demons.”

“Right,” I whispered, shifting my head to look at Soul, peeking at him from behind Arrow’s bicep. I was standing close enough that I could feel his tail flick, as it tapped his leg. Like a cat’s might.

Soul remained where he was, a small but kind smile directed at me. “I’d like to ask you some questions. Arrow and Orchid can stay if you’re more comfortable. Or we can go into the living area with everyone else you’re familiar with. Completely up to you. Whatever puts you at ease.”

That was the first time anyone has inquired about my comfort. I was shocked enough that I stared with wide eyes at him before shifting in Arrow’s hold to look at Orchid. Orchid laughed at whatever he saw on my face.

“Come on, Haidee. Let’s go with everyone else. I think the more familiar faces you see, the more comfortable you’ll feel, yeah?” he said.

I nodded.

Arrow released me, but his hand ran down my arm until mine was nestled in his. He smiled encouragingly and for some reason, it gave me some courage to release the stressed breath I was holding and follow calmly. My fear only slightly coloring my vision.

Bone Breaker and Denial were still on the couch with Bounce in one of the chairs. Soul joined them on the couch, sitting next to Denial, who twisted their fingers together. Orchid dropped in Bounce’s lap, making him ‘oomph’ and Orchid grin mischievously.

Arrow gestured for me to take the other chair. I did, and he sat in front of me, pulling one of my legs over his shoulder and down his chest, then brought the hand he’d been holding into his hair. I was both surprised and comforted by his presence and the way he just moved me around where he wanted me. None of it felt like a demand but like gestures of assurance.

When I was done staring at the top of Arrow’s head in confusion, I looked up at Soul. He was still watching me, but with a smile. The same small, kind smile he’d been giving me. I wanted to trust it, but my entire life taught me not to trust anyone. Especially someone in power.

“Tell me how you came to be tangled with Sticks and Bones,” Soul said. “I know you’ve spoken a bit about what you’ve been through, but I would really like to hear it from you. I understand it might be hard to talk about, so take your time. And I don’t need details.”

Honestly, I'd numbed myself to it over the years. How could I not? How do you live the life that I have and not just shut down?

Before I could begin, Arrow tapped the hand he placed on his head. "You can grip my hair if it helps," he said, tipping his head back to look at me. Even upside down, he was beautiful. I gave him an uneasy smile.

"And any anger that you feel or see in the room when you talk *is not* directed at you," Orchid said. "I promise."

Well, that wasn't at all worrisome. But I took a breath and told them a piecemeal. "I was taken as a child from my parents' home. I don't know if they were killed or not. I don't even know where we lived. I was maybe four. Definitely not older but perhaps a little younger. They knew I wasn't who they insisted I was. Who they told everyone I was. Some politician's daughter who disappeared from the spotlight once her birth was announced. I kept telling them I wasn't her but I learned the hard way that they didn't want to hear it." Arrow tensed under me and I reflexively tangled my fingers in his hair, a jolt of fear making my heart race as I looked down at him, forcing my hand to relax. He placed his hand over my ankle, gently rubbing my skin.

"Keep going," he murmured softly.

I watched his hand when I continued. "I spent years locked in tiny rooms. When I spoke, I was reminded not to." I couldn't bring myself to say I was beaten. "When they wanted me to speak and I didn't, I was reminded that I should only answer when spoken to. And then I... grew up and my treatment changed." Almost as soon as I started showing signs of puberty, there were nasty demons in my bed. The memory made me shudder and I shoved it away.

My fingers flexed open and closed in Arrow's soft hair as I concentrated on my breathing. "No one actually spoke to me. Anything I heard were things I'd overheard. When it was clear that their lie wasn't believed and I in fact *wasn't* the politician's daughter, they decided that they'd train me to be a breeder. By teaching me how to... deliver pleasure... they thought they could recoup some of the expense of keeping me."

I stopped talking when the room turned dark and hot. I could feel their anger as it rose above me. Arrow's tail slammed once, twice against the floor before he grabbed it with his free hand to keep it still. The absurdity that he needed to hold it to keep it still nearly had me laughing. I might have if the shadows of demonic fire burning within the room hadn't been so terrifying.

Deciding that I needed to just get the rest out, I blurted, "Then it all

stopped, and a trainer demon was sent in to teach me how to be a proper wife to one of your clubs. I was purchased by Jab and his other two girls told me how... great he is. That's when you showed up."

I flinched when it sounded like something cracked but the boiling heat died down. I didn't dare look up, still too afraid of what I'd see. Even with their warning that their anger wouldn't be directed at me, I learned a long time ago that even when I haven't caused anger, it doesn't mean that they won't take their anger out on me.

Several minutes passed. When I finally dared to look up, all eyes were on me. Intently watching. I swallowed.

"You're definitely not the daughter that they were claiming you were," Soul agreed. Apparently, something I said sounded familiar to him. "But why do you think KOK Suckers has an interest in you, Haidee?"

My brows knit together. "I don't even know who they are," I answered. More weight settled on my shoulders, and I gripped Arrow's hair tightly. His hand on my ankle flexed but his fingers never stopped soothingly rubbing my skin.

Orehid



What do you mean KOK Suckers has an interest in her?” I asked when we finally left the apartment. While I really wanted to stay behind and make sure Haidee was okay, I followed Soul back to the clubhouse.

He shook his head, once again running his hands through his hair in frustration. I could see the stress in him, the way he looked wary and how his eyes never stopped scanning the area. It shouldn't be like that. Not on our own turf. Certainly not at our clubhouse.

“They made an offer that I know we're going to have a hard time fighting off,” Soul said.

Meaning that our crew was going to want to take it. “What if someone just claims her?” I asked. “Then we don't actually have to worry about how others will react.”

He nodded absently as we stepped inside. He didn't answer me so I followed him to his office. Since setting up all the extra cameras, he'd been spending far too much time there. I shut the door behind me. Soul didn't sit but turned to face me.

“I don't hate the idea. My fear is how Haidee will feel about it. She's obviously had no control over her life, *ever*. I don't want her to feel like she's being *owned* again. Even if we explain why we're doing that, that's exactly what she'll be, won't she?”

He wasn't wrong. At all. The old ladies, they're owned. Property of their husbands, their possessed, or whatever other relationship that they found

themselves in with one of our crew members. And in a way, also owned by the club.

Sighing, I leaned against the door. "Then what do you propose?"

"Let's get Doll and Tonne to sit with her. It'll be good for her to see that other women are around and they're not being mistreated." Soul paused. "Then we'll hold Church."

I scowled because I knew that's not what he wanted to do. "First, I need to see Secret. Think you can find him for me?"

I raised a brow, not enjoying being an errand boy. He smirked because he knew that all too well. "I need to make sure my hunches on how KOK Suckers knows Haidee is here or that she exists at all, is against the rules," he explained.

Now he had my interest. Giving in, I left his office and headed for Secret's. He wasn't where I thought he'd be, so it took me a while to find him in one of the upstairs bedrooms, naked on a bed and watching television with his cock in his hand.

"Seriously?" I asked, scowling at him. "You could at least shut the door."

He rolled his head on the pillow to look at me, giving his mostly flaccid dick a lazy stroke as he smirked. "Hop on up, Orchid. I could use someone to ride me for a bit."

I narrowed my eyes. "You're a pig. Soul wants you and you better bring your black book. Asshole."

His laughter followed me out. My cheeks were still flushed when I returned to the new apartment belonging to the enforcers. As I usually did, I let myself in.

No one had moved so I dropped back in Bounce's lap. A little more forcefully than I should have. He laughed, wiggling me around until my ass was between his legs and he wrapped his arms around me. "What's wrong, precious?" he murmured.

"Secret's a bit of a dick, you know?" I said, shrugging.

I wasn't overly sensitive to being hit on. Or even the occasional flirting. Suggestive innuendos and flirting were fine. Secret just has a way of being crude. And making me feel like a whore.

It's no secret that I've fallen into several beds within the Dirty Demons. I like sex. And I'm not ashamed about it. But I don't mess around with random demons when I'm in one bed for a while. And I've been in Bounce's for more than a year. Secret knew that.

Bounce cooed to me, rubbing my stomach like I was a submissive dog in his arms. I sighed in irritation before my gaze caught Haidee watching me. Her cheeks immediately pinkened and she dropped her eyes.

“We aren’t a very private crew,” Bone Breaker said, noting her reaction as I had. “That’s why we don’t take any of our conversation or affection into private. Don’t feel like you can’t watch or listen to whatever is going on in front of you. Even if we momentarily forget that you’re there, we’re never going to be upset about it.”

“Especially between the four of us,” Bounce said, gesturing to Bone Breaker and Denial and back to him and me. “We’re a strange little group because Bone Breaker is my possession and while that often means that that couple strictly keeps to themselves, we have been together so long that we know we have needs and wants that the other can’t satisfy. That’s why I have Orchid and Bones dabbles in psycho.”

Denial snorted. Arrow laughed loudly.

“And I’m a slut for dick,” I volunteered, grinning when she turned bright red. “Something I’ve never kept a secret, but I’ve also been very clear that I don’t wander when I’m with someone I like. If it ends, then it ends and I’m back to slutting around. But it’s not ending, and Secret knows that, but he still decided to be a prick.”

Haidee’s brows knitted together as she looked at me. Her cheeks were still hot, but I knew she was trying to figure something out that I’d said. Maybe it was the slutting around thing.

Proving that he already knew Haidee better than any of us after having known her the shortest amount of time, Arrow shifted to look at her. “Secret is the club’s secretary. Despite his”—he glanced at me—“lapse in tact, he’s a good guy. And someone that we trust.”

She released a breath and nodded. Arrow petted her leg and turned back around.

CHURCH WAS HELD LATER that evening. I sat in the corner with Denial while Bone Breaker and Bounce were close to Soul as their positions dictated they be. Shimmer was at his side, a dark sneer on his face. Even from here, I could see that there was something he was excited about. There was eagerness in

the way he fidgeted and shifted in his seat. In the way he forced the sneer to remain while he really wanted to smirk smugly.

I had a feeling I knew what Soul suspected. Leaning into Denial, I glanced in his direction and then at Shimmer. Denial nodded imperceptibly. He already knew. Or he suspected. Since he and Soul were close, I didn't doubt that he already knew. He likely knew more than I did.

"First order of business," Soul said. "Baba Yaga has reached the end of his minimum time for prospect. He's proven himself loyal and of the character we value. Any objections to inviting him to be a fully patched member?"

I watched Shimmer specifically. While he rolled his eyes and continued to sneer, he didn't say anything. No one did.

"Then we'll patch him later," Soul said, nodding. "On to the run next month."

"Wait," Shimmer said. "Since we were just talking about prospects, what about Licks?"

"Licks has only been a prospect for less than two and a half months," Pegger, the treasurer said.

"So?" Shimmer snapped. I watched as he visibly forced his tone calmer. "We can vote early since we won't have Church again for a while."

Soul looked at Secret, as we all did. Shimmer already knew he lost before Secret even spoke. He scowled. Secret didn't need to speak though. He simply shook his head and Soul spoke for him.

"You know as well as everyone else that a prospect spends at least three months proving themselves, Shimmer. As vice president, that's not a rule you should be forgetting," Soul said flatly.

Shimmer nearly growled.

"As vice president, you shouldn't forget any rule," Secret said. "Especially not considering how often you've heard them."

Ducking my head, I grinned. Without saying as much, Secret had just announced that Shimmer has been inquiring about the rules.

Silence settled around the room while Shimmer glared hotly at Secret. Secret, for his part, looked like he always did. Unfazed. He blinked at Shimmer slowly.

Soul went over a handful of other points of business before he studied the room. My breath caught as I took in all the faces, wishing I could look in more directions at once. There were so many I wanted to concentrate on. But

I was confident that this was a room with at least two cameras.

“As you know, we have the widowed old lady of Sticks and Bones’s vice president. However, that knowledge shouldn’t have left this crew. Especially when I made it specifically clear to more than one of you that we would not be advertising that she’s still alive or that she’s here.” He paused as he looked around the table.

Faces dropped and I made a mental note of who they were, knowing that many others had, too. I didn’t know that there’d been others who had expressed interest in basically selling Haidee as Shimmer had outright demanded we do. Either it was just him who had mentioned it to Soul, and he was just trying to make Shimmer comfortable in his situation before he delivers a blow, or there had been others.

I glanced at Denial, but he was blank and stony faced as always. Rolling my eyes, I turned back to watch it unfold.

“Since I’ve made my position very clear on where the girl stands, tell me why I’ve had an offer from KOK Suckers for her purchase.” His voice was dark and challenging. The lights overhead flickered with his anger.

The room collectively shifted. Even Shimmer adjusted to put a little more distance between them.

“You understand that it is a severe disregard of the rules to expressly disregard an order I give, correct?” Soul asked, his voice a low, deep growl.

Most in the room nodded. Those who were solely supportive of Soul did so eagerly. Those who followed Shimmer’s nasty ass did so fearfully. Shimmer’s eyes narrowed as he stared at Secret. I had to wonder whether Secret had been leaving a few rules out.

And if Shimmer tried to call him on it, that would be giving himself away.

When Soul looked directly at Shimmer, Shimmer gave him a curt nod.

“What are they offering?” Lyon asked. He was one of Shimmer’s, and I made a note to watch him.

“It doesn’t matter what they’re offering,” Soul snapped. “I already said no!” His voice was loud enough, his anger powerful enough, that the lights popped, several going out. The walls shook. There was a sound like thunder in the distance.

Soul placed his hands flat on the table and leaned forward. He looked around the room, his usually dark eyes a burning fire. “Let me make this perfectly clear. Whether you like it or not, I am president. What I say is law.”

He looked directly at Shimmer. “And if I find out who has disregarded my command, not only will you get the ass kicking of a lifetime, but you won’t be placed on probate. Your ass is out of this club. Am I fucking clear?”

Though I couldn’t see Shimmer’s face, I saw the way his throat tightened when he swallowed. His jaw was tight. His hands fisted on the table.

“Yes,” Shimmer said, his voice low, “president.”

An echo of his words went around the room. Soul held Shimmer’s gaze a moment longer before standing. “Dismissed.”

He left the room, throwing the door open so hard that it slammed against the wall. Shimmer’s dogs filed out, but not before I heard many murmurs that we should sell her and be done with it, regardless of who made it known that she was alive and here.

Shimmer was all too aware that eyes were on him. He kept his anger under wraps, his mouth shut, and he left while trying to appear careless and unaffected. Too bad for him, he wasn’t fooling anyone, and we all watched him go, knowing that he was in the dog house.

I jumped when there was a body shoved against the wall. Spinning, my eyes widened when I saw Bounce had Secret pinned by his neck, Secret’s feet not touching the floor.

“Treat my demon the way you did today again and I’m going to skin you alive,” Bounce growled. “Am I clear?”

Secret raised a brow, his face turning red from lack of oxygen, but he nodded. Bounce let him fall to his feet before turning and walking out of the room. I watched, eyes wide with surprise, not at all expecting something like that.

Next to me, Denial chuckled. With a finger under my chin, he closed my gaping mouth that I didn’t know was opened. Then he left the room too.

Secret looked at me, still with a brow raised. I could read it in his expression. ‘You told on me?’ Incredulous. Surprised. Somewhat amused and maybe a little offended. Considering we both knew he hadn’t actually meant it because as he’s all too clear to volunteer, he doesn’t like dick. He was just being a dick. Not the same thing.

Without knowing what to say, I got up and left the room. floating along as my feet led me out the back door to the apartments. Before I knew it, a wide, silly grin split my face. My heart pattered in my chest as a warm feeling settled over me. I wasn’t sure anyone had ever claimed me in such a way, making it clear that I was important to them. That I belonged to

someone.

Fuck, it felt good.

Orehid



It's not often that I felt jealous without knowing why. I mean, I *knew why*, but I couldn't quite make sense of it. I shouldn't feel jealous. I had no right to feel jealous. Fuck, it was completely inappropriate for me to be jealous.

But as I watched Arrow make Haidee laugh and feel comfortable, as she relaxed a little more with every soft, affectionate touch to her, an angry monster grew inside me. Irritated. Desperately wanting to be him so I could be the one making her feel that way. Putting her at ease. Earning her trust.

Fucking Arrow had to come in and steal my thunder!

Not that I had any thunder. I was awkward as fuck most days unless it was directly related to fucking. Then I could make it clear what I wanted and not look like a fool. Or when I was comfortable in a relationship as I was currently with Bounce. And, you know, a strange extended relationship with Bone Breaker. And then further with Denial. And if we went out another degree, there was Soul.

It was a crazy carbon chain that almost made me giggle with amusement. That is, when I wasn't glowering at Arrow for taking all of Haidee's time.

I liked that she had someone she could trust. Given what she'd told us, that's not something she's ever had. Ever. Which was both sad and infuriating. But why couldn't it be me? Was it too greedy for me to want to be that for her? I might have been if Arrow hadn't shown up.

Between the four of us who had been around her most, I was the most reasonable choice. Bone Breaker and Bounce liked her, sure, but they knew they were far too intense when she was in such a fragile state. They'd

probably break her. I saw the way they watched her. It wasn't any different than the way I did.

The only one of the four of us I wasn't sure about was Denial. Because he's got this stone cold killer mask that I couldn't read for the life of me and I've fucking tried. He's crazy and I was slightly intrigued, though I stayed away from him when he got angry.

Soul might be the most obvious demon to be weary of because his power is strong and crippling when turned on you. But Denial was a demon at his base. Cruel and sadistic, completely mad and ready to be covered in blood. He'd probably dance in it, too.

Haidee's laughter made me wilt and pout. I leaned back on the wall of the clubhouse and folded my arms, watching them with self-pity. Watching the way Arrow pulled her toward him and danced her around the small grassy area while music filtered through the air.

It was a nice day, so Arrow had decided that she needed to get some sun and fresh air. He may look sweet and gentle, but Arrow was a beast when he needed to be. He didn't become the weight of a fucking whale with muscles to match like our enforcers, but his ability to protect Haidee was still very much a threat to others.

He spun her away and she was so startled she reached out to grab him, finding his tail instead. I could see her reddening face from here as she dropped it, horrified. Arrow laughed, it sounded beautiful and sexy as it floated to me from across the yard. I rolled my eyes, pouting further when he brushed her cheek. His words were too quiet when he murmured something in reassurance.

"You're looking a little whiny," Bounce said. I glanced at him and let my arms drop. He smirked, turning his face in the direction I'd been staring. "Don't like them together, huh?"

I shrugged. "I like them together just fine," I argued, sniffing dismissively.

He laughed, pulling me into his chest and biting at my neck until I laughed at the way it tickled. "Liar," he whispered.

Sighing in exasperation, I glared at him playfully. "I just kinda thought I'd be the one to make her smile and laugh. Then Arrow showed up and ruined everything."

"Hm. Sounds to me like you're getting over me."

The teasing in his voice gave his words absolutely no conviction. I rolled

my eyes. “Never,” I huffed. “But, you know, I just...” My words trailed off as my gaze drifted back to Haidee. She was smiling again as he slowly danced with her, holding her close. The way he looked down at her made even my stomach flutter. I could feel myself pouting again.

Bounce chuckled. “Come on, precious. Let’s leave them be.”

I really didn’t want to. I wanted to be the supervisor in case she became uncomfortable, and Arrow didn’t back off. That wasn’t going to happen. Arrow was actually a really great demon. I truly was just jealous.

I let Bounce pull me away; he led me to the apartment I stayed in when I wasn’t with him. It had been a while since I was here last because I’d been staying with them. Even when Bounce spent the night with Bone Breaker, I remained in the third bedroom.

It was comfortable, this weird zigzagging line that connected us in different kinds of relationships. And I enjoyed it. I liked being there. It never became uncomfortable, not even when Bounce wasn’t around, and I was left with Bone Breaker or Denial. Maybe because they were my friends first. My crew. This was just an elevated relationship, but that foundation was always there.

The door shut behind us and I turned to look at him. This was a smaller model of the one he’d moved into. As if a couple of the rooms had been cut off and I was left with a basic, plain version of the bigger apartments.

Bounce pulled me against him, looking down at me with affection in his eyes. I suddenly felt really foolish because someone *did* look at me the way I was only just moments ago pouting about how Arrow looks at Haidee. I slid my hands up his chest and around his neck.

“Alright fine,” I said, inflecting some misery into my voice with my resignation, “I’m being stupid.”

“No you’re not,” he said. “You’re allowed to like Haidee.”

“Yeah, but I don’t need to. I have you.”

Bounce chuckled. His arms dropped from around my back and cupped my ass, scooping me off the ground so I wrapped my legs around his waist. “You know damn well that I’m not going to be offended or upset if you want to be with someone else, too.”

“That would be a bit hypocritical,” I said, nodding.

He grinned. “Yes. But I’m not like that. You like who you like. If you find it in your soul that someone else is a part of you, then I won’t ever stand in your way. You know the things that are deal breakers for me.”

I did. The usual. Lying. Sneaking around. Keeping secrets. Nothing that you wouldn't expect.

Sighing, I hugged him closer as he carried me to the bed and climbed on. I smiled up at him as he hovered over me. "Yeah. I guess I was too afraid to do what Arrow is. I didn't want to push her or scare her."

"Orchid, Arrow might just be the one for her. The one that completes her soul." What he wasn't saying was that Arrow might be her possessed. That one demon that you felt to your very core. I nodded. "That doesn't mean she won't have room for you too. She's been through a lot; but when she sees that she's safe here, when she trusts us, I think she's going to like having a lot of demons loving her."

"A lot, huh?"

His grin was beaming. He pushed his hands under my shirt, rubbing up my stomach to my chest, bunching my shirt under my arms. "I'd be surprised if she didn't have a dozen demons crawling at her feet, Orchid. She deserves more."

She did.

A breath hissed out of me when he pinched my nipple, the sting going straight to my balls. I glared at him, at the dark, pleased smile on his lips. His hooded eyes looked at me with growing heat.

His mouth covered mine as he curled his fingers, digging his claws into my skin and making me groan. My dick thickened in anticipation. I could already smell my blood in the air from where he'd pierced my flesh. Never enough to actually hurt me or make me bleed out, but always enough that we could smell it. Taste it in the air.

And he could gather it on his tongue.

Bounce pulled my shirt over my head before he dropped his face to my chest. He didn't lick my blood right away. The little lacerations were small enough that they'd close up almost immediately. Instead of tasting, he rubbed his face through it while I tangled my fingers in his hair.

A shiver raced through him as he groaned, dropping his body to the bed. His hips jerked with his arousal as he sought friction while he painted his face in my blood. When the wounds stopped bleeding, he raked his claws down my stomach.

I gritted my teeth as he groaned, watching the lines seep. He waited until they were pooling before laying his face in it. His moan was dirty. His hips moved almost wildly against the bed, rubbing his dick against anything as he

covered himself in my blood.

When he looked up at me, eyes a demonic yellow, glowing with a fire from within, he was smeared in red. Dripping in my blood. It was painted on him so thickly that it looked like he was covered in globs of lipstick.

“Feel better?” I asked, my voice breathy.

He growled in response. It wasn't long before our clothes were completely discarded. Before he went down on me, I forced him to get the lube. He enjoyed just having my blood between us, but I much prefer a little smoother surface.

Bounce glowered at me.

“Prep me with the lube but you can use my blood on your dick,” I compromised.

He smiled, hungry and satisfied with that answer. Licking his lips, my blood staining them dark red, he buried his face against my dick. Rubbing his bloody face on me and then licking it off. I shuddered as I perched back on my elbows to watch him.

I was pretty sure this was the part that he didn't do with Bone Breaker. This was the need that he had that Bone Breaker just didn't like to do. Maybe it was the blood. Or that he was more feral than sane in this moment. It could be his intense need to be covered in the blood of the one he's about to fuck when he fucks them.

While I was pretty sure there weren't any secrets between him and Bone Breaker, and they shared whatever they did with their other lovers between themselves, I never asked why they decided to take a second lover each. It wasn't unheard of for possessed to do so, but in my experience, they usually share another lover or two.

There was no sharing here. I didn't have that kind of relationship with Bone Breaker and Bounce didn't with Denial.

Sometimes, I wished that Bounce would tell me what I satisfied for him that Bone Breaker didn't. What need did I answer? What desire did I fulfill? It wasn't so much that I wanted to know what I gave him that Bone Breaker didn't. Not in a way that would be considered something I might use as competition or gloating. But because I wanted to know what I offered him. What he saw in me.

Up until just recently, I thought maybe it was just another component of sex. Something that he needed in the bedroom that Bone Breaker wasn't into. It wasn't until he physically threatened Secret on my behalf that I considered

maybe we had more than that.

I could be a bit naïve. We've been fucking for over a year now. And we spend a lot of time together. We get along. We're affectionate. But something that we never do is talk about anything between us seriously. Or at all, really.

My curiosity as to what it was that he took from me went silent as soon as his well-slicked finger pressed into my body. There was no teasing or going slowly. Bounce wasn't into that right now, apparently. He was on a mission to fuck me and he wasn't wasting any time getting there.

His teeth bit into the sensitive skin next to my dick, hard enough to break the skin. I flinched, gripping his hair tightly. He licked at the spot, sucked at it until it bled more freely and then continued to rub his face in it.

He was covered. Completely red. Dying his skin in my blood. It covered my cock, my balls. It was smeared all over me.

Moving his attention from the wound he created, it was able to pool with blood again, he turned his attention to my cock. His yellow eyes flicked to mine before he swallowed me down. I groaned and then gasped when he pulled his finger out only to replace the one with three.

"Fuck, Bounce," I grunted, my body arching as he spread me wide. My eyes rolled when he hollowed out his cheeks in a half-hearted, and definitely empty apology. He wasn't sorry. He was fucking impatient.

Letting myself fall back on the bed, I closed my eyes and spread my legs wide for him. I lost myself in the way he touched me. Fucked his fingers into my body until I was moaning, rocking on them. Little fireworks buzzed through my system as he sucked me.

Then he was done playing around. He was off my dick, allowing it to slap against my stomach, splashing the pool of blood everywhere. His fingers vacated me, leaving me empty and wanting. Getting to his knees with his fingers in his mouth, I scrunched my face at him.

He was basically licking lube right now. Ew.

His hands came down on either side of my head, his dick pushing against mine. The intensity in his eyes had me staring as he worked our cocks together. His lips parted, letting me see the sharpened teeth that were stained red.

Bounce looked like an animal. A beast. A monster. He was a mess. More than feral, and absolutely out of his mind. Dangerous and deranged.

He wasn't looking for pleasure right now as he roughly rubbed his cock against mine. He was coating his dick in my blood. I was pretty sure this was

the beginning of some ritual, even as we've done this a million other times. With all the blood, and that he was caked in it like war paint, I was sure this was a demonic rite.

He kissed me quickly, filling my mouth with the taste of me, my blood, and lube. I glowered at him as he grinned, unhinged, and shifted until his dick was at my hole.

"Take me," he said, his voice dark. Hellish. Sexy as fuck. My dick leaked in response.

I nodded. As soon as I did, his cock was shoving inside me. I gasped, my spine arching almost painfully as he forced his way into my body. "Yes," I hissed as pleasure filled me until I was almost blackout drunk on it.

His hands gripped my hips to hold me still as I writhed and bucked against him. It was a single, long thrust until he was fully sheathed inside me, but I thrashed underneath him, maddened with pleasure. Maybe it was the blood. Maybe that added to my pleasure. Maybe that's why I couldn't lay still until we both caught our breath.

There was no catching my breath. Not until he was done with me.

Bounce growled, the sound making my cock jump with excitement. A low whine, needy and pathetic, filled the air as I wordlessly begged him to move. To fuck me into unconsciousness. His fingers bit into my skin, the pain like a shot of clarity.

Blinking up at him, I reached for his face and brought him down to me, sealing my mouth with his. But there was no question. I wasn't in charge here.

His kiss was scathing, hard, possessive. He owned every piece of me right now and my shiny but tarnished soul rolled over and presented its belly. Offering it to him to take. To own. He could tear it apart if that pleased him.

Finally, he moved inside me, pulling out and slamming his dick back into me so hard I cried out. And that was it for me. I knew nothing after that. Nothing but the intensity that was sex with a bloodied demon who was hell-bent on making my body his own. Giving me pleasure so blinding that I was sure he literally killed me three or four times.

My cum stung the many lacerations that he kept open on my torso. Keeping us both covered in blood until we were a slick mess. Until all I could smell was sex and blood. It was strong enough that I couldn't even smell the sweat I knew we were both caked in.

His voice rang in my ear when he became wild with the first throws of his

orgasm. Words that I hadn't heard him say before. Words that echoed what he threatened Secret.

"Mine, Orchid. You fucking belong to me. Understand? Every fucking cell of your body is mine. Mine to please, to take apart, to cherish, to own. Who do you belong to? Who commands you?"

"You," I cried, pleasure an eruption inside me with every word he said. "Only you."

Bounce's growl filled my head as he filled my body with his hot seed.

It was a long time before we were still. A long time before my mind logged back online from the blissed place inside me. The spot in my mind that I always escape to that only wants to please Bounce. That wants the pleasure he gives me and wants, more than anything, for him to find his pleasure in me.

When I finally fluttered my eyes, Bounce looked sane again. He was smiling down at me softly, as if he wasn't a demon on the brink of losing his fucking mind just ten minutes ago. Well, it might have been an hour. No idea how long I'd been lost in that cushy, happy place in my head.

"You okay?" he asked, his lips brushing against my face feather light.

I sighed, glancing down at my body. Because we're demons, the blood was already gone. Soaked into our skin. The little lacerations that dotted my body were a different story. They'd heal easily enough. None of them were deep.

Nodding, I turned into him, burying my face in his neck. "Yours," I whispered.

"Mm," he answered, wrapping around me. "Good."

Right now, nothing could burst this little bubble. The jealousy over Arrow and Haidee was but a faint spot in my mind. The touch of uncertainty about why he was with me when he had Bone Breaker was all but snuffed out.

This was it. Everything was perfect.

Haidee



I was beginning to feel comfortable. The first thing on my mind when I woke up wasn't fear or dread. While I was still nervous about doing the wrong thing, I wasn't slinking around the apartment.

What really surprised me, and frightened me a little if I'm honest, was that I trusted these demons. By all means, I shouldn't. They murdered everyone around me and then took me with them. Clearly, they were dangerous. And they didn't really offer any explanation for any of it—the mass murder, not killing me too, or why they took me. And I wasn't sure if I was allowed to ask, so I didn't.

But there was no doubt in my mind that I trusted them. I trusted Bone Breaker and Bounce to provide for and protect me. Which they did. They fed me and made sure I had everything to make me comfortable. Including privacy and courtesy.

Orchid was friendly and always willing to just chill. Soul checked in on me almost every day, asking if I needed anything. If there was anything I wanted that I didn't have.

Denial was still the one I was most uneasy around, but I knew it was because of how sharp and cold his eyes were. However, that look never changed, regardless of who he was looking at. I'd seen him show affection and apologize with that same look. To me, it would almost seem like those last two were empty sentiments. But after being in his company for who knew how long at this point, I decided that maybe it was a defense mechanism.

They said he was insane. Psychotic. The mask he wore was his way of

keeping himself reined in.

And then there was Arrow. Everything about him made me glow from the inside. It made me warm and smile and so filled with everything unfamiliar that I was scared but also excited. For the first time in my horrible life, I felt like there was a light somewhere. A demon who cared about me. Who wanted me. I was excited to see him every single day and sad when he left me at night.

Hell, I even wanted his touch! Touch has always terrified me. Because it's always been painful, unwanted, and terrifying. Forced.

Arrow's wasn't.

There were also two girls that stopped by sometimes. Doll and Tonne. They were old ladies of a couple of the crew members; though, since they rarely said their names, I forgot who. But they were kind. It was nice to see that there were women around.

The apartment was empty when I woke up this morning, but there was a note left for me from Bounce, stating that he went to get breakfast from the kitchen inside. He'd be back soon. It didn't say where anyone else was.

Because the sun was shining brightly and I could hear birds, I pushed the door open and stared outside. The air was warm, the sunlight on my skin felt remarkable.

Since I'd been outside every day for the last week or more, I didn't think anything of stepping outside. Stepping off the stairs, I felt the grass between my toes and grinned. Turning my face into the sun, I closed my eyes and just felt its rays on me.

The entire back of the clubhouse where there were half a dozen or more apartments was walled in. There was a large gate that I assumed was for the ease of moving furniture and whatever. Otherwise, it was completely closed off from the outside world.

Arrow said that Orchid lived in one of the apartments. Achilles, someone I hadn't met yet, also lived in one. There were also half a dozen bedrooms inside on the second floor that members of the crew sometimes crashed in. He said Secret stayed in one pretty frequently. As did their treasurer, Pegger. I hadn't met him yet, but Arrow seemed to think of him along the same lines as Secret. Trustworthy.

There were other names they told me while we sat inside of those I should be wary of. Namely, the vice president, Shimmer. I wasn't allowed to know details, but he wasn't someone they trusted. Certainly not around me.

That was plenty of warning enough for me.

Because I rarely went into the clubhouse, I didn't run into these people. I had no business being in there, and they had none out here. So far, I'd been left alone. But this was probably the first time I was actually alone.

It left me uneasy, but there was also a thrill. I felt safe. I felt protected. There was a high stone wall around me. No one was going to get at me right now. Since the brief mention of KOK Suckers being interested in me when Soul first came to talk to me, there hadn't been any other mention of it. I hoped that meant that they'd lost interest in me. That everyone had.

Then I'd be left alone.

Feeling brave, I walked to the corner of the apartment and looked around. I could see three other apartments from here. I wasn't about to visit them, though. But since I didn't see anyone else, I had the misguided trust that I was alone and safe. So I turned to continue a circuit around the building, just so I could see other parts of the yard.

The side of the apartment didn't look any different than the front. Even the view was pretty much the same, so I walked to the back. I was closer to the wall now. Not close enough to touch and for some reason, my fingers itched to do so. As if I needed assurance that the wall was sturdy. It would protect me and keep the world out.

Since I still hadn't seen anyone and there was no noise except the birds singing, I crossed the short distance to the wall and placed a hand on it. Sunbaked and warm, I took a breath. Feeling the rough, hard edges of the stone press into my palm.

A smile touched my lips as I opened my eyes and looked up to the top. It was maybe nine feet? More? Tall enough that no one was going to jump over it.

Satisfied, I turned and stopped. Fear surged through me. I recognized the demon leaning against the corner of the apartment I was staying in. He was the one that pulled me from the temple floor after they killed everyone. The nasty one who looked at me the same way every other demon always had.

My heart raced. My fingers shook.

His smile wasn't any less nasty now than it had been. The difference was that the cruelty in his eyes was joined with anger. For whatever reason, I was sure it was pointed at me.

"The little pet is left alone," he said, his awful voice making my spine stiffen. "It'd be a shame if you simply just... disappeared, pet."

My stomach dropped when he pushed off the wall and stalked toward me. I backed away until I was pressed against the wall. He laughed, the sound harsh and low. I could feel it as if it was a nasty touch. I flinched.

“Before I get rid of you, I’m going to see what you fucking taste like,” he growled as he slowly stalked closer. Try as I may, I couldn’t contain my shaking. “I’m going to make sure everyone who wants to fuck you gets their chance to break you like the fucking toy you are. And then I’ll sell you to the highest bidder. Since I’ve already secured the bid, it’s just a matter of time, pet.”

He was feet in front of me. My eyes blurred with fear as tears filled them. I was supposed to be safe. They promised I would be safe.

But in the days of letting my guard down and trusting these demons, I forgot one important thing. I was still at their mercy. Their mercy for kindness. For care. For living necessities. And at their mercy for safety.

I hadn’t remembered to find a way to protect myself.

He reached for me when he was close enough, but before his hand closed over mine, he was off his feet. I watched with surprise as he was lifted into the air and slammed harshly into the ground. I screamed, dropping to my knees and covering my head. Not knowing what new threat had arrived, but foolishly trying to hide in plain sight from it.

“You’ve been warned.” My head snapped up at Denial’s voice. There was something different about it. Darker, maybe. Chilly like ice. His image was off too. Blurry. Like his soul was hanging around outside his body. “And you’re breaking another rule, fucker.”

Shimmer didn’t speak as he groaned on the ground. “Unprovoked,” he croaked, his voice strained.

“Too bad for you, you’ve been caught on camera,” a new demon said. I swiveled to look at him, finding him standing with a smirk on his face as he looked down at Shimmer.

And then Bounce was beside me, scooping me off the ground and bringing me around the building without speaking. The concern on his face was loud, but I was too busy shaking and crying to ask.

He sat me on the couch inside, brushed my hair from my face, and framed my head so I was forced to look at him. “Are you okay, Haidee?” he asked, gently. “Did he hurt you? Did he touch you?”

Somehow, I managed to shake my head. I wasn’t sure which question I was answering, but ‘no’ covered the last two, anyway. He didn’t touch me or

hurt me. Just scared the shit out of me. And reminded me I'd never be safe. I'd spend the rest of my life living on the edge of a blade, waiting for someone else to hurt me.

There was always going to be someone else. That demon made it perfectly clear.

"Take a breath, hunny. It's alright. I'm so sorry I left you alone. I should have waited until you were awake and taken you with me. I'm so, so sorry."

The door opened again and the demons from out back entered. Denial and the new one with glasses. Denial stared at me in his crazed state. I leaned back when he came closer, crouching down beside me so that the dead look in his eyes was level with mine. I shivered uncontrollably.

"What did he say?" Denial asked. I almost laughed in hysteria when he attempted to make his cold voice gentle. Probably reading the incredulity in my face, he smiled a little and closed his eyes. "I know it's hard to believe right now, Haidee, but you're safe. And we won't make the mistake of leaving you alone again."

Closing his eyes helped. The savage terror I had of him settled and I took a breath. Before I could speak, the door opened again and Arrow stood there, his eyes all for me as he looked at me with alarm.

Tears stung my eyes as relief filled me. Arrow was here. He'd take care of me.

His face morphed into something painful as he crossed the room. Gently, he took me from Bounce's hold and tucked me into his chest. All the fear came out as I cried into him. He didn't speak. Didn't reassure me that I was safe. Didn't tell me that everything was okay. He just held me until I could breathe again.

When I picked my head up, the sorrow in his eyes touched me. "I want to know how to protect myself," I whispered, my words choked because I wasn't supposed to ask for something. That was against the rules the trainer demon taught me.

But Arrow nodded. He tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear and rested his forehead against mine. It was intimate. Comforting. "I can do that. I'll teach you."

A hand on my back made me shift. I expected Bounce, but it was Denial, his eyes slightly hooded to hide the crazy in them. "Please, Haidee. We need to know exactly what he said to you. And then we'll never ask again."

I nodded. Glancing at the couch beside where Arrow had me in his lap, I

wondered if I should sit there instead of where I was. But Denial took that spot, sitting close so he was pressed against my side.

His crazy ass should terrify me being so close. I could feel his anger coursing through him. But I knew, somewhere deep inside me, I knew that it wasn't anger toward me. And unlike the demons of my past, he wasn't going to take his anger out on me.

He was angry for me.

So, leaning ever so slightly into his touch, I told him what the demon said to me.

Haidee



As promised, I was never left alone after that encounter with the vice president, Shimmer. I don't know what became of that, nor did I ask.

While I'd come to realize that all the rules the trainer demon taught me weren't wrong, necessarily, I just wasn't bound by them. At least, not in the apartment. Expectations were different when I was inside the clubhouse.

I preferred not to be in the clubhouse. There were too many unknown demons there, and I hated the way they looked at me. Too many faces. Too many desires staring at me from their leering eyes.

But that's where their physical training room was. A room that was covered in mats and filled with weight training equipment. True to his word, Arrow started teaching me how to defend myself. It was always him and me, but sometimes someone else joined us. Usually Orchid or Secret, but Bone Breaker, Bounce, or Denial popped in from time to time. And I swear, I'd seen Soul watching from the door once.

Arrow was never far from my side since the morning with Shimmer. When he had to go for any reason, it was never before there was far more than a single other demon around. Otherwise, I was his sole focus. His top priority.

Even at night, Arrow crawled into my bed and curled around me, keeping me tucked between his hard body and the wall. Putting himself between me and any potential threat.

Having him there was unnerving at first. I felt far more secure alone than with another person in my room. But it wasn't long before his absence at any time began to feel like I was drowning. Like the boogeyman was just waiting

to pop out and take me.

My days weren't busy as people came and went from the apartment. Bone Breaker and Bounce, though they lived in the apartment with me, were often away for most of the day, though one or the other always popped in a couple times throughout. Arrow said they were important members of the club. They had jobs that were their own. Soul relied on them.

"You don't have a job?" I asked.

Arrow grinned. "My hacking skills are not to be surpassed," he answered smugly. "However, I'm not strictly needed for most things. I usually make the bank runs, but I've signed off on that for now."

I didn't have to ask why. I knew it was for me.

Denial hung around often too. He was quiet and was careful not to look straight in my eyes. The demon wasn't dumb by any means. He knew that eye contact with him brought me immediately to a dark place with the memories I tried to keep away. Experiences with demons who looked at me exactly like he did. Though, I did my best to forget and put them behind me.

While I trusted these demons (something that still baffled me), I was always looking over my shoulder. For unfamiliar faces watching me. For Shimmer stalking me. Unexplained moments often resulting in gooseflesh taking over my skin.

Weeks had passed since Shimmer's threat, and I was feeling myself becoming stronger with the defense training Arrow had me going through every day. We spent only an hour training. I knew he was keeping his word, but he never intended for me to be in that position again. Or in any position where I'd need to utilize these skills.

One of my favorite moments in the gym was watching him spar with one of the other demons. It was usually Licks or Baba Yaga. And watching the two of them spar, while Arrow instructed them what to do was also exhilarating. Entertaining. Their constant banter as they jabbed at each other had me laughing often. It was in good humor, as their smiles indicated, but it turned out to be one of the highlights of my days.

Otherwise, I read a lot. Many books were piled on the counters, and I'd move through them one at a time, stacking them into a new pile when I was finished. I must have been caught in the books too often to actually see who was bringing them and taking away the read ones.

My favorite spot to read was in the living room. There was a big chair that faced the entire room from a corner, where I had a view of the front door,

down the hall to the bedrooms, and part of the kitchen. It made me feel secure in that I couldn't be snuck up on.

Whoever was with me usually hung out in the same room. Arrow brought a gaming console and he'd often play, either by himself or with whoever stopped by. Orchid brought paperwork. Denial was always on a computer or tablet of some kind. And the enforcers didn't hang around long enough to get involved in something.

This afternoon, Orchid and Denial were sitting with me. They were talking about something concerning a video feed that I wasn't really paying attention to as I read. I wasn't sure if the book was particularly engaging since I was too easily distracted. When it was one that I was immersed in, entire hours would go by before I looked up. When I did, it was usually because someone brought me food or a drink.

I looked up when the door opened. Arrow's eyes went straight to mine, a beautiful smile filling his face. "Come on," he said, holding his hand out to me.

Without questioning, I closed the book and set it on the little table next to the chair I was in. I pushed my feet into the shoes on the floor and let the blanket I had wrapped around me pile onto the chair as I made my way to him.

He kissed the side of my head as I joined him and I sighed, leaning into his embrace.

Arrow led me out of the apartment and toward the clubhouse. He opened the door and then let me step through. There were voices drifting to us from down the hall. Laughter. The *crack* of a pool game and banter following. I think I even heard the quiet hum of a television or radio.

We didn't head for them but the stairs in the back. Down the third-floor hall and to a bedroom. It was neatly kept and looked devoid of any signs of anyone living there.

The window was open, and Arrow pulled me to it. Letting go of my hand, he climbed out and then crouched to offer me his hand. I raised a brow, biting my lip.

"Trust me, Haidee. I'm not going to let anything happen to you," he murmured.

I knew that. My heart beat with that knowledge. But I was still new to trusting someone. Nodding, I placed my hand in his and allowed him to help me onto the roof.

We weren't overly high up, but since I couldn't remember a time I wasn't on the ground, my feet solidly planted where there was no chance of me falling more than a couple feet at most, this was almost terrifying.

The breeze brushed against my skin, making my eyes flutter. Up here, the world was a distant rattle of sounds moving around me. Horns in the distance. Children playing. The bustle of people moving about their business.

Arrow's hand tugged gently on mine, and I opened my eyes to allow him to lead me wherever he intended for us to go. It wasn't long until he had me moving precariously around an awkward curve in the roof that we came to a mostly flat area.

He had blankets set up with pillows. A basket. A cooler. A canvas bag.

I looked at him to find he was watching me, a soft smile on his lips. "Thought we could shut out the world for a while. Eat as we look at the city sprawling around us. Watch the sunset. And when it's dark, we'll cuddle under the blankets and watch a movie."

My heart raced. One of my favorite parts of reading were the sweet, thoughtful moments between characters. When one of them did something specifically for another for the purpose of putting them at ease. Making them comfortable and confident. Expressing their affection through a gesture.

This was my very own moment.

"Thank you," I whispered.

Arrow smiled and led me to the blankets. I sat and he pulled my shoes off. He pulled the basket to us and we shared plastic containers of different foods. Salads, both hot and cold. Shredded meats in sauce. Noodles. Vegetables.

When we were stuffed, he handed me water. I sipped on it watching him look at me. A small smile remained on his lips as if it just wouldn't fade. Like the slight flush on my cheeks wouldn't go away.

Then we tucked into the blankets and got comfortable against the pillows. The sky was already a stunning orange and pink. The longer we watched, though we didn't see the colors actively shift, the paint in the sky morphed into deeper colors. Velvety grays and blues. Fading into a deep navy littered with little pricks of shining stars.

We laid in the quiet, looking at the sky for a while. Neither of us were in a hurry to turn on a movie. He hugged me to him, kissing the side of my face. My cheeks. My jaw. Then he sighed and stayed still.

He wasn't looking at the sky like I was. He was watching me. The longer

he did, the more heated my cheeks became. Warmth gathered in my chest. My stomach fluttered.

I turned my head to look at him and he smiled a little more.

“Comfortable?” he asked quietly.

“I am,” I said.

“Warm enough?” he asked, raising a brow.

A grin spread across my face. I was never without a blanket. Oftentimes many blankets. I wasn’t sure if it was a security thing or if I was just that cold. I was certainly cold when I was outside of them.

“Yes. You give off plenty of heat.”

He liked that if his widening smile was any indication. I don’t know why it caused me to blush. His finger brushed my cheek, right over where my skin was heated. Then his thumb traced my lips. My heart raced in my chest, like a horse’s hoofbeats across the plains. Thudding in a way that I could feel in my bones.

“Haidee,” he murmured.

“Yes?” My voice was breathless.

He licked his lip, my eyes watching his tongue. “Can I kiss you?”

A shiver raced through me and while I was a little nervous, I nodded. I *wanted* him to kiss me. Because he asked. Because he respected me enough to ask. Because he wasn’t just taking something from me or demanding I do something for him. This was different.

Arrow leaned forward, his mouth slowly coming to mine, giving me plenty of time to push him away. But I didn’t. I reached up into his soft hair and pulled him down until our mouths came together.

His lips were soft against mine, but he moved slowly. Pressing them to me and backing away. Then coming again. I smiled and when he came down, I bit his lower lip.

He growled quietly and kissed me for real. Harder. With purpose. I parted my lips and licked his. Arrow chuckled before taking my invitation and claiming my mouth with a deep kiss.

His hand moved to my waist, and I rolled into him, pressing my body to his. Because I could trust him. I knew if I told him no, he’d respect that.

But I didn’t tell him no. Not when we continued to kiss as the moon crawled through the sky. Not as he rolled so I was on top of him and then again when he was on top of me.

While we never did more than kiss and superficial exploration over

clothes. Nothing overly heated or sexual, but we still learned each other's bodies. For the first time in my entire life, I realized that I could enjoy another's touch.

Orehid



There was once again open hostility within the club. Not that it ever truly calmed. But it was simmering while Shimmer's false accusation caught on camera no doubt remained on top of his mind. And then it was even more stony silent when Soul all but told him we *knew* that he had been the one to go against Soul's command and try to sell Haidee.

We didn't know, exactly. But we knew that if he hadn't been the one to actually put her on the market so to speak, he'd definitely instructed it to be done. No one else, not a single one of his cronies, outright disregarded Soul's law.

And then Shimmer disappeared from the clubhouse entirely after his attack on Haidee. While Bounce and Denial hadn't gotten there in enough time to catch everything he said to her, they overheard enough. I still wasn't sure how Secret knew something was going down. It was slightly suspicious as far as I was concerned, but no one else seemed to think so.

But since Arrow began to take Haidee into the training room for defense lessons, Shimmer was back at the clubhouse. As were his cronies. And while Shimmer was on his best fucking behavior, the open hostility and vocal aggression from his minions were worse than ever.

They knew that there were cameras everywhere. And they made it a point to tell anyone who listened, while still remaining fully within the rules, that they wanted to sell Haidee. I was pretty sure their goal was to convince everyone else that this would be beneficial.

And while they didn't come right out and say anything against Soul, they talked about Shimmer's ideas. How he had designs to bring Dirty Demons

into an age of glory again.

What they didn't realize was they were making themselves targets on who we were keeping our eyes on more closely. Plus, they weren't gaining Shimmer any more support. In fact, I was sure that most of our patch members who didn't like Shimmer liked him even less now. And they began avoiding those who wanted to talk of nothing but Shimmer's 'inventive concepts' or selling Haidee.

I was thankful that while they were avoiding Shimmer, they continued to show their support to Soul by spending their free time at the clubhouse. They just walked out of the room if Shimmer or his little bitches walked in, choosing to find somewhere else to hang.

It was infuriating. I wanted nothing more than to go in there and slap them all. Or take a pool cue right to their dicks. Skewer their balls. And while Shimmer tried to look humble and like a standup, thoughtful and courteous member of the club, he wasn't fooling anyone. Especially since everyone *knew* the charges hanging in the air against him.

Honestly, I wasn't sure what Soul was waiting for. I knew he had a reason for not acting against Shimmer yet. But I was fucking dying to know what it was.

I tried not to pay too much attention to it since Soul seemed unconcerned, even if stressed, I was getting nervous. While Shimmer hadn't managed to gather any new support (that I could see), this act of polite dissension showed us how many demons he had under his thumb. And there were more than I thought.

"Stop," Bounce said, pulling my attention from glaring into the game room where Shimmer was lounging on a barstool watching his minions play pool. I looked at Bounce and he smiled sympathetically, bringing his fingers to my forehead and rubbing out the stress lines. "It's under control. Have a little faith, precious."

I sighed in frustration. "Maybe I'd feel less like I'm on pins and needles if I knew what you were planning."

He chuckled. "I'm sure you would. But I don't know what the plan is. I trust Soul is in control."

Glaring at him because, while I had blind faith in Soul, I was getting antsy with the fact that Shimmer was still walking around without being punished.

The door to the clubhouse opened again and the demons we were waiting

for joined us. Bone Breaker, Denial, Secret, Haidee, Arrow, and Soul. Arrow had Haidee's hand in his and the familiar jealousy bloomed inside me. Not enough to miss every single demon present looking at Haidee and I wasn't the only one jealous that Arrow was the one holding her hand.

I'll admit, that made me feel better.

Bounce pressed his lips to my ear. "If Soul was concerned, he'd not be joining us and leaving Shimmer here. Taking his enforcers with him."

"Sweet Love is still here," I pointed out. "So is Pegger."

"They are. And every last member now knows that there are cameras blanketing this place. Shimmer knows that he's got mountains of claims with evidence and witnesses to support it, against him."

"Why do I get the feeling that this is all part of the plan?" I asked, narrowing my eyes.

He grinned, without agreeing or disagreeing. With a quick kiss to my lips and a slap on my ass, Bounce moved away from me and toward his bike. I watched as we all climbed on, surprised when Haidee rode with Bone Breaker instead of Arrow.

She looked at me as she wrapped her arms around his waist. When she caught me watching her, she smiled. It warmed my chest, and I returned it.

I remember the first time I saw her on the bike with Bone Breaker. She didn't want to touch him at all. Thankfully, it seemed she was over that fear. It made me wonder if there was something growing between them. It's not like I spent every night at their apartment.

A fresh wave of jealousy surged through me in time with the first roar of one of the bike engines. It propelled me into starting mine. I wasn't exactly a one-demon man, but until Haidee showed up, I couldn't remember ever wanting to be with a second person when I was in a solid relationship already. Maybe that was part of my discomfort.

Soul revved his engine and then pulled out onto the road. We followed, creating a double-row line behind him. The roar of the engines filling my ears and the slap of the wind against my face pushed everything that had been weighing me down to the back of my mind. I relaxed and enjoyed the ride.

When we came to a stoplight and I looked at Haidee, her grin made my chest warm. I supposed, if I was being generous with myself, I had no room to be jealous. It's not like I've made my interest clear to her. Given what I knew about her past, I wasn't sure if she'd welcome that kind of attention, anyway.

But I'd recently seen Arrow kissing her. So if she had any aversion to it, she was learning that not all demons were the same. Arrow certainly wasn't. And I was determined that she knew I wasn't either.

Fuck, I'd even seen her warming up to Denial. And I *knew* she was terrified of that demon! Yet I've walked into the apartment to find them sitting together on the couch. His hand resting gently on her leg through her blanket while she leaned into his side and read.

I was almost mad at the sight. Because I was fucking jealous.

It only proved that unless I was going after someone I wanted to fuck, I was shit at making my intentions clear.

We pulled up to the bowling alley and parked our bikes in a row. It wasn't Bounce that helped Haidee off the back of Bone Breaker's bike, nor Arrow. Soul did, and Haidee easily gave him her hand. I suddenly felt like I was trying to tread water with weights tied to my ankles. Has everyone gained her trust more than me?!

Bounce's arm wrapped around my waist as he pulled me roughly to his side. "Keep scowling and you're going to get the opposite effect that you're hoping for," he said into my ear, voice low.

I huffed, wrapping my arm around his back and stuffing my hand into his pocket. Pouting. I was pouting *again*, like a child.

"I'm good about knowing what I want, but unless it's climbing into someone's bed, I don't know what to do," I admitted, glancing at him with my lips pressed together.

At least he wasn't laughing. His smile was sympathetic. Understanding. "Just relax, hm? She's still adjusting to all of us."

"But even Den—" I started to argue, but he pressed his finger over my lips.

"I know, Orchid. But fuck, when's the last time Denial has had anything nice?"

I narrowed my eyes at him. "I'm sorry. Soul and Bone Breaker don't count?"

He chuckled, pressing his lips to the spot just below my ear. I valiantly ignored the way my body tingled at the touch. "I don't think either of them could be considered 'nice,' do you?"

Refusing to agree with that, I just stared at him.

Bounce sighed. "Let Denial have his time," he said quietly. "He's a crazy fucker. Everyone's first reaction is fear. To run away. So when he has a

chance to find someone to love him, I think we should let that happen. And I think it's good for Haidee too, because she can see his psycho looking at her through his cold, dead eyes and yet, she *knows* that he's there for *her*."

I hated that he made me feel like they should have their chance. But selfishly, I didn't want to be left out. I didn't want to let all these guys have their chance and then I miss mine because she's got so many demons.

"She's spent an entire lifetime being abused," he whispered, bringing me against his chest. His fingers digging into my hip, his anger clear every time he spoke of how she'd been treated. "Trust me when I tell you that she's going to let herself love whoever loves her with their whole heart. She's got years to make up for not being loved. And we're going to worship this woman like she's a goddamn devil."

Satisfied that maybe he was right, we went inside. The rest of our group had already gone in and gotten us a couple lanes. Bounce and I stopped to get shoes before following. I sat next to him, pulling my boots off and stepping into the shoes, all the while watching Haidee laugh with Arrow and Soul.

Soul smiled, looking more relaxed than he had in a very long time. Now that I'm seeing it, I don't know that I've ever seen him look so relaxed. At peace.

I couldn't imagine how serene he'd look if Shimmer wasn't a factor.

Soul went first on the lane next to us, showing Haidee how to bowl. Not bowl well since he got a gutter ball. Haidee laughed at the teasing banter Denial and Arrow threw his way. Soul just grinned and tried again. When he knocked all the pins down, I knew that he'd thrown the gutter on purpose. Just to make our girl laugh.

Haidee stood and picked up a ball. When she looked at them with her brows knitted, Arrow joined her. Pressing his body along hers, showing her how to hold the ball and how to throw it. He kissed her lips softly and patted her small ass in encouragement.

She smiled at him and did as he instructed, throwing the ball down the lane. I was impressed it didn't go straight into the gutter. She hit the corner pin. The way we all cheered had Haidee laughing, her cheeks pink. And when she hit two more pins on her second turn, our cheers were louder, as if she'd managed a strike straight out of the gate.

Jealousy forgotten, I spent the day watching her smile. Watching as everyone waited on her without making it overly apparent that they were. Watching as everyone stared at her with little hearts in their eyes.

Sadist Soul



Tears stung my eyes as my muffled cries were lost in the hand that was pressed unforgivingly against my mouth. My balls ached, throbbed in pain. I struggled to move, but couldn't. Not with the way Denial held me.

My back was to his chest, my arms tied securely behind me, pressed between our bodies. His thighs trapping my hands beneath him. He's still got his pants on and his raging hard cock rubbed against my forearm.

I wasn't dressed. When he'd come into my room to find me ready to tear my hair out in frustration, he made me undress in his cold, calm voice. Because I *needed* more than anything to succumb to someone else's command right then, I let it all go. Forgetting everything that waited for me on the other side of the door and giving myself over to Denial.

When my breath regulated and I relaxed once again, Denial's hand circled my cock. I whimpered behind his hand, my hips jerking up as he stroked me hard and fast, building my orgasm steadily. Quickly. Forcing it high.

Crying into his hand, I tried to pump into his other, my hips coming up, fucking myself into his grip. I was almost there. Nearly ready to fall apart. So desperate to come. Just another second. Another stroke.

I cried out in pain as his hand left me again, my hips jutting wildly in a mad search for friction as my orgasm was denied once more.

He said nothing as I tried to thrash in his hold. Tears streamed down my face, his lips pressed gently to my neck as he waited for me to calm down again.

Denial always edged me when I got to the point where I was so frustrated

with life that I was ready to burn it all down. Edged me so many times that I thought I was going to die from refusal of orgasm. The one time that I almost orgasmed before he wanted me to, he squeezed my balls so tight that I thought he flattened them. The pain killed the orgasm. It wasn't the kind of pain I appreciated.

Still panting but not ready to fall apart again, Denial shifted us so that we were propped a little more securely against the headboard. His legs moved over mine, effectively pinning me to the bed. I whimpered in anticipation, knowing that he was nowhere near done torturing me.

I tried to say his name behind his hand. Tried to plead with him. For all the good it would do. I might be the one with sadist in their name, but Denial truly embodied it.

His hand on me made me jump. But not nearly as much as I could have; I was locked in place. His body kept a rigid, tight hold all over me. I was already trembling, tears falling as I squeezed my eyes shut while he began again with a punishing rhythm. Driving my orgasm to the front right away. Forcing my arousal high and strong and demanding. My balls drew up as I cried out into his hand, begging for release. For his mercy.

He wasn't quitting. Wasn't letting me go. He was going to let me—

Right before, a fucking second before I came, he released my cock mid-stroke. I yelled out in pain, once more flailing uselessly against his hold. The hand that wasn't over my mouth moved away from me, not touching me at all. I was so strung out, so hard up for an orgasm that right now, any touch was going to set it loose. Denial knew that. So he didn't touch me.

"You're okay," he murmured softly. "I'll take care of you."

There were so many arguments on my tongue. Not that I could speak them since I was still sobbing behind his hand. Not that he could hear them because he wouldn't let go of my mouth. Stifling my sounds was another weird kink I had. I wasn't sure what it did to me. Maybe it went along with being restrained. Completely at his mercy. He wasn't giving me the freedom to even let myself be heard.

My whimpers weren't going to stop. They were a constant pathetic sound that filled his hand at this point. He pushed something under me. At first, I had hoped that he was sticking something—anything at this point—into my ass. There'd be nothing to stop my orgasm then.

But that's not what he did. He pressed something blunt against my taint, right under my balls. I whined at how cold it was. How hard it was. Almost

painful in the way it was forced there, and I was unable to move myself to relieve the pressure.

His hand went to my dick then. I'm not sure how he did it, but as soon as he began fisting me, the little device he wedged under my balls began to vibrate.

I cried out as pleasure shot through me. It ricocheted around inside me until I was so overwhelmed with pleasure that wasn't quite building but poking at me, then I was wailing. Howling. Coming undone without actually coming.

This was the longest he kept touching, continuing to build pleasure, since he first got me in this position. Because my body was so fucking wrung out, it didn't know which way was up. It didn't remember how to orgasm. I was overstimulated. Oversensitive. My mind a burst of pleasure so fierce, I was nearly blinded.

But then it began climbing again. All the many lines of pleasure began falling hard into the well. Building and building and building. Ready to overflow. Ready to burst like a geyser.

Denial let go of my dick and moved the vibrator, running it up and down my shaft. I cried out, trying desperately to move my hips. I couldn't. He wouldn't let me. The mind-numbing vibration moved to my head, right over my slit. I screamed into his hand, tears blinding me. Pleasure so painful coursing through my body. My balls fucking hurt as if someone had punched them.

"That's it, baby," Denial cooed into my ear. His soft, gentle, almost loving voice was far away. As if I were hearing it in a memory. Foggy and unsure. "You're doing so good for me. Look at you. Look at how tense your body is. Begging for release. But you're not going to come yet, are you? Not until I say you can."

Sobs wracked my body as my dick throbbed. My balls ached. My chest hurt. I couldn't catch a breath. Denial continued to move the vibrator up and down my dick. Any time he cupped it in his hand with one of my testicles, my body violently tried to get away. The overstimulation was painful. And yet, my cock leaked so steadily that I was covered in cum.

I was delirious. Seeing stars and hearing fireworks. Hearing the roar of bikes and crackling of fire. Feeling far too much as Denial made pleasure the best kind of pain but somehow locked away my orgasm. It was an animal in a cage, thrashing and hammering as it tried to get out.

“So good for me,” Denial praised. He kissed me gently, ignoring my riotous convulsing as if I were laying still for him. “I love how well you listen. How sexy you are. Look at this cock.” He released my testicle and trailed the head of the vibrator over the length of my shaft again. Just barely touching me. It felt more like he was vibrating the air that was kissing my skin. Until he got to my cockhead, and he pressed it to my slit again. A new wave of sobbing met his hand as he closed his fist around the tip of my dick, keeping the vibrator there. “So red. So angry. Fuck, you’re beautiful like this. So fucking perfect the way you give your body to me and let me take care of you.”

His words hit me somewhere in my chest. As if he were possessing my soul. A calm settled over me and my entire rigid body just relaxed into him, while my mind was still a chaotic storm of pain, pleasure, and frustration. The sounds coming out of me never ceased. But everything in me knew that Denial would give me exactly what I needed. He was taking care of me.

“There you go, love,” he whispered, pressing a soft kiss to my cheek. “That’s what I needed from you. Let yourself go. Let me have you. All of you.”

I did. He could have anything. He could do what he wanted with me. The noises stopped coming from me. My mind didn’t exactly relax, but I sank inside. Into the place of pleasure and obedience, wanting nothing more than to let him have me. Let him take from me. I sighed as my body relaxed.

Not my dick. That appendage was fucking pissed. Angry. Pained. Raw. Every single touch hurt. It had its own pulse. My balls were in agony.

But the rest of me? The rest of me had found a quiet place. A happy place.

“Fuck, Soul,” Denial said, his voice sweet. His lips at my ear, his tongue gently traced the shell. “Fuck, look at how good you are. Look at how you let me have you.” His hand tightened around my cockhead, pushing the vibrator hard into my dick. As if he was trying to shove it down my slit. I swear, that vibration went through my entire body. Making my breath hitch. “Ready to come for me, baby?”

I didn’t answer. My head lolled against him, knowing that he’d do whatever was best for me. His smile against my neck was soft.

He pulled the vibrator away, and I whimpered. He dropped his hand between my legs and I felt the blunt head of it, no longer on, at my ass. “It’s time to come, Soul. Wait just a minute longer. Let me make this worth the

long wait. Let me take care of you.”

Still, I couldn't answer. Hopefully, he knew it was yes. He has my consent. He always would. I knew he'd take care of me. Always.

Denial hadn't prepped my ass. The only lubricant on the vibrator was my excessive amounts of pre-cum. But he pushed it inside me. The hiss I let out was only in my head. He pushed it in and shifted it, so a new jolt of pleasure raced through me as he wedged it against my prostate. Then his hand was on my dick.

“Ready for you,” he said. “Come for me, Soul. Paint us both with your seed. Show me how much you like my hands on you.”

As soon as he started stroking me, the vibrator turned on. Between his strokes and the constant stimulation against my prostate, I was coming immediately. But it wasn't as explosive as I thought it would be. And I was still floating somewhere inside the soft, safe place in my head.

But I came. Denial's hand left my mouth, freeing my voice, and wrapped around my neck. It wasn't hard. Just to hold me there. My eyes were open, seeing nothing at all but the darkest night as lights shot across it. My jaw was slack, but nothing came out.

And my balls unloaded more cum than I thought was demonly possible. Doing exactly as he asked of me, I soaked us both until there was nothing left. I'd like to say I went limp in his arms, but I was already there. When my balls stopped pulsing my release, I sank into the place in my mind where Denial was wrapped around me. All of me. In a way I couldn't feel outside my body. A peaceful smile, and I was lulled into sleep.

I AWOKE IN HIS ARMS, as I always did. Clean, sated, and untied, Denial's fingers soothed through the knots in my hair, gently untangling them. My eyes fluttered open to see his empty gaze staring down at me. A hint of a smile on his lips. “Did I go too far?” he asked.

Snorting, I shook my head. “No. I feel like I lost ten pounds of stress.”

“Nope. Ten pounds of cum. I had no idea that was possible. I used three towels.”

Laughter bubbled out of me, my cheeks heating. I curled into him, burying my face in his chest, and Denial pulled me tighter.

“What do you need?” he asked quietly. “More? Do you—”

“Fuck, if you try to make my dick respond before next week, I think it’ll fall off. No, Den. No more.”

He smiled against my head, but it faded. “Then what’s wrong? I can feel how stressed you are again already.”

I sighed and shifted so his face was in mine. He kissed me and for a minute, everything else fell away. Then he asked again. Needing to take some of my burden, even when I tried to keep it for myself.

“I can’t bring business here,” I told him. “Not between us.”

“There’s never anything between us, Soul,” he said, cupping the back of my head. “Nothing. I will always be at your side. Your back. In front of you. Wherever you need me. But there won’t be anything between us.”

Taking a breath, I closed my eyes. “I keep getting more offers for Haidee,” I told him. “Whoever is spearheading this hasn’t stopped pushing. And they’re playing the bidders against each other.” I paused to look at him. “KOK Suckers are getting aggressive. Nearly making threats.”

“We aren’t letting anyone buy her,” he said, his voice cold once again. “We can’t do that to her. We can’t let her go.”

“I’m glad you’re fond of her,” I said.

The surprise on his face had me chuckling. Then his eyelids hooded and the first three words came out amused. “So I am. The real question is, when are you going to get rid of Shimmer? You’ve got enough now, haven’t you?”

I nodded. “I do. But getting rid of Shimmer doesn’t get rid of the problem. If the cameras have proven anything, I think they’re expecting that. Waiting for it. They have something else planned, Den. And they’re waiting for me to move against Shimmer before they act.”

Denial growled. “Enough of this,” he said, his voice hard and cold. He pulled me to his chest and slung a leg over my hip. “Tomorrow we’ll think of something to force their action. But right now, tonight, it’s just me and you. Sleep. I’ll be right here. All night.”

Smiling, I pressed my face into his chest and let myself sink into the quiet, happy place inside me because I knew Denial was here and he wasn’t going anywhere. I was safe and cared for. So for right now, I didn’t have to be on.

Haidee



I was beginning to really love naps. And I didn't have to be locked in my room for them to feel safe. Often, I dozed on the couch or in the chair where I was reading. Usually Arrow was there, which I loved more than I had words for.

But Arrow was called away for the day, which was probably why I welcomed the nap so readily. When he was here, I loved to just lay in his arms. Talk and hear him talk. Read together. Listen to him read to me. It didn't matter what we were doing, I loved every second of it.

Both Bounce and Bone Breaker were here today because Arrow was gone. I didn't think I needed both enforcers, but they seemed happy enough to stay home with me. Bounce made a huge breakfast that felt more like a feast. When there was a ton left over, he said he'd use it to make lunch later.

I watched them sit together on a chair, their limbs tangled as they quietly talked about a movie or something. I was so used to seeing Bone Breaker with Denial and Bounce with Orchid, sometimes I forgot they were together too. But seeing them like this made their other relationships seem almost new, somehow.

They were so in tune with each other. So in sync. The way their fingers moved and how they nearly mirrored the other. The way they stared into each other's eyes. And the clear love they shared.

It made my chest pang again. I was once more reminded of the cage fighter and all her mates. How loved she was. She was rescued from the creature who tried to own her for her debt while still being strong enough to fight for herself and what she wanted.

I closed my eyes and thought about Arrow. Maybe I was being greedy by thinking I needed a lot of mates, like the human-turned-lioness shifter. I was pretty certain Arrow liked me. Maybe he'd love me one day like the shifter's mates loved her. But was I still deserving of that? After all the people who touched me and used my body for their own, was I worthy of that kind of love?

These thoughts stayed with me when I drifted to sleep, though dreams didn't plague me. How could they when the enforcers were there to keep me safe? Nothing bothered me when I slept now. That was probably the reason I slept so soundly.

When I began drifting awake, still bundled under a small mountain of blankets, voices floated to me. They were quiet, but I still recognized them. At first, I smiled contentedly because it was a sense of normalcy and security that I was coming to cherish.

But then the tension in their tones met my ears and my eyes opened. I was buried in a blanket so I couldn't see anything but the darkness that surrounded me. That was likely why their voices were as muffled as they were.

The third voice said they weren't alone.

"Eight?" Bone Breaker said. His irritation was apparent in the next slurred curse words that followed. "What the fuck?"

There was a pause before someone spoke. "They're offering eight and all the territory that they took from Sticks and Bones when we didn't make a move to claim it."

"That would double our spread," Bounce said.

"Really, we should have taken it anyway," Soul said, irritated. "If we hadn't been so busy waiting for the mutiny within our own fucking club, that would have been first and foremost on our minds. As it fucking should have been. We should have gone straight to their territory, eliminated the rest of their club, and taken the city for ourselves. Instead, we're fighting with each other."

"Not your fault," Bounce said. "While, yes, we should have done that if anyone had been thinking clearly, we didn't."

"They're not invested in that territory," Bone Breaker said thoughtfully. "Or they'd not so willingly offer it up. We could still take it."

"I shudder to think whether we're actually keeping Ash Hollow in check right now," Soul said bitterly. "I don't think we should even bring that up."

“Or, hear me out, what if we take it as a big fuck you to KOK Suckers for thinking they can bully us into selling them Haidee and make a sort of farmer chapter there? We can ship Shimmer there, without his cronies, or split them anyway, and then once they’re out of our chapter, it’ll be easier to eliminate him.”

While they continued to talk this through, my heart raced in my throat at the first part of the sentence. Another motorcycle club was trying to buy me! Fear trickled in, tears stinging my eyes. My fingers clenched into the blanket. They wouldn’t do that, would they? For territory? For money? Would they sell me?

“I don’t hate the idea,” Soul said, making my heart jump into my throat. He didn’t hate the idea of selling me?! “I think we need to talk this over with a couple more. And definitely Secret. I don’t want to screw us into tying our hands further.”

“You could just get rid of him now,” Bounce said. “You have more than enough against him.”

“Yes, I do. But they’re gathering here again and I can’t shake the feeling that they’re waiting for something specific before they make a move. A feeling I can’t shake says that the first move is me taking action against Shimmer.”

“And yet, if you do nothing, he’s going to feel like he can get away with more,” Bone Breaker said. “His bullshit wasn’t addressed. He’s walking free right now without being punished.”

Soul cursed, and I could hear footsteps as if he were pacing the room. Silence followed in which the only sound was his footsteps.

“You have someone monitoring the feeds?” Bounce asked.

No one answered. I assumed someone nodded or shook their head.

“How about you fine him?” Bone Breaker suggested. “Heavily. For both his offense toward Haidee and for his attack on Secret. Tell him that you’re still considering the severity of what charges should be pressed against him for his outright lie in an attempt to accuse Secret of an unprovoked attack.”

“Money means nothing to him,” Soul said.

“I think you’re wrong,” Bounce said. “He’s the voice always pushing to increase taxes.”

“And his day job is as a shady financial advisor. I’m sure as fuck that he’s smuggling money from his clients,” Bone Breaker said. “He sees money as power. More powerful than people, which is why he’s never concentrated on

gathering class A or even B demons to support him. He thinks he can use his financial prowess to get what he wants.”

“Everyone has a price,” Bounce mocked.

“Which is why he’s playing the bidders against each other. He thinks someone is going to bid high enough to make me consider selling Haidee to them,” Soul said. He let out a long exhale that sounded a lot like a growl. “He thinks everyone has a number. They just haven’t reached mine yet. That’s why this bullshit is still carrying on.”

“So then we do just what we’ve been talking about. Fine the fuck out of him. If he doesn’t pay, then you can stick him on probate where he’ll become nasty and belligerent. At which point, you can boot his ass out. Or, say he pays, then we propose taking over the old Sticks and Bones territory from KOK Suckers. By force, if need be. Since he’s a violent asshole, he’ll like that. Then we open a new chapter there,” Bone Breaker said.

“What’s great about that is Shimmer will recruit like crazy, giving us plenty of fodder. However, we also know he’s a power-hungry fool. And he’s got some people following him now, but when he’s on his own, they’ll see just how foolish he is. Recruiting from them will be easy,” Bounce said. “And we all know he’s going to feel high and mighty having his own club. He’s going to do all sorts of shit to provoke us into retaliating. He can’t shimmer his ass away without us knowing, because he’s too arrogant to accept help. That leaves him weak,” Bounce added.

“We know all his weaknesses,” Bone Breaker said. “We know his strengths. We know his personality and we can already anticipate what he’s going to do. Let’s just work with that and move forward. Once you’ve cleaned house, you can get Dirty Devils back to their former glory, force Ash Hollow into submission, and make sure KOK Suckers and Maple Roots know their fucking place.”

“It’s only a matter of time before they see our cracks like Sticks and Bones did,” Soul muttered.

Their voices petered off. I could feel their stress and knew without a doubt that this wasn’t a light conversation they were having. I may not have understood most of what they were saying, but I knew they had rules. And from other discussions I’d picked up on over the last few weeks, those rules often tied their hands into acting how they needed to.

Seems to me the answer was quite simple. Rewrite the rules. They were their rules. That meant they had the power to override them, so they worked

for them and in their favor. That's what politicians did. Someone was always benefiting from the rules. Right now, it sounded like the wrong person was.

While they'd stopped talking about selling me, my pulse never calmed. When I fell asleep again, it was more fitful than it had been in a while. There wasn't any one thing. But my dreams weren't filled with peace and security. There was tension there. Fear. Uncertainty. And a looming threat somewhere in the dark distance that I couldn't see or run away from.

When I woke again, my face was poking out of my mountain of blankets. Fingers were gently brushing through my hair. I thought it was Arrow, but when I opened my eyes, Soul was sitting above my head.

He wasn't watching me, but staring off at the wall blankly. I swallowed, glancing around the room. Bounce and Bone Breaker were once again, or maybe still, curled up in the chair together. They weren't talking anymore. Now their heads were bowed together, connected at their foreheads, as they stared almost reverently into the other's eyes.

It was almost a little too sweet.

When I glanced back up at Soul, he was looking down at me. "Good nap?" he asked, a smile making the corners of his lips curl. I felt Bounce and Bone Breaker shift to look at me. My cheeks flushed.

"Yes," I said, not sure if it was good at all.

He sighed. "We're going to keep you safe, Haidee." I bit my lip and his fingers stopped. He watched me, studying my face, then brushed his fingers softly over my jaw. "Don't worry. Not everyone has a price."

My eyes widened, and he chuckled.

"We realized you were awake when you started whimpering," he said gently.

I flinched, looking at him through squinted eyes. "Sorry. I shouldn't have been listening."

"We were talking right in front of you," Bounce said. I glanced at him. His head was leaning against Bone Breaker's still, but they were both looking at me. Smiling serenely. Completely relaxed. "We already told you. We know you're there when we talk or do something. Not a big deal. We trust you."

Because I'm voiceless. That's what a female in a motorcycle club is. Seen and not heard. Those are the rules.

I nodded. Who was I going to tell, anyway? The demons protecting me were the good guys. Or, maybe the better guys. I had a feeling that none of

them were actually good. I could be wrong. They could be awful. Horrendous. Just as horrible and terrifying as the demons who abused me.

But then again, I'd still take this form of bad over any other. Because the other option was the demons who wanted to sell me. I guess you just needed to choose the type of bad you can live with.

Sadist Soul



It hadn't just been Haidee's whimpering that had told us she'd been awake. It was her fear. After our conversation had run its course, she began making noise. So she wasn't awake right then, but she'd heard at least part of our discussion.

I sat next to her and gently uncovered her face to find that she'd fallen back asleep. Whatever she was dreaming wasn't happy and it was probably our fault. She'd been through enough horrors; we shouldn't be adding any more.

"She thinks we're going to sell her," Bounce had said, sighing. "We've worked out that's her biggest fear. Being owned again. Being a toy to nasty demons."

"That's why Denial scared her," Bone Breaker said. "She sees in his empty expression the same kind of demon that's hurt her in the past. He keeps his eyes nearly closed when looking in her direction."

I didn't know why, but that stung. Denial didn't care how people regarded him. Hell, he worked that angle pretty thoroughly. It wasn't even a lie. He was a fuckstorm underneath his cold exterior. He *would* tear apart anyone in front of him if he let it fall. I've seen it.

But he's so much more than that. And there are so few people who see that. Who were willing to look past the superficial to see the heart underneath.

It's a cold heart, but it's big too.

"She likes Denial," Bone Breaker said when I'd become silent again while staring at Haidee sleep. When she whimpered, her face falling with

fear, I instinctively began running my fingers through her hair to soothe her. It always worked with me. Den knew how to soothe me that way. Though I've never tried it for someone else, why not now? "She *knows* he won't hurt her. But she's lived a long time in fear and pain and she still runs on instincts. But she trusts Den. And he's stupidly proud of that fact."

He was grinning at me as Bounce climbed back in the chair with him, returning to the tangled knot they'd been in when I walked into their apartment.

His words put me at ease, and I went back to staring at Haidee. Only one more whimper escaped her before she seemed to fall into a calmer sleep. When she woke, I'd assure her. She'd be safe here. Fuck everyone if they thought they were going to push me into selling this woman.

No one is an object to buy or sell. No one. And sure as fuck not this girl.

Not for the first time, I had to wonder who she was. Was it really a case of mistaken identity? Why would so many people be so persistent in buying her, if that was the case?

I'd asked Arrow to look into her past. To find the answer. There needed to be an answer. If we knew what it was, then we might know how best to fight back.

The part that truly had me confused was, if she was someone that was worth purchasing, how did Shimmer come across that information? I didn't think that was the case. I truly didn't. Not only because no one was an object to sell, but what if it's a ransom scenario? Is there a price on her head that way?

If that was the case, then I could see why so many people were interested in owning her. Because they held all the power. While I'd like to think that this was the way to lean, the pit in my stomach said that wasn't it at all. Haidee wasn't a pawn to pass around in a bid for power. Even if that did work in favor of the kind of demon Shimmer was. But I didn't believe that was the case at all.

He latched onto the fact that Haidee had been purchased for Jab as his bride. If I had to take a guess, he knew more about that kind of thing than I did. And whatever he knew made Haidee worth money in his eyes.

And apparently, at least half a dozen more demons' eyes too. The whole thing made me sick.

When Haidee finally awoke, we tried to comfort her about overhearing our conversation and that we'd keep her safe. I tried to think of something

that might put her at ease. Something we could say or do.

I remembered how she smiled and laughed when we took her bowling. She'd been comfortable enough that she even leaned into my side for a while, allowing me to sling my arm over her shoulders.

There was no way in fucking hell I was going to break that trust.

"What do you want to do today?" I asked her.

Haidee shrugged. "Anything you want to." Her voice was quiet, timid, but so soft and sweet.

"I have an idea," Bounce said, leaning forward. Because he and Bone Breaker were so thoroughly intertwined, Bone Breaker came with him when he leaned closer. I chuckled, shaking my head. "How about we conduct a cleansing ritual?"

Haidee's eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

He pulled himself from the chair, dragging Bone Breaker with him. It was such a sight of tangled limbs that I laughed. Haidee giggled too, though she tucked her face within the blankets to hide it.

Both of my big enforcers crouched at the side of the couch to look at Haidee. I could see their fondness as if it was a beacon in the room. The way they looked down at her, adoringly. Indulgently.

Bounce touched her cheek, and Haidee smiled at him. "We'll set a fire and call on the devil for a little help in getting rid of the bad juju. We can burn everything that reminds us of bad things. Or maybe symbolizes bad things." He glanced at me. "Or maybe pieces of people. Hair or..." His eyes narrowed. "Fingers?"

I laughed, shaking my head.

"What kinds of things do we burn?" Haidee asked, studying Bounce as he looked at me. Bounce turned back to her, grinning.

"Well, how about a certain white dress that's a little spattered in blood? We'll burn it as a way to lock away that part of your life," he said.

Haidee's eyes widened, her perfect dark lips parted slightly. Bone Breaker reached over and traced her lips, making her blink at him.

"You won't be sold again, bunny. They're going to have to kill all of us first in order to get to you. And I promise, we're really hard to kill," Bone Breaker said.

She smiled, nodding. "Okay. But I don't think we brought that dress."

"I'll go get it," Bone Breaker said. "Bounce can get the fire ready, and Soul will gather other things and maybe some body parts to burn."

“I don’t exactly have body parts in the freezer,” I said.

“Think of something to acquire them then,” Bone Breaker said. He leaned in and pressed his lips to Haidee’s for a soft kiss. Her eyes fluttered, cheeks turning a pretty dusty pink. And then he was up and out the door.

Bounce followed, mimicking Bone Breaker’s kiss, but when he got to his feet, he pulled her with him. She came off the couch, still wrapped like a burrito in all the many blankets. He smiled softly and slowly unwrapped her as if she were a gift.

Haidee let him, smiling up at him. When she was standing before him in just her clothes and not thirty pounds of blankets, he touched her face and then looked at me expectantly.

I got to my feet. Before I could walk out, Bounce’s eyes narrowed, his head bowing. As if he were a predator looking at me for doing something wrong. When I raised a brow, his gaze flickered to Haidee.

They were closer to her than I was. I didn’t have the time to earn her trust and affection yet. Giving her the quick ‘goodbye, I’ll be right back’ kiss they did wouldn’t be as welcome from me. But when his lips lifted in a slight snarl, I sighed and moved back to Haidee. Fucking pushy demon.

She looked up at me, watching me with an open expression. So beautiful. So perfect and sweet. I touched her chin, tracing it with my thumb, and then pressed my lips to hers.

With our mouths connected, I waited a beat to see if she’d push me away. And then a beat longer just to breathe her in. But that was enough. I didn’t want to make it awkward. So I pulled away and offered her a light smile.

Her smile never wavered, even as her lashes fluttered slightly.

Bounce grinned at me, satisfied that I did what he demanded of me. Fucking demon. Like it was a hardship. Kissing her.

Not at all. But now I tingled all over and craved to feel her lips against mine again. To hold her and touch her. Fuck.

I DIDN’T GATHER body parts. It’s not like I could go demand a thumb tip or a foot from Shimmer. He’d at least have questions that I wasn’t going to answer. However, I headed into the closets for any article that might be his. I found a jacket that I was fairly certain belonged to him.

Taking that with me, I met the demons out back. There was already smoke billowing behind the apartment. Setting the items I brought down, I turned back to the clubhouse.

“Where are you going?” Bounce asked. “And how’d you get that jacket?”

“It’s his, isn’t it?” I asked.

His grin said it was.

“I need to check in with Secret real quick.”

Bounce rolled his eyes. “It’s not against the rules. Yet.”

I needed to hear that for myself. Secret was in his office, sitting behind his desk with his head in his hands, elbows on the table, and the red book sitting open in front of him. The red book was where we kept all our finances recorded.

“What is it?” I asked.

He looked up, blinking at me through his glasses. “We have too much money,” he said, eyes narrowed. “I’ve taken into account the increase in taxes, but I know where we should be. I know where our accounts should be.”

Frowning, I crossed my arms. “Someone is making too many deposits?” That seemed like a strange issue to have.

“By \$80,546.13,” he said flatly, lifting his head up and sitting back. “Hell, I wouldn’t question it if it was a thousand. Even a couple thousand. But eighty? What the fuck is that?”

I shook my head. “Let’s talk about it later. We’ll get with Pegger and see what he can tell us. Right now, I need you to tell me what rules there are about cleansing rituals.”

He raised a brow. “None,” he answered without picking up the black book. When I didn’t accept that, he smirked. “I may keep some rules to myself when certain members of the club are asking. Sure, lying by omission, but I figure, if they don’t ask outright for something specific within that rule, I’m not *really* lying to them. I mean, when you ask me to tell you the rules regarding enforcing taxes, I can tell you the first three and just take a very long pause until you think I’ve finished. It’s not my fault that you leave before I continue talking.”

I look at him until he grins. Sneaky fucker.

“But I don’t withhold from the president,” he said, sniffing and crossing his arms. “I have your back, Soul. There’s not a single rule against cleansing rituals at all. Why would that have even come up?”

“There’s a rule about which rice we’re allowed to eat on Wednesdays. Why has that come up?” I countered.

He snorted. “Fair. But no rules on cleansing. I swear.”

Satisfied, I turned, but stopped when he asked me to wait. I turned to find him pulling a key from around his neck. He unlocked one of his desk drawers and pulled out a wooden box. “Burn this for me?”

I raised a brow. It was big enough for a hand. I took it from him and studied the blank, smooth surfaces.

He smirked. “Just visualize whatever outcome you’d like, Soul.”

Turning back toward the door, I decided that I’m glad he’s got my back. He’s his own kind of scary.

Sadist Soul



This was really not the best time for a run. But it had been scheduled for months, so canceling it was only going to cause more tension within the crew. Still, I was incredibly uncomfortable leaving the clubhouse. Yes, it was covered with cameras. An ant couldn't move along the baseboard without it being caught. I'd know if something happened here while we were out.

Besides, it was a mandatory run. The entire club would be going for the duration. I kind of wanted to go somewhere else, though. Not to our former chapter. I didn't want to give Shimmer any more puppets he could manipulate.

I tapped my fingers on my desk and stared at the screens as they flickered through the different areas. Those with movement were set to pop up and remain there. But the other spaces were covered by cameras that just spanned slowly from one feed to the other.

As did the bar that Shimmer and his cronies had been hanging out in. Arrow hacked their cams pretty easily and now I could see their front door and most corners of their bar.

It's almost as if Shimmer knew they were being watched there, so they came back. And he *knew* they were being watched here.

Bone Breaker and Bounce were correct. Shimmer needed to know there were consequences for his actions. With Secret's assistance, I'd written up several fines for his behavior. Namely against Haidee. For going against my demand that he leave her alone. For his attack against Secret. And as Bone Breaker suggested, I made sure he understood that the severity of his false

accusation was still being considered and that a determination for his punishment would be delivered at a later date.

I'd pinned it on the notice board, as was usual with these things, and had it delivered with confirmation that it was handed to him at work. That was three days ago. His fine was now due within twenty-four hours. While he'd been here and very clearly angry, he'd also been quieter than usual. I fully expected him to come storming into my office, furious and ready to throw down.

Every fiber of my being wished he would, so I could cream his fucking ass. And not in an enjoyable way. He thought he was hot shit with his ability to shift across short distances. But as we'd all told him many times over the past few years, his shimmer made his move predictable. He refused help in changing that. Now it was his weakness that even the other clubs were learning to read.

But it gave every one of us an advantage when we had to fight with him when it came down to that. And it would. Eventually.

I'd rather it be on my terms, but he was proving to be a more stubborn dick than I hoped.

A knock on my open door made me look up. Sure as shit, Shimmer stood there. His expression was calm. Even his eyes were serene. His muscles relaxed. One of his hands was in his pocket as he waited for me to acknowledge him instead of just walking in as he usually did.

Sitting back in my chair, I steeped my hands. "Hello, Shimmer."

"Prez," he countered. "May I come in?"

I raised a brow. With a single nod, I gestured to a chair across from me.

He strolled in, head high and shoulders back. Exuding every ounce of confidence that he always walked around with. He sank into the chair and offered me a small smile.

I'd give it to him. He didn't so much as look at the camera sitting on top of the monitor, pointed directly at him.

When he didn't speak right away, I asked, "You ready for the run?"

Shimmer grinned. "Yes. Looking forward to it. That's why I joined a club. Sometimes I forget that; but more than anything, I love to ride."

If I didn't know him as well as I did, I'd say he wasn't at all playing me, right now. But he was stupider than I wagered if he thought I was going to accept this new friendly demeanor. However, I could play along.

I nodded, affording him a smile in return. "I think that's what draws us

all. There's nothing like ripping down the open road."

He sighed, his eyes closing momentarily. His smile faded into something that was almost reminiscent. Then he opened his eyes, and while his smile didn't fall, he turned to business.

Shifting, he reached into his cut and pulled out an envelope. Setting it on my desk, he slid it to me. It was thick, so I figured it wasn't his resignation from the club. One could only hope. Reaching for it, I picked it up and flipped the flap.

Cash.

"My fines," he said. I met his eyes, and he smiled demurely. "You're right that I was out of line. My opinions aside, I broke rules. Many rules. I'll apologize to Secret and if you'd allow me, with your presence, I'll also apologize to Haidee."

I frowned. Setting the envelope down, I crossed my arms again. "You're going to leave her alone now? Stop trying to sell her?"

A flicker of irritation flashed in his eyes. "She doesn't belong here, Soul. We all know that."

"No, Shimmer. You see an opportunity to capitalize on some territory and money. So, regardless of anything other than your own feelings about it, you're moving in that direction like a wrecking ball. She's no different from any other old lady that our crew members have brought around."

His lips were pressed into a thin line as he stared at me. "And what if she is?"

I leaned forward, folding my hands on the desk in front of me. "Listen to me, Shimmer. I don't give a fuck what Haidee is. Who she is, where she came from, how she was... raised. I don't care who the world thinks she is or what kind of price hangs over her head. I. Don't. Fucking. Care. She's a fucking demon. A person. We don't sell people. Am I clear?"

Shimmer let out a frustrated breath. "Yes. You're clear. But others know she's here now. You can't make them unknow that."

"Yes. And when I get to the bottom of who's responsible for orchestrating that and keeping it going, I'll make sure they're out on their ass for disobeying me in such a spectacular fashion. I will *personally* handle them and their punishment." The sliver of fear in his gaze didn't go unnoticed. He squirmed, ever so slightly, in his chair. "And I will find out. There aren't only cameras decorating this clubhouse like a fucking Christmas tree, Shimmer. They're all over the city. Everywhere. It's a matter of time."

Shimmer gave me a curt nod. “Good,” he said. “There should be. We offer protection, after all. What good are we if we can’t make good on that promise?”

I sat back, the soft cushion of the chair roughly grating against the claw marks on my back. Denial played a new game last night. I was left with a whole fucking lot of aches and pains this morning, but the orgasm and his attentive care afterward were totally fucking worth it.

“Glad we agree. Thank you for paying your fines and not making me have to take matters in a different direction.” The threat was there, even if my tone was friendly enough. “We’re ready to ride in twenty. How about gathering everyone outside so I can set the circle?”

His smile was wide again as he got to his feet. “Yes, prez. Gladly.” He turned and sauntered out as I watched him with narrowed eyes. He hadn’t admitted to being responsible for the attempted sale of Haidee, but he definitely knew something. Not that I had any doubts before, but he was absolutely involved. To what extent was yet to be discovered.

I locked the money away, making a mental note to get with Secret about the \$80,000 over deposit when we got back too. More money was better than less money, but while our means of gaining money weren’t exactly legal or ethical, we didn’t evade taxes. If we had that much money surplus, it was going to garner questions.

The irony of it wasn’t lost on me. We break the law and have no issues with that. But in other ways, we are upstanding, law-abiding citizens. And we’d like to keep it that way. Choosing our poison was much preferred to walking into a noose we didn’t tie.

When I was sure everyone was out of the clubhouse and gathered around our bikes, I set about casting the circle. At the back of the property, I called the devil himself with my own blood to protect our property. Making it inaccessible to anyone but me until our return.

I knew it was successful when a translucent bloody bubble glittered in the early morning sunlight before fading as if it wasn’t there. Satisfied, I moved around the perimeter until I was standing with my demons. My gaze fell to Haidee right away.

She stared at the clubhouse with awe, and I knew she’d been watching the bubble appear. I smiled as I closed the distance. As per usual, she was standing with Arrow, his arm around her shoulders, holding her to his chest while he spoke with Baba Yaga.

Her eyes dropped to me when I approached. The excitement in her eyes was new, but I swear, I could feel it caress my skin. Making it tingle and prickle. “You did that?” she asked.

I nodded, smiling in return. I touched her chin and then her cheek. “Yes. I always leave our clubhouse impenetrable when our entire crew is called away. You know how territorial demons are.”

Haidee bit her lip before laughing quietly. “Possessive, even.”

She was teasing me. Fucking teasing. I couldn’t fight the beaming smile on my face. That she was comfortable enough to joke, even with a lot of demons she didn’t know and ones she *knew* not to trust were around, was everything.

My resolve to keep her safe only solidified further. I leaned in to kiss her forehead. “Very,” I agreed. “You ready to go?”

Her nod was a little shy, but she pulled away. “Yes. Is it a long trip?”

“Long enough, but Sweet Love plots out the best routes. Don’t be surprised if there are surprises along the way.” I winked at her and she smiled widely again.

I turned from Haidee to head for my bike. All the demons around her watched her with varying levels of adoration. It was reassuring to see. She deserved to have demons fawn over her. Take care of her.

Meeting Bone Breaker’s eye, she smirked.

“You taking her?” I asked him.

He nodded. “For the first leg, yeah. Then I’ll let her ride with Arrow if she wants.”

“Sounds good.” I clapped him on the shoulder and headed for my bike.

Sweet Love was already at his, straddling it, though it wasn’t turned on yet. He had his phone out as he studied the screen. I pushed at his arm when I stopped next to him where my bike was propped on its kickstand. “We good?” I asked.

He looked up at me with a grin. “Yep. All good.” His gaze flickered back. “Crew ready?”

“Ready. Lead the way, Love.”

His grin spread wide as he clicked his phone off and stuffed it into the pocket inside his cut. I pulled my bike up, kicking the stand back, and then turning the engine over. It roared to life. Over the next thirty seconds, dozens of bikes behind me joined in the noise.

I looked over my shoulder to make sure everyone was mounted and ready

to go. My gaze paused on Haidee, watching her grinning as she wrapped snugly around Bone Breaker. Her eyes glittered in the sunlight, excited.

Turning back, I caught Denial watching me. The touch of a smirk on his lips. Giving him a smile and then licking my lips, I turned forward again. Revving my engine, my demons behind me echoed the noise. Then I sat back and led the charge out of our lot and onto the street.

Haidee



This was the first time I'd been looking forward to getting on Bone Breaker's bike. I was ready for the way it shook my bones. How the wind pulled at my hair and my clothing. I looked forward to gripping him tightly and feeling his heartbeat as the world sped by. His hand would rest over mine for a while before he'd go back to holding both the handlebars.

What felt like hours went by and I never got tired of looking around. As long as I wasn't looking straight out to the right or left, I had time to study the scenery. The city wasn't as dark as I thought. When I was first let out of the van I was brought to the temple in, it looked dreary and like the tall buildings were curling down around me.

But then, it might have been the situation. Everything felt dark and threatening. Even when Bounce and Bone Breaker had pulled me out of the temple after the crew had killed everyone, everything around me felt like it was getting ready to attack me.

Out of one hold and into another. Just like my life had always been. One attack, one beating, one assault, and another always followed.

I closed my eyes and concentrated on the sun touching my skin. It was warm and soft. So calming. The constant loud roar of the bikes became background noise as I pressed my ear to the soft leather of Bone Breaker's cut. My fingers absently brushed the buttons and along the seam at the front where it was closed over his chest and stomach.

When you never dared to dream of a better life, it's hard to believe one has actually found you. I didn't go looking for it. How could I have? I now understood that the lack of food and drink I received was purposeful. It was

done in an effort to ensure I was too weak to truly fight back. With too little energy to break free and run.

That all changed the moment Bone Breaker and Bounce brought me into their house. The first thing they did was offer me comfort. Comfortable clothes. Comfort by warmth. And then they set about nourishing me with drinks and food. Then further by offering me a comfortable bed. Alone.

While I thought that solitude was perhaps the best thing I'd ever experienced, I'd come to learn that I liked company in my bed just fine. When it was Arrow, anyway. The way I fit in his arms and how he held me... I couldn't put it into words. The warmth and happiness that filled my chest was almost overwhelming.

The way he looked at me.

I almost wished that the first story I read about the badass cage fighter had come with pictures. Just so I could see the way her men looked at her. I wanted to know if that's how Arrow looked at me. I thought maybe it was, but I had no point of reference.

The bike slowing down and leaning had me opening my eyes. We were turning into a fuel station. I was almost disappointed when the engines all cut, and the wind stopped grabbing at me. The touch of the sun suddenly felt far too hot.

Shifting so I could get off the bike, I threw my leg over and nearly fell on my ass. Strong hands caught me and I looked up into Secret's face. He chuckled and hauled me to my feet. My cheeks burned with embarrassment.

"Legs can be a little unsteady when you first get off after a long ride," he said. "You'll get used to it."

I nodded. "Thanks."

He leaned down and kissed my cheek. "You're welcome. Want anything inside? Drink? Snack?"

Was I hungry? Taking my lip between my teeth, I glanced at the large building. I wouldn't even know what to ask for.

"Not yet," Sweet Love said, making Secret and I turn to where he was refueling. "I got a great food stop planned just around the corner." He winked and turned back as the pump clicked.

"Never mind then. I'll grab you a water, though," Secret said.

I nodded after him and turned to where Bone Breaker was pumping fuel. He smiled at me, even as he watched the numbers tick by. "Like riding?" he asked.

“Yea. Much better this time.”

His grin widened. “Good.”

Secret returned with a water and brushed his hand through my hair as he went back to his bike, waiting his turn to refuel. It was half an hour before everyone had managed to get through the station and Sweet Love led us down a few roads until we landed in a park filled with food trucks.

I watched with a smile as everyone patted Sweet Love on the back with enthusiasm, loving this turn of events for food. He grinned at me, winking, and followed.

There were far too many to choose from, so I just tagged along with Bone Breaker. He chose our meal based on the length of the line. The shortest line. It didn't seem to represent the quality of the food. It was so damn good.

Bone Breaker was smirking at the rest of the crew still waiting in various lines while we were munching on our little containers in the shade of an umbrella. “You can't go wrong with any of the food here,” he told me. “So there's no reason to wait in the long lines. It's all amazing.”

I had no argument but also no point of reference. My food intake before the Dirty Demons was sustenance with the sole purpose of not letting me starve to death. Flavor and quality weren't important to those who held me captive.

After we ate and others started meandering about, Bone Breaker shifted closer to me and wrapped his arm around my waist. Pulling me snugly to his side. Leaning against him, my eyes closed as a yawn overtook me.

“Need a nap?” he asked.

“I'm getting spoiled with naps,” I conceded. “My body expects them now.”

He chuckled. “Come here, bunny. Let me hold you and you can nap a while. We'll be here for an hour or so anyway.”

When I nodded, Bone Breaker scooped me up and shifted where we were sitting so he could curl me into his arms and hold me close. My head on his chest, I curled into him, my eyes already drifting closed.

Sleep was immediate. The gentle breeze in the warm air. The soft chatter and laughter, both familiar and not. The smell of delicious food mixed with clean air. The occasional sound of engines as people came and went from the park we were in.

The hour went by quickly and before I knew it, Bone Breaker was gently waking me. His voice was soft, sweet. I blinked open to find him watching

me, a beautiful small smile on his lips. “Hey,” he said, brushing my hair back. “Sleep okay?”

I nodded and wiped the sleep from my eyes. “Thank you.”

“I will gladly hold you while you sleep any time, Haidee,” he murmured, helping me sit up. He pressed his lips to mine and my eyes fluttered closed. It was short and soft but sweet. It made my heart race.

His gaze was dark when he set me on my feet. “You want to ride with me still or join Arrow?” Bone Breaker asked.

“I can ride with Arrow?” I turned to look for him. He was leaning against his bike, talking with someone whose name I didn’t know. His smile was gorgeous. Well, everything about him was.

Bone Breaker chuckled. “Of course. I just wanted to make sure you were alright. And you know, you’ve only ever ridden with me and I kind of like it that way.”

Looking back at Bone Breaker, I studied his face. There was something adorable about that. It made warmth flutter in my chest. “I’ll ride with you.”

His grin grew. “You don’t have to, Haidee.”

I offered him my hand. “I want to.”

Bone Breaker’s hand was probably twice the size of mine. Easily. Maybe larger. I felt like a child when he took my hand. But the way he grinned at me turned everything in me to jelly. In response, I found myself grinning, too.

THE CITY we went to was smaller than Ash Hollow. The buildings weren’t so tall or shiny. But it was clean. There was something brighter about it even as the sun was setting.

Likewise, the clubhouse wasn’t nearly as big as the one that belonged to the Dirty Demons. Yet it was modern and looked new. The grounds were well manicured with a bunch of really pretty gardens and seating areas. There were fire pits, a volleyball court, and a swing set of enormous round swings with elastic nets in them.

The demons here were another motorcycle club. I couldn’t remember the name of the club, but Bounce told me that they were a newer chapter, having only been around for the last handful of years. They were young. The Dirty Demons used them as a farmer chapter, meaning they recruited from them,

apparently.

None of this meant anything to me. Not really. Quite literally, I was just along for the ride.

None of the new demons with this other club paid any attention to me. It was a breath of fresh air. Maybe they didn't know me. Word that someone was trying to sell me hadn't reached them yet.

There were other women that the Dirty Demons brought. Doll and Tonne, plus three others. They stuck close to their demons, but they also conversed with whoever was around.

As the night wore on, the fires grew high, and alcohol flowed. Everyone was relaxed and hanging loose around the backyard. Some meandered inside from time to time and came out later. Bounce said there were game tables inside. There were also bedrooms, so if I was tired, to let them know and they'd set me up.

However, being in a bedroom in a strange house with so many people was definitely not going to happen. Yes, I was learning to trust, and yes, I was also learning to defend myself. But there was no way to fight off a lot of people. Knowing your weaknesses was a strength. And I knew I'd be lucky if I could fight off a single demon, never mind several.

Because no one seemed even remotely interested in me, including Shimmer and his many minions, I'd gathered the courage to walk around the yard. As long as I could always keep one of the demons I personally trusted within sight, and they me, I felt safe enough.

There was a lot to look at. Different yard games that I didn't know. Snacks that I picked at on my way by. Demons glanced at me from time to time as I neared or passed, offering me a smile before turning back to their conversation. When their eyes would turn my way, my heart jumped, but every time I was unimportant to them, I relaxed a little more.

That is until I stumbled upon a conversation that was clearly about me. I didn't recognize the demons, but I knew a few of them wore the Dirty Demons patch.

"He's being fucking miserable and unreasonable about it," a Dirty Demon said. "She needs to go. We have so many fucking bids on her."

"Why does he want to keep her?" another asked.

"To bone her, probably. I mean, she's hot, I guess."

Snickers. My stomach curdled. My breath stuck in my throat.

"That's probably not it," one of the non-Dirty Demons said. "Sadist Soul

is a lot of things, but I don't think he's looking to keep the girl just so he can fuck her."

"No," a different Dirty Demon said, frowning at the first. "That's certainly not why. I get his reasons. I'm not even arguing them. However, man, if you could hear these offers! She's one fucking person."

"All we need to do is isolate her and we can get her out of there. Load her sexy ass into a van and make the deal. Then there's nothing he can do about it," the first demon said.

My heart stopped.

"What's he going to do? Chase her down? She'll be long gone before he figures it out."

I stopped seeing them as I backed away, further into the shadows. The air around me felt colder. My skin pebbled in goosebumps and I shivered as they continued to talk.

"Not that she's ever alone."

"She was once. He was too fucking slow to snatch her, though."

Frustrated growls.

"Soul will have no choice. When she's gone, she's gone. And we can move on."

"So much fucking richer for it."

That's all I could handle; I turned and looked around. My vision darkening at the edges. I ran to the house and threw open the door. Stumbling blindly down the hall, I just needed a room where I could lock myself in. Where I'd be safe. Where no one could find me.

Blood rushed in my ears, and I heard nothing else. Not as I stumbled and ran into walls and doorframes. I threw open the first door I came across and slammed it behind me, clicking the lock and falling to the floor. Pressing my back to the door, I shoved the heels of my palms into my eyes.

It was only then I realized I wasn't alone.

Orehid



I knew why we went on these runs. They were supposed to boost camaraderie over something we loved to do—ride. And I did love to ride. It's one of my favorite things. And I didn't hate the places we visited or the stops along the way.

What irritated me more than anything was being surrounded by people I hated and not being able to get away from them for a solid, at minimum, twenty-four hours. And here we found ourselves surrounded by a nice group of demons that we only hung out with occasionally, and the half of our crew that I despised.

It was enough to keep me in a foul mood for quite some time. Not during the ride. The wind against my face and the purr of the motors was enough to let me escape and enjoy riding. But now that we're here, I cannot look anywhere without seeing at least one of Shimmer's minions.

They were spread out pretty evenly, which to me said they were trying to recruit to their own cause. Namely, usurping Soul. I was fairly certain that's what Shimmer's ultimate goal was. He wanted Soul gone so he could claw his way into the presidency.

There'd be an absolute mutiny on his hands if that ever happened. I know at least half the crew would never stand for that ass wipe as president. I sure as hell wouldn't.

However, I was still surrounded by them in a way I couldn't escape. Not that any of them were causing issues. Hell, even when I went near them, they weren't talking business at all. They were shooting the shit. Reminiscing. Gossiping about neighboring cities, rival clubs, other species that inhabited

the state.

“They’re only a couple thousand miles away,” Stones, one of the other chapter members said. “I follow one of their feeds. She posts sexy as fuck pictures.”

“Really? Fur? Tails?” Gunner said. Gunner was one of our newer members. He’d only been a full patch member for a little under a year. He was a good guy and definitely not a fan of Shimmer’s.

Stones snorted. “Like any of that would bother you, demon.”

Gunner chuckled as the other guys did. I sidled over to listen. He glanced at me, flashing a grin, before saying, “Nah, wouldn’t bother me. Tails are sexy as hell.” He reached over and twirled Marvel’s tail, who stood next to him, as one might do a lock of hair.

Marvel rolled his eyes, but he didn’t pull his tail away.

Another round of laughter moved over the group. I even smirked. He wasn’t wrong. Tails were sexy.

“I suppose feline shifters aren’t much different than demons,” Stones said thoughtfully. “Claws, eyes that glow in the dark, tails. We don’t generally grow fur or change shape entirely like they can. But fuck, wouldn’t I love to bend one over. Just to feel them purr with my cock deep inside them.”

“And I bet the sounds they make while fucking are all animal,” Quartz added, a distant look in his eyes.

We weren’t anywhere near other species. There was an occasional visitor or interloper living among us, but Ash Hollow was deep inside the demon states. There was more intermixing of species around the borders of the states where they abutted other species’ territories, but generally, demons preferred to remain among their own kind.

That’s not to say we weren’t down to fuck something new. It was exotic and enticing. The thrill of the unknown and what would probably be a once in a lifetime situation was always alluring. Once upon a time, the open road and the freedom of riding was what drew me to a club. In my mind, we’d travel to distant reaches of the demon states, or find hidden gems. And there, we’d be flocked over by sexy people. Not all of which would be demons.

It happened less than I thought it would. A rosy dream that never truly came to fruition. Then again, Dirty Demons were a bit of a fuckshow mess and had been for a while. If we were in a solid state like we should be, maybe it would be different.

My gaze caught on Bounce a few yards away. He was watching me, a

sexy smirk on his face. Then again, maybe that dream I once had would never have satisfied me. Sure, I was always a slut and happy to fuck whoever was around.

Once.

Not so much anymore. I enjoyed what I had with Bounce. The way he treated me and the way he fucked me. It was more satisfying than any other sex I'd ever had. More whole and good and warming than any relationship I ever had.

Smirking back, I stepped away from the table and moved toward the clubhouse. The doors were mostly propped open so prospects, civilians, and old ladies could move through of their own free will and not have to wait for a patch member to open the door for them.

Slipping inside, I paused to listen. There was laughter coming from the game room down the hall. And then shouts overrode that by whatever the group in the living room was watching on the television. I could see shadows moving around on the floor from the people moving about in the kitchen.

I moved down the hall, passing open doors until I reached the end. Clubhouses had bedrooms for their members. This one had them littered throughout. There were half a dozen on the second floor, a couple on the first, and another small handful in the finished basement. But there was something about being overheard that I really enjoyed. Others hearing what my pleasure sounded like.

Stepping into the room, I quickly stripped from my clothes and crawled onto the bed, laying on my back, and then stared at the slightly ajar door. My dick was already hardening as I waited for Bounce to follow. He would. I knew he would.

The hall wasn't dark, but there wasn't an awful lot of light that penetrated the space because there were no windows. The only light that lit the space was from windows in rooms with open doors. It was dim, and I locked my gaze there as I lazily stroked my cock.

My heart raced when I heard footsteps. They faded, turning in a different direction. I searched through the small crack I left for shadows moving. Strained my ears to hear more than the laughter and shouts from the other side of the house. Biting my lip, I narrowed my eyes. Fucking demon making me wait.

Determined not to appear as eager as I felt for Bounce when he finally decided to show up, I turned my head to stare at the ceiling. I remembered the

last time we were together a couple nights ago. The way he touched me. The way he bit into me—the sting in his saliva sending a poisonous fury through my blood until I was delirious with pleasure.

Bounce's bite was toxic. Venomous. But when he only let you have a taste with your blood high on endorphins and adrenaline, pumping quick with arousal, it was an aphrodisiac. There was a very fine fucking line between heightening sex and suddenly fucking a corpse. Bounce had told me many stories of when he'd given a little too much venom in his bite.

Personally, I'd have nightmares if I killed my lover while I was fucking them. He laughed about it now, but he said he was mortified the first time. And the second. I didn't ask how many times he practiced until he got it right. Fortunately for me, he had that talent well mastered by the time we met.

The door clicked quietly, and I bit my tongue to hold in my smile. And the irritation that he made me wait so fucking long. It had probably been at least seven minutes since I'd been in here, naked and waiting.

My cock jumped when his shadow fell over me. Unable to help myself, my eyes snapped to his. Glowing yellow demon eyes, hungry as he prowled, stripping along the way. By the time he reached the bed, he was naked, with a belt in one hand and a ball gag in the other.

A pulse of pre-cum dripped onto my stomach as he crawled on top of me. Without saying a word, he looped his belt once, then turned it the other way and looped it again. I gave him my hands when he waited for them. Slipping them within the leather cuffs, he tightened them, then leaned up my body to secure my arms above my head.

Thunder raced in my ears as my heart hammered in my chest, making my blood rush like it was being forced through a bottleneck. Bounce pulled back, and I gave an experimental pull. The loops tightened on my wrists when I did, loosening slightly when I let my arms go lax again.

Stradling my hips, Bounce brought the ball to his mouth and licked it obscenely. Getting it dripping with his spit. I swallowed, my hips bucking on their own accord. Smirking, he leaned over me and kissed me hard. Possessively. Purring into my mouth.

“Such a good fucking demon you are,” he growled, the sound going straight to my nuts. I grunted, shivering under him. “Look at you. So fucking ready for me to use until I wring every drop of cum out of this sexy fucking body.”

A whimper left my throat, making him smile broader. His yellow eyes flashed with pleasure.

“Pick up your head, precious.”

I did as he said and he placed the ball in my mouth, tying it securely behind my head. It was big enough that my jaw ached almost immediately. When my head was resting on the bed again, he patted my hair, cooing to me about how perfect I was.

Then he used his mouth in the most sinful way, moving down my body. I expected blood, but he didn't pierce my skin. Not once. He licked and sucked viciously, leaving bruises all over my body. When he got to my dick, he rubbed his face there, all over my bits. Making my hips buck up with need.

He moaned into my groin, rubbing his face and just barely flicking his tongue against me. I whined desperately behind the gag. Pulling in frustration at my restraints. I tried to beg. To plead. But the gag muddled every sound I made.

And then he moved his face lower, stopping at my balls for several long minutes as he sucked on them harshly. Making me nearly scream into the gag. When I was ready to cum from that alone, Bounce grabbed hold of my thighs and pushed them up to my chest, exposing my ass.

“This tight fucking hole, baby. I'm only going to wet it. I don't want you stretched for me. Instead, I want to feel every tight fucking squeeze you have. Every bit of stretch.”

I whimpered, my ass puckering at his words. Both in anticipation and dread. He loved to fuck me without prep. And while it was a bitch in the beginning, I really didn't mind. His cock was glorious.

My eyes rolled back in my head as he buried his face between my ass cheeks, licking furiously at my hole. He pressed against it in such a way that I thought maybe he changed his mind. He was going to spear me with it. But he didn't. He just teased me as he coated me with his spit.

And then he was up my body, pushing my legs wide as he settled between them, the head of his dick at my ass. Wasting no time, Bounce shoved his swollen cockhead past my ring, making me cry out at the burn and intrusion.

“That's it,” he groaned, my ass clenching around him. “Fuck yes, Orchid. Squeeze my dick. Just like that, precious.”

I didn't have a choice. It felt like he was pulling me apart. But he didn't stop. Didn't stop shoving that thing inside me while I wrenched my arms against the belt holding them in place. Crying into the gag. Tears streaming

down my face.

When he was fully seated inside me, Bounce pressed his face to mine. Licking away my tears, kissing me softly, telling me I was the best thing in the world. Perfect. His.

He rocked gently, easing away the sting. His hands on me were soft. His voice breathy and sweet. He wrapped his arms around me and continued to murmur away all my pain until I was dough in his hands.

“Okay now?” he asked, his yellow eyes glowing brightly like street lamps. “Ass okay?”

I nodded, lifting my head. I needed him to kiss me again. Bounce smiled, giving me what I wanted. As he pulled his cock out completely, pressing his head to my hole as it slowly closed again, he covered me in soft kisses. His pretty words never stopped. Reminding me I was his. And that he’d always take care of me, especially when I fed his fantasies. He’d make sure I was so pleased and overwhelmingly happy when he was finished with me, any pain or discomfort would be far from my mind.

He pushed back into my body, one long steady thrust that had me groaning, pushing my ass up so he’d go deeper. As deep as he could. The pain was long gone now. Now, it was only pleasures and sensation.

“That’s it, baby,” he murmured against my ear. “You like that.”

I nodded frantically.

Bounce grinned as he sat back. Gripping my hips in his hands, he began fucking me in earnest. The gag muffled my cries of pleasure were muffled. My orgasm was so close already as my dick throbbed and bounced against my stomach. My balls were so tight and heavy, their every movement was painful.

And then the door swung open, making us both crane our heads. Haidee came flying in, spinning around and slamming the door shut. She stood there for a minute before she fell to the ground, pulled her knees to her chest, and let out a sob.

Bounce and I were so stunned at her sudden appearance and then her crying that we remained how we were, his dick deep in my ass, and frozen. Staring at her.

She suddenly stilled and slowly lifted her head to look at us. Her gaze took in our position, and her eyes went wide. She stared at me specifically—my hands bound, the gag in my mouth—and fear filled her eyes.

I tried to tell her it was fine. I was fine, and had agreed to this. But of

course, she couldn't understand me with a ball stuffed in my mouth. Haidee pressed her back more firmly against the door, as if she could force herself through it.

Bounce's face contorted, dismayed at how she was looking at him. He turned back to me and gently reached under my head, untying the gag. Pulling it from my mouth, he reached for where the belt was secured and let that go as well.

"It's not what you think," I said to Haidee as I gasped in breaths. "Come here, Haidee. I swear to fuck it's not what you think. Bounce isn't hurting me. He'd never do that. He has my full permission to tie me to the bed."

I was rambling, reaching for her, even as my body was still held in place by Bounce's dick wedged in my ass.

Haidee stared at me, her chest heaving.

"I promise you, Bounce isn't hurting me. He's not forcing me to do anything I don't want to do. He cares about me. This is just something we like," I said, desperately trying to make her understand. It might have worked better if Bounce's eyes would stop glowing demon bright and return to their dark depths.

"Haidee, please," I whispered. "Come here. Please."

In hindsight, I shouldn't have asked her to come closer. To enter the bubble of what she probably saw as something cruel. Maybe something she'd been forced into. But I was so fucking desperate to make her understand that this was okay. That I welcomed it. So I needed her close. I needed to show her.

I was actually super surprised she did as I asked. She got to her feet, her legs shaking, and stood next to the bed. Reaching for her hand, I pulled her onto the mattress so she was awkwardly sitting next to me.

Her gaze trailed over my body, my weeping dick. Bounce's cock lost inside my body. Her cheeks reddened as he looked at my face. Searching.

"Look," I said quietly, and brought my wrists to her. "Nothing there. Bounce uses that belt because it's soft. And when my arms are slack, it loosens so it's not rubbing on my skin."

"Why?" she whispered. Her brows were knit together.

"Why what?" I asked.

"Why—" Her gaze flickered to the belt. "Why are you tied down?"

I took a breath, trying to clear the fog. "Because it feels good," I admitted. "When I can't touch. When he removes one of my senses.

Restraining me puts me completely at his mercy so that he can do what he wants with me.” She flinched and I grasped her hand. “Haidee, I swear to you, I like every minute of it. When you and your partner are completely open and honest about your wants and desires, when you trust each other implicitly, you can do these kinds of things together and it makes sex even better.”

She bit her lip, searching my face and looking at my wrists. Her fingers traced over the sensitive skin. I was actually glad I hadn't been wrenching on the belt violently. Yet. My skin was a little pinkened, but it wasn't raw or red. It wasn't broken.

Thank fuck she hadn't walked in on us when he had us both covered in blood.

“Can I show you?” I asked her. Her eyes moved to mine, wide and horrified. I smiled, shaking my head quickly. “I meant with me. Can I show you?”

She was still confused. Not that I was being overly clear. I looked at Bounce, who remained completely still as if he wasn't alive at all, watching us. His face filled with pain and regret. He didn't want Haidee to be afraid of him.

Haidee nodded, her bottom lip between her teeth.

“Show her how to tie my hands, Bounce?” I asked quietly.

He flinched and looked between us, unsure. But he took the belt from me when I offered it to him. Taking a breath, he shifted the loops open again and offered it to Haidee.

When it was in her hands, I gave her my wrists. She looked absolutely horrified, pulling it away. I smiled reassuringly at her.

“I'm telling you I want them on my wrists,” I said gently. “I'm saying it of my own free will. Please?”

Her eyes darted between Bounce and me before she brought it back. She helped me put my hands through and when I told her to tug a little on the length of the belt, the loops closed around my wrists. I grinned.

“Now Bounce can show you how he secures it above my head.”

Bounce scowled at me but did as I said. His dick in my ass, shoved further in the new position which had me curled in on myself, made me groan and my eyes flutter shut. When he was back, I took a deep breath to try to clear the lust out of my eyes, so when I looked at Haidee I wasn't just a fucking mess.

“See?” I asked.

Her gaze studied where the belt was secured and then slowly went down my body, taking in all my naked flesh. Her eyes on me, looking at me as she was, made my dick throb. It twitched visibly and a fresh bead of pre-cum dripped slowly to my stomach.

Haidee watched, transfixed. Her lips parted slightly.

I glanced at Bounce, who watched her steadily. His chest rose and fell rapidly with deep breaths. His arousal was almost potent in the air and his nostrils flared.

Her fingers twitched.

“Do you want to touch me, Haidee?” I asked.

Her gaze snapped back to where my hands were bound.

“I want you to,” I told her, and her gaze went back to my face.

“You do?” she asked.

I nodded, my hips rising without me meaning them to her. It drew her attention back to my dick. “So bad,” I whispered. “However you want to touch me, you can.”

She visibly swallowed. Again, I was surprised when she reached out and touched my cock. Not just with a finger, but she curled her hand around it and gave me an experimental stroke.

I grunted, jerking my hips into her hand and then shoving it back down on Bounce’s dick. It made me groan louder. Bounce could no longer hold still. He pulled out and pushed back inside, making me moan again.

Everything inside me burst to life. Stars shot before my eyes as I watched Haidee look at me. Her attention moved between her hand on my dick and Bounce’s moving in and out of me.

“It’s sexy, yeah?” I asked.

I didn’t think she was aware of herself nodding. It made my heart pound harder. I so fucking desperately wanted her to jump on. Ride me while Bounce fucked me. But I wasn’t about to ask her for anything. Instead, I said, “Whatever you want, Haidee.” Keeping my voice calm and serene. Inviting, but not at all demanding. While I also tried to make her understand that I more than wanted her if she was interested. “You can touch me however you want. You can use my body however you want.”

Her eyes, wide again, moved to mine.

“I like it,” I assured her. “More than anything, I love to see who I’m with take pleasure from me. *I like* being held down like this. I need you to believe

me.”

She swallowed again, shifting where she sat, and looked at my wrists bound above my head. My arms were lying relaxed, so the loops were loose on me.

“You do.” It wasn’t a question.

“So damn much,” I said, almost a whimper. “And I meant what I said. You can use me however you want, Haidee. You can find your own pleasure on me too.”

Her cheeks reddened, and she turned her face back to my dick. “I don’t —”

“If you don’t want to, that’s okay too,” I quickly added. “It’s your choice. Always your choice.”

Haidee



My choice. I'd never had a choice when it concerned sex. Nothing was my choice. Not what I did or what was done to me.

But given a choice?

I'd think that I wouldn't be interested at all. That no part of this would look or sound even a little smidge appealing.

Orchid wasn't wrong, though. Seeing him tied down like that, liking it, that was hot. And seeing Bounce's cock slide in and out of him as he moaned and arched under him? That was so hot my entire body turned on in a way I'd never experienced.

Swallowing, I looked at him again. My cheeks were on fire. Hell, my entire body was on fire.

"I don't know how," I finally admitted, which was what I'd been trying to choke out before.

"If you want to, we can show you. We can help you," Orchid said. "But I promise you'll always be in control. You can stop whenever you want. If you don't like it, you don't have to do anything."

Did I want to? The idea that someone would see me like that again, naked and vulnerable, was certainly cooling down the heat inside me. But there was no mistaking the pleasure that they were sharing.

Did I want to be a part of that? Did I want to see if I could have pleasure too?

Part of me did. A loud part. Biting my lip, I ran my hand along his dick again. Orchid groaned. It wept, a bead of pre-cum forming and growing with every passing stroke. Bounce matched my strokes thrust for thrust.

I nodded. "Okay," I whispered.

Orchid nodded, grunting and pushing his cock into my hand. "You should know that I'm shit at keeping still," he said, his voice thick with lust. "But Bounce can hold me down. Then you can do whatever you want."

Despite the hunger in his voice, he was sincere. I nodded, glancing at Bounce with his angry yellow eyes. I quickly looked away and let Orchid go. He whimpered, but cut off the sound immediately.

I quickly took my clothes off and knelt back on the bed. Once again, I bit my lip. My breaths were shallow, but I forced my mind to remember that they promised I'd be in control. I could do whatever I wanted.

Making the decision that this was my body and if I wanted to see if I could find pleasure, too, then I was allowed to do that. Especially when I was in control. Taking a deep breath and glancing at Bounce again, I crawled over Orchid.

His hips bucked immediately, but Bounce quickly shoved him down, flat on the bed. His hands remained on Orchid's hips, keeping him still. I looked at him over my shoulder and he gave me a timid smile. He hadn't said anything since I'd thrown myself into the bedroom.

"Hi," I said.

Bounce grinned. Sighing, he rested his forehead against me. "I'm so sorry if I made you scared of me," he whispered. "I swear to fuck, I'll never hurt you, Haidee. And I don't hurt Orchid in a way he doesn't like."

I squinted at him, not entirely sure what that meant. But I nodded and turned back to the task. Moving backwards so I was pressed to Bounce's chest, I positioned myself over Orchid's leaking dick.

He whined, his gaze locked on where the head of his cock toyed with my wet entrance. Desperate. "I think I need the gag again," he whimpered.

Bounce nodded, nudging his face into me. "Wrap it around his mouth, with the ball firmly inside. You need to tie it kind of tight or it'll chafe his skin."

Shivering, I hesitated before moving back up Orchid and reaching for the gag. "Really?" I whispered.

He nodded vigorously. "Yes. I get loud and blather. It's awful."

Bounce snorted. "It's hot as fuck. But he tends to say some things that might not come out the way you think they mean," he told me. "And this is all about you right now."

My heart squeezed a little. Nodding, I followed Bounce's instructions and

gagged Orchid. He lifted his head in full cooperation as I tied it.

“Feel okay?” Bounce asked as I leaned back.

Orchid moved his head for a minute and nodded.

“Good job, Haidee,” Bounce said quietly. “You know, part of giving me control of his body actually puts him in complete control of the situation.” I looked back at him with a brow raised. “I would never do something he didn’t like or gave me permission to. And the second he tells me to stop, I would. He’s giving me his complete trust to use his body and you don’t do that to someone you think is going to hurt you. He knows I wouldn’t ever do that, and he knows I will always make sure he gets his pleasure first.”

“How does he tell you when he doesn’t want to do something when he can’t speak?” I asked.

Bounce smiled. “We’ve been together for over a year, Haidee. I know when he’s not into something. I can read his body. The sounds he makes. But if he ever wants to stop and can’t tell me, he finds a way to use his body to do so. It changes depending on what we’re doing and how tied down he is. But in this case, he’d kick me. Bring his leg up and kick me anywhere to get my attention. It would never come to that because I’d know before he got to that point. And like I said, I wouldn’t hurt him or force him into anything. This is about pleasure and trust. Not control. Not even sex. Being together and sharing something that you don’t let other people have a part of.”

I had a lot of questions. Especially since Bounce was bonded to Bone Breaker. But it’s not like I was privy to know everything. In fact, I was pretty sure there was a fuck ton of shit I didn’t know. And wouldn’t know until I knew to ask.

Nodding, I moved back toward him, scooting until I was once more over Orchid’s dick. As soon as my body brushed his, he moaned loudly, trying to move his hips. The way his muscles bunched and the look of complete pleasure on his face heated me through again. Knowing that Bounce’s dick was still stuck deep in his ass made me flush, my skin tingling.

Taking Orchid’s dick in my hand, I positioned myself so I could slowly slide onto him. Bounce kept him still, though I could feel as Orchid tried with all his bound muscles to move me quicker. His desperation to have me was heady. That he couldn’t force it along gave me confidence.

“Take your time,” Bounce murmured. “Ignore the way he moves and the motherfucking sexy sounds he makes. He loves everything you’re doing.”

I wasn’t really doing anything but fitting him inside me.

It felt different from any other time. Maybe because I wasn't fighting it. Because I was doing this to myself. Welcoming a demon into my body. It didn't hurt. The stretch and pressure I felt wasn't painful. It felt good.

Taking a deep breath, I settled on top of him, letting my weight bring me down completely.

"Are you okay?" Bounce asked, his lips at my hair.

I leaned back into him, and he immediately pressed against me. Pressing his lips to my head and kissing me softly. Orchid's body shuddered as he tried to bring his hips up again.

"Yes," I said. "It doesn't feel like... the other times."

"Good. Do whatever feels good, Haidee."

Biting my lip, I shook my head. "I don't know what will feel good." My cheeks burned at the admission.

"You can experiment," he said. Letting go of one of Orchid's hips, he brought his hand around so he could lightly touch my skin with his fingers. Right above my sex. "In here, about here, there's a spot that will bring you a lot of pleasure when you hit it right with his cock. And this is a perfect position to reach it."

The little movement Orchid gained from Bounce showing me that had his dick moving inside me. I gasped at the way it shot fire through my veins, my hips bucking back on their own.

"That's it," Bounce said, and I could feel him moving behind me, once again thrusting into Orchid. "Just like that. That's how you find pleasure."

Swallowing, I nodded, and he moved his hand back to Orchid's hip, pinning him in place again. Then I spent some time moving on Orchid, rocking my hips and sliding along his shaft. I knew what would make him feel good. That's what I'd been trained to do. But I'd never been shown how to find my own pleasure. That wasn't what mattered.

It took me a while to find it, but when I did, I couldn't seem to stop myself from moving. Stroking his dick against my sensitive walls and crying out with the sensation. Orchid was wild under me. His arms thrashed against the belt as he cried and made all sorts of noises under his gag.

I watched his face, seeing the bliss in his eyes. The pleasure he took from this. And for the first time when I was bringing someone else pleasure, it fed my own.

"That's it," Bounce said, his voice low and gravelly. "Look how good you feel. Look how good you're making Orchid feel by taking your pleasure

from him, Haidee. He loves this.”

Orchid nodded wildly.

“Let his hips go,” I whispered.

“You sure? He really can’t control himself like this. Definitely not when you’re riding him too.”

Biting my lip, I nodded. Planting my hands on Orchid’s stomach, I braced myself. Bounce brushed his lips against my shoulder, and I felt his hands slip out from under my thighs. As soon as he was free, Orchid thrust up hard into me and I gasped.

It was dizzying how he managed to hit the magic spot with such hard accuracy. Stars flitted behind my eyes. He snapped up into me again and the stars came apart, falling through the sky like rain. Again and I was crying out, telling him how much more I needed.

My head was filled with sounds. My body alight with the best sensations I’d ever felt. Bounce’s hands on my hips steadied me before Orchid simply flung me off with the force of his thrusts.

This feeling built inside me. Like a pot boiling to near spilling over. A volcano bubbling, the lava rising to the surface. Or a storm gathering energy, lightning streaking across the sky.

When it all broke free, I had no control over my body. I arched back, slamming my back into Bounce’s chest. His arms wrapped around me as I screamed in pleasure. A finger dropped to my sex, and he added to my orgasm by setting the sparking ends on fire when he brushed my clit with his finger.

My body spasmed. Every inch of my skin became sensitive to his touch. But it didn’t fade right away. I remained in some floating place where all I felt were the remnants of that feeling. The high of an orgasm. A smile fell across my face as my eyes dropped with exhaustion.

“That’s it, hunny,” Bounce said as he gently lay me down. “Sleep, pretty girl.”

Orchid’s arms came around me a minute later. And then Bounce was there, wrapped around us both.

“She’s perfect,” Orchid said as sleep began to claim me.

“She is. So are you. Letting her use you like that. Making her know she’s safe. You’re so perfect, my precious fire.”

I could feel Orchid smile into my hair. “She felt so good, Bounce. The way her body gripped mine. I spilled so hard inside her.”

His voice sounded dazed. While my cheeks likely would have heated again at his words, I was too sleepy. I felt too good. So a happy smile graced my lips instead.

“Good. I’m glad you felt good. I love to make you feel good. Now sleep, my precious.” His fingers touched my hair, gently grazing over my cheek. “Sleep, my perfect demons. I’ll protect you while you do.”

Sadist Soul



Runs had always been my time to decompress. No matter where we were going, the open road and wind in my hair was relaxing. I almost felt carefree. Like nothing could touch me.

A naïve voice in my head kept trying to convince me that maybe if we took more runs as a club, then Shimmer and his idiots would remember what being together and riding really felt like. That this was the camaraderie that we were supposed to have.

It wasn't about power or reach or territory. Instead, it was about sharing something you love with friends who loved it as much as you do. It was about the joy of the open road and exploring cities and the world.

But then we'd stop at our destination, and everything would come crashing down. I'd remember what really happened in our club. What half of our club thought we were about while the other half just wanted to live in peace. Collect our tax, having parties, fuck, and ride.

Not start problems. Not sell people. Not deplete the wealth in our city by so grossly overcharging everyone that they're forced to move just to survive financially. Not to expand exponentially until we rule all the demon states.

A little bit of power in the wrong hands can be toxic. And that was Shimmer's problem. He'd tasted a little too much power, and he was always hungry for more. I wasn't doing what he thought was best to gain that power. Gather it and keep it for our own.

However, the party at the farmer chapter was good. It was calm and quiet, only rowdy in that the demons were having fun. Alcohol was flowing, food was grilling, fires were burning. There were games inside and out. The

occasional faint moaning of someone having a good time doing other activities.

Boner, the president of the chapter, was a young demon. I'd been sitting with him for a while as we discussed what was going on in his city. While he didn't tax for protection, he was considering starting it up because the city was a damn mess. But how to best begin that when your crew is only so big, and the city is quite large?

"We're not as big as Ash Hollow, probably only half that population, but I'm not sure we can just go out and start enforcing a protection tax," Boner said.

I nodded. "That's not how you're going to need to start it. I think two things would need to happen simultaneously. You need to buy or indebt a diverse handful of law enforcement somehow. And you need to start offering pay for protection as a purchasable service. Make it an option first while you get the law under your thumb. And then I think you can slowly begin expanding out. The worst neighborhoods where crime is rampant, you can begin to tax first and make it mandatory. But also make a show that you're willing and able to clean that shit up."

Boner nodded thoughtfully. "I like that."

"I can't tell you how it went down in Ash Hollow. Our records show that we've always enforced this tax. While I haven't looked into it with any kind of purpose, it almost appears that when Dirty Demons was created, the tax was too," I said.

"That wouldn't surprise me. When we talk about pay for protection, your club is the first thing that comes to mind. You've made it your brand and have kept it successful for generations."

I glanced up, watching Haidee wander around the yard. She paused and listened to demons talking in small groups. Sometimes a smile would touch her lips and other times she'd flush and hurry away. She stopped to watch games and talk with the demons she knew and trusted. Otherwise, she tried to stay outside of everyone's attention.

It was good to see she was relaxed enough to wander around freely. That she knew she was safe to do so, even among strangers, made me swell with pride.

"I heard on the streets that you took out Sticks and Bones entirely," Boner said, changing the subject.

Nodding, I continued to track Haidee for a while before looking back at

him. “They were getting too ballsy. Continuously came into Ash Hollow just to fuck around. With the people, with our club. They had the fucking audacity to hold their vice president’s wedding at a temple deep within Ash Hollow, for fuck’s sake.”

Boner frowned.

“That was the icing on the cake. We murdered everyone inside. Not leaving a single member of their fucking club who attended alive.” I shrugged. “When the remainder halfheartedly decided that they were going to ‘teach us a lesson’ for that, we killed the rest of them in our own city. So yeah, Sticks and Bones is no more.”

He chuckled. “Way to make sure the world knows Dirty Demons are still not to be messed with after all these years.”

I smirked. “Thankfully, our reputation precedes us, and we don’t have to get into confrontations often.”

Unless Shimmer gets his way. It sounds like he wants to be a bully club and just push his weight around. I won’t let it happen. He’ll have to kill me first. And he’s not strong enough or clever enough to pull that off.

“What about you? Competition?” I asked.

Boner shook his head, taking a swig of beer. “Not to be concerned with. We’re new, but we’re strong and growing quickly. And we’ve already cleaned up several areas in town, primarily because some of our members live in those particular neighborhoods, but it’s needed. This city used to be great. Clean and prosperous. I want to bring that back. But I also don’t want to struggle for funds.”

“There are other ways,” I said.

He shrugged. “There are. And we have a few things brewing.” He eyed me, smirking. “Legal things. But those are always slow building and sometimes, to do it right, you need to spend money before that project is at a point where you can start drawing money.”

“Ah,” I said, nodding. “You know that if you choose something like bought protection and enforce it over the entire city, you can’t really let that go. You’ll be giving them the message that you no longer give a shit if they die. If the city goes to shit again. And when everyone—both inside and out of the city—hears that you’ve dropped protection, it’s going to be a free for all.”

Boner groaned. “I know. But of all the ways to make money and keep money flowing for a while, this is the least repulsive. I’ve had a few too many personal experiences with what drugs do to a family, so that’s not an

option. I cannot bring myself to traffic fucking people or other species, so that's not going to happen, regardless of how much money a single life can bring. We've been up and down ideas for months now. Protection seems the easiest, most enjoyable, and least horrific way to do it."

I laughed. "It has the added benefit that you'll be able to take out some aggression and show the strength of your club when you need to flex your hold. And I get it. While I didn't instate the pay for protection operation, I agree with your assessment of other options. We can do this solely to sustain our club and other 'charitable' organizations that we keep our fingers in for the public eye."

Not that it really mattered at this point. If we keep increasing taxes, we're never going to keep the reputation that we should have. And that's not one of greedy bullies.

"You know, I could always drop the tax to something pretty low when we no longer need it to sustain our endeavors," Boner mused. "Start with something like 10% and I can drop it back to what, 3%? Does that still say that we care without robbing them blind?"

I rubbed my eyes. If only he knew how much we taxed. Hell, I'm sure he did know. It wasn't a secret. Honestly, I was shocked that people continued to move into Ash Hollow. I don't think I would. But then, Ash Hollow is one of the safest places in the demon states.

Or it was. Until the Dirty Demons began fighting internally too much and our attention turned from our role in the city to keeping ourselves together.

Something needed to change. Yesterday.

Boner and I spoke about a start-up model for his protection tax as the night wore on. I lost myself in the conversation and enjoyed the peace while still being able to watch the yard.

WE LEFT the following day just before lunch. We didn't take the same route back. Sweet Love liked to give us different settings to admire as we traveled.

The skies were a little gloomy today, but it wasn't dark enough or cold enough that it felt like rain. It was just cloudy. The sun peeking through the clouds before hiding again made it feel like we were driving through portals into other worlds. The sun seemed to change the landscape entirely.

We stopped for a late lunch and fanned out over a small park. We were just outside of KOK Suckers' territory, which was rampant in drugs and prostitution. Don't get me wrong, sex work is fine. You do you. But from what I understood, it was forced prostitution. KOK Suckers were the pimps.

I could only imagine what their interest in Haidee was. Given what I knew about Haidee's past and what she went through, I could only imagine that they're somehow aware of it as well. A trained sex worker. Beginning from the onset of puberty.

Haidee likely looked like a big payday for them. I couldn't fathom what else they were after with her, but the amount of cash they were offering as well as territory...? Something just didn't sit right with me.

The demon daughter of the politician was very clearly put into the public once she reached adulthood. There was no way that it could be claimed Haidee was that daughter. So then why did she have such a price tag hanging over her head?

It didn't make sense. I've had both Secret and Arrow looking into it, and they couldn't find anything. Arrow even managed to get into the bidding, to see how Haidee was listed. So unless they're not seeing Arrow (under an assumed name, of course) as a lucrative and legitimate bidder and they're leaving something out to those they think can't pay out, there's nothing out there stating that she's more than what she appeared to be.

A stolen child who was raised in horrid conditions.

My thoughts were interrupted by quickly rising chaos around me. I sat up as Licks basically fell into me, his eyes wide with horror. "She's gone," he stammered, breathless.

"Who?" I asked, though I already knew without him saying her name. Chills covered my body. My muscles stiffened. The heavy weight of dread settled on my shoulders and a pit grew in my stomach. When Licks didn't answer and continued babbling incoherently, I grabbed him by his cut and shook him. "Who, Licks? Who's gone?"

"Haidee," he said, eyes glassy. "KOK Suckers took her. Right through our fingers."

Rage boiled so blindly into me that I couldn't contain the outward reach of pain. Licks cried out as it touched him, his body recoiling as he dropped to his knees. More people echoed his screams and fell before I managed to rein it in.

I turned, intent on finding the demons who were supposed to be with her.

My enforcers. My secretary. Denial, Arrow, Secret. But their faces, ranging from fear to rage, told me that they hadn't known what happened.

Stomping over to them, I grabbed both my enforcers with my hands around their necks. "What the fuck happened?"

"You want us to help her piss?" Bounce snapped, but he didn't shove me off him. "We're surrounding this fucking place. There's no way one of them should have been able to sneak in and get to her."

As if giving his words the middle finger, a civilian parked a car and strode through our ranks into the restaurant. I growled as Bounce flinched.

"Unseen," Bone Breaker said. "Obviously, all eyes were on the strangers in our midst."

"Except in the bathroom," Denial said, his voice a low, dangerous, cold sound that I could feel in my soul.

"Waste no time," I said, letting my enforcers go. I turned to my now silent club, all watching me. Waiting. Expectantly. "War. We're taking them out and bringing Haidee home."

Orchid



The most telling way to know how dangerous a demon was, how much power flowed in their blood, was their eye color when they go demonic. It's a spectrum that began with blue and ended in red. In this order, beginning with the weakest, it flowed from blue to green to orange, yellow, then pink, and lastly red. Pink was rare. There was a theory that the demon was actually a red-eyed demon, but they hadn't tapped into their full power.

I was green. My power was all flowery. Don't get me wrong, I was still a dangerous motherfucker. I primarily grew vines with thorns, and the thorns were poisonous. If it got into your blood, touched your skin, you'd become numb and boneless, unable to move or control your body.

Both enforcers were yellow-eyed demons, which was the most common when we're talking about strength and power since pink was rare and red was nearly unheard of. Some say that the blood of the red-eyed demons had been diluted too much over the generations when they bred with those of lesser strength. I didn't think that's how it worked, but meh. I didn't exactly study it.

However, we had two pink-eyed demons within Dirty Devils. Sadist Soul and Denial.

Where did Shimmer fall in all this? Much to his chagrin, his eyes were orange. He tried like hell to prove that eye color meant nothing, and he was a strong, badass motherfucker. But that's all he is—a motherfucker. He's too stubborn, irrational, and ridiculous to be strong or badass.

And then there's the one eye color that doesn't fall within the spectrum

anywhere. It's newer and there's an argument as to whether they're considered weak or strong. In my experience, with the two I've met, I'd say they're strong as fuck. They have the ability to borrow another's strength and power. Whether it be to put more power behind their own specific skill or to utilize another's skill entirely.

They have purple eyes. And we have one demon with purple eyes—Arrow. I'd seen the shit that demon can do and he's a force all his own. I didn't know if he was stronger than a red-eyed demon, but even if I was that strong, I'd not want to face Arrow in a dark alley.

Or in a brightly lit alley.

Right now, with Haidee being stolen from us, the demonic energy surrounding the little restaurant we'd been eating at filled the air like a fog. I tried not to panic and observe instead, so I noted a few things.

Arrow was utterly calm as he studied everyone. His eyes were hooded as he slowly looked around at us all. Being that Arrow wasn't furious and freaking out (oh, he was absolutely pissed, and I could see his worry for her), it made me take deeper breaths and force myself to look around me.

Haidee had only been missing for twenty minutes. That meant if we moved quickly, we should be able to track her down. Get her back before she's too well hidden.

Soul was out of his mind furious. His eyes were such a bright pink that they were lighting up the faces in front of him, giving them a pinkish glow. There were also little red splotches in his eyes that I didn't think he knew he was capable of.

My skin itched as a phantom reminder of what his painful touch could do. It'd just barely brushed my body before he got himself under control. Licks was still shaking, his eyes wide and horrified.

Swallowing my fear for Haidee, I looked back at Arrow. He was still quietly watching our club, so I turned my attention to where he was looking.

While not everyone knew Haidee personally, there was an unmistakable anger brewing in everyone's eyes. We were stolen from. And it wasn't something as stupid as an object, but a fucking person. That alone was enough to make our entire club angry.

It was expected. Especially since we were stolen from by another motorcycle club. Who stole a fucking person?

Haidee must be terrified. To be stolen again.

Shaking my head, I pressed my lips together, determined that we *would*

find her before anyone laid a hand on her again. My hands fisted as I tried to keep myself from becoming irrational in my anger.

Most of the eyes around us were bright blue, shining with the anger of a demon's wrath. There was the healthy spattering of green mixed in, and then the sporadic spotting of different colors.

And that's how my gaze landed on Shimmer. His eyes were orange, sure, but dull. His hands were stuffed in his pockets as he looked around and listened to a couple of his cronies bitch about Haidee being stolen from our hands.

I wasn't naïve enough to think that they'd suddenly had a change in heart for Haidee. They would still want to sell her when this whole thing was over. And they'd be happy to sell her back to KOK Suckers if they were still the highest bidder—and survived us kicking the ever-loving shit out of them for stealing her to begin with.

No, it wasn't that *she* was stolen. It's that we were stolen from.

But I continued to watch Shimmer because, more than anything, this should have been a slap in his face too. High and mighty Shimmer was self-righteous and entitled during the best of times. This should royally piss him off. He should be in Soul's face demanding that we hunt down KOK Suckers and kill them all.

He wasn't. He was nodding along with his minions, a sneer locked on his lips, but uninterested.

"This isn't what it looks like," Arrow said quietly, and I glanced at him to find that he was watching Shimmer as well.

"I was just thinking that," I agreed. "It's very suspicious and a little too convenient."

"She's not in either bathroom," Arrow said. "Nor anywhere in the restaurant. The only places where there are cameras here are at the front door and looking at the register. I checked them. Haidee goes in and doesn't come out. No one else goes in until I do twenty minutes later to check on her."

"But there's a back door." We shifted to look at Denial. His eyes were a little too frightening to look at right now, so I looked at his forehead instead. He's scary as fuck when he looked regular. Pink eyes? No, thank you.

"There is," Arrow agreed. "And no camera back there."

I rubbed my face in frustration. "I suppose it would be too easy to say that no one saw anything."

"That's just the thing. No one saw anything. Yet the report is that KOK

Suckers stole Haidee,” Arrow said.

“Because we’re closest to their territory?” I asked. We were only about three miles from where their city border started.

Arrow shrugged, his purple gaze moving away from us and back into the bulk of the demons. Those inside the restaurant were getting nervous. I could see faces in the windows watching us. Fear in their eyes.

“What do we do?” I asked.

Neither of them answered, but both looked at Soul. He was furious. Shaking. Ready to tear down the entire city to find her. Bounce and Bone Breaker weren’t any different. And Secret stood there watching them, lips pressed into a thin line. The only other indication that I could tell he was angry, aside from his glowing green eyes, was that his hands were fisted too. Shoved deep into his pockets, they were in tight fists, ready to fight.

Otherwise, he appeared like he normally does. Calm and indifferent.

My gaze flickered to Shimmer, and back. The difference was that one was pretending to be angry when he didn’t care at all. And the other was appearing calm when he was ready to lose his shit. Secret’s behavior wasn’t suspicious at all. That was normal Secret behavior.

“Shimmer’s either up to something or he knows something,” I murmured, looking back at the vice president again.

“Right now, I don’t think that matters. Soul was given a target, and he’s not going to be rational enough to listen to reason until he’s satisfied that KOK Suckers don’t have Haidee,” Denial said, his voice emotionless.

It made me shiver.

“So what do we do?” I asked.

“Keep an eye on him at all times,” Arrow said. “When we confront KOK Suckers, we watch Shimmer. Everyone else’s attention will be locked on the enemy, so we don’t have to worry about missing something. Shimmer’s going to be the one to lead us to what really happened.”

“He’s been trying to get us to agree to sell her,” I said in a rush. “What if he’s killing two birds with one stone? He arranged it for a KOK to grab her here while also turning it around to Soul that they stole her so that we would begin a war. You know he’s greedy as fuck. He wants to expand Dirty Demons’s reach.”

“I wouldn’t put it past him,” Arrow agreed, his voice tight. “Whatever we do, we need to do it quickly. It’s been almost thirty minutes since we’ve seen her last. We need to go before she gets too far away and our chances of

finding her drop to zero.”

“Fuck,” I said, tears stinging my eyes. She was just trusting us. She even joined Bounce and me while we fucked. How could we let this happen to her?

“Let’s go,” Soul’s dark voice promising a painful death filled the air. “We’ve wasted enough time. We’re going to track the fuckers down and skin them alive.”

My gaze went back to Shimmer. While everyone shouted their agreement and headed for their bikes like a bunch of crazed demons set on murder, Shimmer smirked and turned toward his bike. There was almost a skip in his step.

He was pleased with something.

I could almost convince myself that he was happy because he got to partake in bloodshed, and that seemed to be what he thought made a demon strong. Killing others. So sure, he’d be happy. But there was just something about the way he was acting that convinced me he had a hand in this.

Maybe this was the reason we needed to put a knife through his chest without any questions asked.

Haidee



I was a little disappointed the next morning to have to get out of bed when I felt so good, but I was happy to be back on the bike with Bone Breaker. I was starting to really enjoy riding. There was a freedom to it that I couldn't really place, considering I was just along for the ride. I didn't say where we were going, or give directions. In reality, I had no control over the ride at all.

That didn't seem to stop me from feeling like I had the world at my fingertips. It was refreshing and somehow breathed life into me, making me feel alive.

I fell asleep happy and feeling so good even as I woke up surprised that I'd allowed myself to be involved in that situation with Orchid and Bounce the previous evening. I'd always sworn that I'd never let anyone touch me again. It was my body, and I was keeping it to myself.

There was something about seeing Orchid voluntarily put himself at Bounce's mercy that drew me in. The way he showed me how to tie him down. The way he *wanted* to be gagged. It was intoxicating watching the pleasure on his face, which echoed throughout his entire body.

I just couldn't help but think, *I did that*.

It wasn't the first time my body had been used to bring someone else pleasure. That's what I was trained to do. But there was something different about this. About seeing Orchid in such a state of abandon and bliss as he writhed and shook under me.

Sex had never felt good for me. It had never been the point of sex. No demon that had come to use my body was interested in anything but what I

could do for them.

So I didn't know it could be like that. I didn't know I could feel good with them. I'd never seen that kind of pleasure in another person before. Not the way Orchid just let go and surrendered to it.

Being wrapped in their arms after had been so satisfying. I felt good. A little achy, but in such wonderful ways. Again, not something I thought was possible, but it was pleasantly so. And the way they held me all night allowed me to sleep in peace.

It felt like a different person woke up the next morning. I'd have rather stayed in bed with them all day, just enjoying their body heat and soft voices, but I was also ready to get back to my routine. The familiarity of the apartment I'd been living in.

I chose to ride with Bone Breaker again because he seemed to really like that this was shared between the two of us. And when we made our first stop for a late lunch, I cuddled in with Arrow and Secret. Sitting in Arrow's lap next to Secret as we shared a platter of food between the three of us.

Stuffed full and feeling a little sticky from the food, I excused myself to use the restaurant restroom and washed up. The little wet napkins provided to us just didn't cut it for me. I needed soap and water.

"I'll go with you," Arrow said, getting to his feet.

Raising a brow, I shook my head. "I can use a bathroom on my own."

He watched me for a minute before nodding. A smile stretched across his face. "Okay. Then I'll wait right here for you."

I kissed his lips, and he pulled me against him before I could back away. Drawing the kiss out longer. I grinned at him before backing out of his hold and moving toward the restaurant.

It was busy inside. There were a lot of customers. None of them were members of Dirty Demons that I could tell, but I think that's because we all opted to eat outside and sprawl across the generous grassy area while we ate under the warm afternoon overcast sky. When it was out, anyway. The clouds kept hiding it.

The bathroom was a single-person room down a quiet hall with a few other doors. One led to the kitchen and another to a second bathroom. Choosing one, I closed the door behind me, locking it. I washed, trying to get the remnants of food from under my nails. When I was satisfied that I got as clean as I could without taking a shower, I dried them and turned to the door.

I stepped into the small hall and turned for the restaurant. The door swung

shut behind me, but I only managed to take a step before hands grabbed me and hauled me back. I slammed into a hard body, a hand around my neck and one around my mouth to prevent me from screaming.

I struggled, my mind immediately filling with panic. While I was being hauled backward, I thrashed wildly until I somehow managed to remember that I had been learning how to defend myself. Though we hadn't gotten to something like this.

Using every ounce of strength I could muster, I shoved my elbow back, connecting with a gut. A satisfying grunt met my ears, and I followed it with a hard backwards jab with the heel of my foot into a shin.

He swore. "Keep going, pet, and I'll fuck you up as soon as we're outside."

The voice made my blood run cold. It was the vice president. That nasty demon who'd cornered me behind my apartment. The one who was trying to sell me. Shimmer.

My heart raced with fear. Despite his words, I didn't stop landing blows. But he was expecting them now. He knew which ones were coming and managed to get out of my way. With every missed connection, panic blossomed bigger and bigger until I was screaming into his hand.

No one heard me as we stepped outside through a door I hadn't seen. It must have been one of the others in the hallway. Shimmer dragged me along and I was quickly taken around the corner of a small stone building behind the restaurant.

I thrashed wildly as I tried everything to get out of his hold. Anything. I didn't care what. All I needed was his hand to lose its hold over my mouth so I could scream.

That didn't happen. Tears pricked my eyes as Shimmer hovered me over a hole in the ground. "I'll be back for you, pet. And I'll enjoy breaking you in before selling your fucking body. I'm no longer interested in the highest price. Now my only criteria is who is going to continue to fucking break you."

There wasn't time for his words to truly settle into a new fear as he dropped me into the hole. I tried to scream, but my voice caught in my throat as I slid and tumbled. There didn't seem to be a bottom as I continued down, down, down.

Finally, I slammed into the ground. For a minute, I couldn't move. Every inch of my body was on fire from the scraping and slamming into the walls

and floor as I fell. When I turned back, it was in time to see the small circle of light disappear.

Finding my voice, I screamed for help. Screamed at the top of my lungs. My cries echoed around me as I desperately attempted to climb up the slide I'd been dropped down. I'd not get more than a few feet before it became too much, and I slid down again.

Biting my lip, I turned slowly into the room. There wasn't much light. Just a lantern that looked like it wasn't burning so much as glowing, sitting on a carved ledge in the wall. I couldn't see more than a few feet in front of it, but the entire place appeared empty. And silent.

Not so silent that I could hear my heart beating, but silent enough that I knew I was alone. Silent enough that I couldn't hear anything above me, and no one could hear my screams.

For another long minute, I let the panic take hold. Shimmer was coming back. He'd do things to me that all those demons before me did. And my life would go back to being hell again. And even worse than it had been because he was determined to make it that way.

Swallowing, I forced myself to my feet and headed for the lantern. My hands shook as I picked it up and fiddled with it, trying to make the glow brighter. It worked a little, widening the shell of the circle of light that surrounded me, illuminating dark stone walls.

I was underground, but this wasn't just a pit. It was a built room. It must have a purpose. And there was no way Shimmer was going to come down that chute and bring me out of here. That meant there had to be another entrance.

Gathering up courage I didn't have, I moved deeper into the room, raising the lantern to look around. I found an opening in the wall and headed for it. A hall.

Knowing that staying put wasn't an option, I carried on. Slowly. Keeping my footsteps as light as I could. I doubted anyone was down here. This wasn't a place to live. But then again, there was a lantern turned on. That suggested someone had been down here recently.

It could have just been Shimmer. That seemed logical. But on the chance that it wasn't, I kept as quiet as I could. The light would give me away easily enough. But maybe I could sneak past... what, exactly?

Taking another deep inhale, I cleared out as many worrisome thoughts as I could. I needed to channel an inner badass. I refused to let myself roll over

and continue to be the victim. While I might not be strong enough to fight off what Shimmer had planned, right now, I was given a chance. And I'd be dead if I decided not to take it.

The one thing I had going for me was that I knew if there were demons down here, or animals, I'd see them because of their eyes. Even when they're not rising with demonic energy and glowing brightly, they'd still reflect their true nature in the dark. I'd learned that the hard way growing up. When I'd catch sight of blue or green eyes. Maybe some orange or yellow.

If there was anyone down here. I hoped there wouldn't be. My eyes were blue. I was at the bottom of the food chain, as far as demons were concerned.

Movement in the distance made me freeze. My heart stammered loudly, lodging in my throat and making it difficult to take another breath. With shaking hands and sweaty palms, I turned the lantern down so that it was barely giving off any light.

Biting my lip, I remained completely still. Listening.

It was my imagination. That's all this was. Being alone could easily play tricks on your mind. I took another tentative step forward, concentrating on the small ring of light at my feet that the lantern cast. Silence.

Another step and more silence followed.

Just as I was beginning to breathe calmly again, I heard it behind me and spun. My chest heaved for breath as fear began trickling into my head again, making me tremble.

Alone. I'm alone. It's a rat. A mouse. A cat. I'm alone!

But the eyes that finally opened were not an animal at all. It was a demon, but not one I thought existed. White hollow eyes stared at me in the dark. Dead and empty. That of an untamed.

"No," I whispered. "You're not real. You're just something parents tell their children about to make them behave."

I'd heard the stories from my parents before I was taken. How the untamed were demons who'd never gained the ability to think rationally. Who were little less than mindless murder puppets. They were dumped in catacombs all over the demonic states to keep them off the streets and keep their bloodshed to a minimum.

But it was a story. It wasn't real.

When one set of white eyes was joined by another and then a third, I whirled around and started running blindly.

Sadist Soul



I could barely think with how furious I was. Nothing but red rage screamed in my head. While I refused to think beyond that, the tightness in my chest and the mix of concrete churning my stomach said I was fucking terrified, too.

They'd taken Haidee right from under our noses.

The thought that they were going to hurt her, abuse her in any and all ways, only fueled my fear more. And my fear drove my fury.

A more logical part of me said that we needed to think this through clearly. We were about to set foot in KOK Suckers's territory and start a war. We were going to tear their heads off and shove them up their asses.

That didn't guarantee that we'd get Haidee back, though. Which scared the fuck out of me. How could we track her down? That's what was most important.

Everything in me was fuming that we hadn't possessed her. Someone should have possessed her. Arrow was the most logical choice because of their relationship. But fuck, she was out there, scared and maybe being hurt.

Truth was, we'd be lucky if we found her.

However, sitting here doing nothing sure as fuck wasn't going to get her back. Negotiating wasn't going to get her back. If we had any chance at all, it was going to be while we chased after her and fucked some shit up. Hoping one of the fuckers would fold under torture and tell us where she was.

My normal voices of reason were not in any better shape than I was. Considering most of them were closer to Haidee than I'd gotten, I wasn't at all surprised. So when I said that we were leaving, no one argued. They

headed for their bikes and waited for me.

I looked at Sweet Love, my chest heaving. He gave me a sympathetic smile within his dead set face. "Where to, boss?" he asked quietly.

And therein laid the first problem. I didn't make it a point to know where KOK Suckers hung out. I knew where their clubhouse was. That was going to have to do. No doubt they'd send out the S.O.S. that we were there and the rest would come flocking.

Maybe Haidee would be there too.

Their clubhouse wasn't far from the border of their city where we stopped for lunch. Knowing this made me kick myself internally that I let this happen. I wanted to yell and scream and throw a fit that no one should have let Haidee go anywhere on her own.

But that meant keeping her as little better than a prisoner with us. She'd already been that. I understood why they were giving her the freedom to be her own person. To let her use the fucking bathroom on her own!

A growl escaped me, and I nodded at Sweet Love. "KOK's clubhouse."

Our bikes roared to life as soon as I kicked mine on. The noise which usually calmed me, filled me with more dread. A little voice in my head chanted that we were going to be too late. We weren't going to find her there. But without any other leads on where to look, how were we going to find her anywhere else? We had to begin somewhere and if they took her, that seemed a logical starting point.

I would make every last one of them die a bloody painful death if I didn't get her back.

Glancing in my mirror, I spied Shimmer's smirk. He didn't care about Haidee at all. But he was pleased that he'd be getting what he wanted anyway. While he may have been pushing to sell her to KOK Suckers, it wasn't because he liked them. It was strictly for the money and territory. He'd happily start a fight with them as soon as the transaction had been completed.

I narrowed my eyes at his reflection but turned back to the road. There was no time to deal with Shimmer right now. All I needed was answers. I needed to get this girl back before anyone touched her.

The trip was short. The demons were already coming out of their clubhouse as we pulled in and had the audacity to look pissed that we were there. I barely managed to keep my bike standing as I jumped off and stormed up to their president, Goat. If I had to guess, his oh so creative name

came from the horns on his head that were very reminiscent of a goat's. Clever, this bunch.

By the time I had my hand around his neck and his feet off the ground, KOK Suckers realized that I wasn't playing. I wasn't here for a flashy showdown or an exchange of trash talk. I was fucking here for business.

"Where is she?" I growled.

His eyes were wide, staring at me while his face reddened more by the passing second as I cut off his airway.

"Where is she?!" I shouted, shaking him.

Goat wasn't exactly a small man, but he wasn't huge either. Maybe Orchid's size. So, for me, he was easy to toss around.

"Who?" he croaked.

"Don't play with me," I growled, flexing my hand until he started clawing at it. "Where is my fucking girl?"

"He's not going to tell you," Shimmer said, shaking his head. "Why would he do that, prez?"

Shimmer's voice only fueled my rage more. KOK Suckers only knew about Haidee because of him. While I couldn't prove that, we all knew it to be the truth.

A burning light flashed before my eyes and I stepped back, my grip loosening from around Goat's throat. With another flash, my eyes burned, and he fell to the ground. With a roar, I let my power flare in response. I could visibly see it as it moved through them like a wall. Everyone in front of me, every motherfucking KOK Sucker, fell to their knees screaming.

That's when all hell broke loose.

They quickly retaliated and launched themselves at us, knives bared, claws extended. My demons were ready. I felt the ground shake under my feet as one of my enforcers increased their mass density and slammed someone to the ground. If I turned to look, I'd find a very disgusting pile of what had once been a living demon who got a little too close to one of my enforcers.

I prowled after Goat as he shifted backward, scrambling away from me while he tried to catch his breath. He held his hand up, trying to stop me as he coughed in air.

"I don't know who you're talking about," he insisted on choking in breaths. "I don't have anyone who isn't supposed to be here."

"If that's the case, you're a shit president since it happened right under

your fucking nose,” I snapped, grabbing his hair and yanking him to his feet.

Yes, I was completely aware that I was entirely hypocritical right now. Haidee disappeared from our fingers. And Shimmer has been pulling shit for ages.

Part of me knew he was responsible for this. He was the cause. When we were done with KOK Suckers, if he wasn't already dead from the fight, I would take care of it right here. And anyone else who had an issue with it.

“We don't have her,” Goat insisted. “We put in a bid and keep getting jerked around.”

I slammed my fist into his stomach, making him sputter. It was hard enough that the force ripped him from my hold and he staggered into the wall of the clubhouse behind him. He spit blood, and wrapped an arm around his stomach as he glared at me.

“You think it's okay to buy a fucking person?” I roared.

“You're selling one!”

My eyes flashed brightly, blanketing the wall and Goat in an ironically cheery pink hue. Goat's face blanched, and I knew the moment he realized that I hadn't condoned that at all.

“Seems to me like you have your own problems to handle in house,” Goat said, picking himself up.

“I do. And when I'm done dismantling you fuckers, which I will if you don't hand my girl back to me, I'll deal with that before we even leave this fucking lot. I'll ask you one more time: Where is Haidee?”

Goat tilted his head to the side, his brow rising in surprise. “Is that her name?”

That was all I could take. His blasé response was enough to drive me over the metaphorical cliff. I launched at him, and he let out an undignified squeal as he tried to fall away. He wasn't fast enough.

I slammed my claws into his chest and pumped him full of my fury. He screamed bloody murder as he fought for his life. Each second that went by, I watched as his skin grew paler and paler until it was gray. His red veins bulged from his skin, turning black. His eyes, once glowing orange, were slowly becoming turned into blank white orbs.

I was dislodging his soul, ripping it away. Making him into a mindless, rabid animal that I would then dismember. But first, he needed to feel the pain of death and survive it.

Once his screams turned to snarls, his eyes blankly white, I let him go. He

staggered again and looked up, baring his pointed teeth. I taunted him, inviting him closer. He came like a dog and I pulled his arm from his body. The squelch of his muscles ripping, the tearing of his skin, the popping and snapping of his bones was a fucking high like no other.

One limb after another until I got to his head. By the time he lay in pieces at my feet and I was covered in his blood, I turned around to find Shimmer staring at me with wide, horrified eyes. He turned away quickly, moving in on some new arrivals and shifting between space to fight them.

Turning my back on the war, I shoved open the door to the clubhouse and went through it, room by room, looking for Haidee. When I didn't find her, I sent Bone Breaker through to dismantle walls, looking for a hidden room. A passage under the floor. Anything.

He came out shaking his head, his eyes so yellow they looked like street lights in his head. She wasn't here. I turned again, feeling the fear in me rise like an ugly monster, controlling my anger until I was nearly irrational.

She wasn't here. I needed to find her.

But until someone told me where she was, how was I to find her?

I reached for the closest KOK Sucker and started over again, wrapping my hand around his neck and demanding to know where Haidee was.

And this carried on until the ground was slick with blood and covered in bodies. Still, Haidee's location wasn't disclosed.

Haidee



There are stories that claim the untamed are what demons had been before we evolved to an intelligent species. They're the remnants of what we had been in a previous lifetime. Mindless. Feral. A parasite needing a host to function.

They're the kinds of demons that can be summoned by other species or other demons. They're ruthless, bloodthirsty cannibals.

I ran, terrified, my mind a blur of nothing but fear as I raced through the darkness as quickly as I could. Their footsteps, while slower, were right behind me. The sounds of their feet shuffling along never letting up.

But I was running blindly. Not knowing where I was going. Slamming into the walls, tripping over whatever was on the floor, that sometimes felt like an arm or a leg. I had no choice but to run. If I stayed still, they'd be on me.

While I didn't know if the stories from my early childhood were true or not, I understood the untamed to be more like animals than anything. Meaning, they could see pretty clearly in the dark. And their hearing was infinitely better than mine. And they could smell me from a mile away in the right conditions.

This assured me that I didn't have a choice but to keep running. There'd be no hiding.

My screams renewed as I rounded a corner and nearly ran smack into two more untamed. I somehow slid by them, probably because I dropped to the ground in terror and they toppled right over me.

One of their hands grabbed onto my leg, digging their claws in. I

screamed again, kicking wildly, until it was dislodged. Leg now stinging like I had just contracted an infection, I scrambled to my feet and sprinted away.

I somehow managed to keep a hold on the lantern. Without slowing much, I turned the glow up as brightly as I could. While I knew it would give my position away, if the untamed were like animals, I hoped the brightness in the dark would blind them slightly and make their reach for me less accurate. It also illuminated the way a little better, so I wasn't running into walls or corners quite so much.

The corridors snaked on forever. I slowed but never stopped moving. I stopped screaming, but my breaths still came out in heavy pants. Like the chamber I was dropped in, these walls were built of stone. They weren't just dug, this was a purposeful labyrinth.

That meant there had to be an end somewhere. There had to be other doors. At the crossroads, I took a random option since I couldn't afford to take my time and reason my way through choosing a route. I just kept pressing on, hunting for anything.

The first door I came across opened easily and I found an empty room. Disappointed, I ran on. This went on for what felt like hours. I was exhausted. Thirsty. My leg stung so badly that I was limping. But stopping meant I'd die, and I hadn't come this far in my fucking life to die at the hands of untamed.

Door after door was a letdown, but I continued to try them. I doubted this series of tunnels was going to just open up somewhere and spill me onto the streets. Although that thought was equally daunting. How would I find my way back? It's not like anyone taught me geography when I was a sex slave.

Not that it mattered. There'd be untamed running around in the world if this place just emptied into the city somewhere. Since they weren't, I had to assume there was a door somewhere.

What sounded like a scream made me stop. My heart was still racing, yet the only sound that followed was the incessant scraping of the untamed's feet. Always moving closer.

Biting my lip, I decided I imagined the sound. Deprived of sight and closed off from the world, it wasn't unreasonable to think I was imagining things. I started walking quickly again when the walls shook badly enough that I braced myself on the wall and looked up.

What was that? Earthquake?

The thought made me shake. While I was underground? I was going to be

crushed to death. An echo of pained screaming followed a second later and a sense of triumph flashed through me that I hadn't been imagining things. Better yet, if I was hearing something, that meant there were people around.

This drove me on with a renewed purpose. I checked every door, took better inventory of each room. It was sometime later that I found a door that I couldn't open. It seemed to be sealed shut. However, as I continued to pull on it with my entire body, it slowly shifted on its hinges.

By that point, it was a race to try to get the door open enough for me to slip through (internally crossing my fingers that there was something on the other side) before the untamed caught up. The movement of their feet coming ever closer made my heart race and my hands clammy. I could hear their breaths, their growls.

The door suddenly came free, and I fell backwards, hitting my head hard enough that my eyesight went black for a minute. Unconsciousness meant I was dead. I forced myself to crawl through the door and pulled it roughly shut behind me.

There I rested for a minute to catch my breath and let the pounding in my head subside. Tenderly, I touched my head and winced. At the very least, I was going to have a bruise there.

As I sat there, half waiting for the untamed to throw the door open, other sounds came to me. Screams of pain. Roars of anger. The unmistakable sounds of fighting.

What did I just stumble upon? Out from the clutches of the untamed and into another horror show!

But that way meant I was likely going to find daylight again. So I crept forward, following the promise of light as I moved. And sure enough, while the noises of fighting got louder and the stench of blood filled my lungs, I found the exit.

Part of me was elated. I'd done that on my own! I'd survived the untamed and escaped Shimmer's trap all by myself!

Not that my mountain had been completely scaled. I still needed to get back to Arrow and Bounce and everyone else. And somehow do that without Shimmer finding me first.

I peeked out from behind a cracked door and looked at the fight. It wasn't as close as the sounds made it feel. At first, all I could see were bikes. But beyond them were dozens and dozens of demons fighting. Glowing eyes everywhere.

They were all occupied anyway. As I was readying myself to slip away, I caught the familiar patch of Dirty Demons and froze. Where was I and why were they here?

Biting my lip, my course of action now needed to change. I knew where Arrow was now. Probably, anyway. I couldn't see him. But I *knew* he was there.

Sitting here and waiting seemed like the safest option, but it also felt too cowardly. So I stood from where I was hiding and made my way across the street toward the bloody massacre that was going on. I missed the one in the temple as I hid under what had likely been the dais. But I could see this one and it made my stomach churn.

Standing off to the side, I looked around. Searching for a familiar, friendly face. One I trusted. Or one that one of my friends trusted.

I spotted Secret and grinned. He was pretty close, so I moved in his direction, careful to stay far out of reach and out of the fray. Just as I make it close to Secret, Shimmer is suddenly in my face, glaring at me.

“How the fuck did you get out?” he hissed, grabbing for me.

I jerked backward, and he snatched air. But his body flashed light, and he was on me in the next second, his hand locked around my wrist.

“Let go,” I yelled, once again thrashing my body and kicking at him with everything I had. I was far too tired to be skilled or purposeful with it. My leg throbbled. My head was pounding so hard that my eyesight seemed to pulse with it.

Before I had a chance to scream, Shimmer punched me in the face and I fell to the ground. My wrist was wrenched from his hand.

He grabbed my hair quickly and yanked my face up to look at him. “Shut up,” he growled. “I will do with you as I fucking please. No one will get in my way. Do you hear me, bitch? I will—”

His words cut off and his eyes went wide as he grabbed at his throat. Shimmer released me and took a step back. Secret moved between the two of us and glared, arms crossed. “You will what, Shimmer?” he said, eyes narrowed.

Shimmer stilled completely as he looked between the two of us. I could tell he was debating his options. How he planned to spin it. What his best move was.

I saw the second he decided that we'd both need to die. He lunged at me but changed direction mid strike to barrel into Secret. They toppled to the

ground. I flinched when Shimmer landed a loud, painful blow to Secret's stomach.

"Kill you both," Shimmer growled. "That's what I'm going to do."

Frantically, I looked around. I needed someone to help; I was only going to get in the way. Anyone.

I spotted Denial close by and decided he was my best bet. So I moved in his direction, picking my way through the bodies and avoiding those still trading blows. Glancing back at Secret and Shimmer, my breath caught to find Secret covered in blood and holding his arm awkwardly. His glasses were gone.

Swallowing, I turned back away and made a concentrated effort to get to Denial. The crazy demon with glowing pink eyes.

Orehid



It's fortunate that my thorns didn't have an adverse effect on me. Considering I was wearing them like an aviator suit, it would be really bad news. Having said that, they still pierced my skin and stung like a bitch. I was literally covered in tiny puncture wounds. Between my sweat and the dirt kicked up from the ground, not to mention the blood *everywhere*, they were starting to ache.

I'd like to say that we were winding down, but it seemed we're pretty well matched. KOK Suckers had more members than we did, but they're mostly low level, blue or green-eyed demons. Seemed like it should have been an easy round up, but our already large crew was facing two or three demons apiece.

And then, if they happened to take down one of ours, that meant they could more than gang up on one member. It was bloody and savage.

As I turned around to look for someone who could use my help, I was spattered in the face with blood. I shuddered, spitting it from my lips.

"Fuck," I muttered, Denial looking up at me.

He was fucking terrifying right now. Not only were his eyes almost a blazing neon pink, but they were hollow. Empty. He completely and utterly dropped any attempt at a mask and all you were left with was the psychopathic demon.

Denial reached out and wiped above my eyes. His touch was cold, and I stiffened. Pulling his hand away, he wiped the blood on his shirt. He looked like a fucking serial killer who'd just diced up their last victim.

"Thanks," I muttered.

He nodded. I gasped when he moved quickly, far more quickly than I was prepared for, and was behind me in an instant. I turned to, yet again, being spattered in blood when he ripped the head off a body.

This time, because I'd been startled as I had, my mouth was open. I bent over, gagging and spitting someone else's blood from my mouth, until I was nearly sick. Gross. Absolutely fucking disgusting.

Then there was an awkward pat on my back and I glanced up to see Denial trying to comfort me. On most days, his stony exterior didn't scream 'let me make you feel better.' Today it was like getting hugged by a corpse.

"Thanks. Again," I choked.

He smirked and turned away. I had nothing to wipe my face on. Since my hands were covered in grime, the best I could do was roll the back of my shirt out and wipe at my face. As I dropped it, I swear I caught sight of long, dark hair in the distance.

I stared. Surely I was making that shit up. We were so desperate to find Haidee that I was imagining her where she clearly wasn't. I was seeing her—

My thoughts stilled as I caught what was only ten feet from where I thought I imagined Haidee fleeing. Shimmer had Secret in a hold with his claws digging into Secret's neck. He was covered in blood. His shoulder clearly ripped from his socket. A nasty gash above his eye.

I was propelled into action when Shimmer shoved a blade into Secret's stomach. Blood started dribbling from his mouth.

Spinning, I tried to find Denial again. Where'd he just run off to? I caught sight of Soul instead. Dodging others fighting and jumping over bodies, I flung myself at Soul. He growled like a fiend and I gripped his face tightly.

"I need you to focus on me for a minute, prez," I hissed. He didn't blink. "Shimmer is going to kill Secret. Do you hear me?"

Soul stiffened, and I released a relieved breath. Pulling him roughly around, I pointed. Soul followed the direction I indicated. Shimmer now had Secret on his knees, holding his head back by a fistful of hair, and the bloody blade that had just been in his stomach was now pressed to his neck.

During the time it took me to blink, Soul was there. I swear, I could hear the crack from where I stood as he broke Shimmer's arm. Shimmer's scream followed. I hurried over to where Secret had collapsed on the ground.

His eyes were foggy as he stared up, blood still trickled from his mouth. "He's going to die," I told Soul. "We need to get him out of here."

"He attacked me first," Shimmer insisted. "When I caught him

conversing with a KOK Sucker, I snuck up to hear that he was the one responsible for Haidee being stolen. She's dead. Because of Secret."

Soul was completely still, staring at Shimmer.

I rolled my eyes. "You don't think anyone is going to believe you, do you?"

"I'm the vice president," Shimmer spat.

"And you're a fucking shitty one," I argued. His eyes flared brightly, covering me in an orange light. "Besides that, it's been you all along who's been trying to sell Haidee. Not Secret."

"You think just because he hasn't made it obvious that he wants the girl gone, that he can't go behind your back and sell her?"

"Seems convenient that you've left him in a state where he can't argue," I said, pulling my shirt off so I could bunch it up at his stomach to slow the loss of blood.

"I'm telling you. I know what I heard and what I saw," Shimmer said, turning his attention to Soul. "You have to believe me."

"That would be a mistake," Denial said, stepping out from behind me. I shivered, staring at him. I hadn't known he was behind me, and that was frightening. Even knowing he was on my team. "Believing you about anything would be a mistake."

His voice was cold, and I could see that even Shimmer wasn't immune to Denial's crazy. He backed up a step, though he tried to keep it subtle.

"Somehow, I doubt that very much," I muttered to myself in response to Shimmer's bullshit, turning my attention back to Secret. His eyes were closed, and his skin blanched gray. His breaths were labored and shallow. "Hold on," I murmured. There was no response.

Denial moving made me look up. His hand slid into Soul's, snapping Soul out of his still state as he stared murderously at Shimmer. Soul tilted his head slightly.

"Talk," Soul said. His voice made my blood run cold.

"I heard Secret talking to one of the KOK Suckers," he said emphatically. "The KOK said that they have Haidee, and the transaction is done. And that she's far away from here."

"That's conveniently different from what you said a few minutes ago," I said.

He glared at me, his jaw pressed tightly together. "How so?"

"If you can't remember which lie you're selling, I sure as fuck won't help

you remember it,” I said.

Shimmer glared hotly at me and took a step closer. Such a fucking bully.

“You’re in no position to be trying to intimidate Orchid,” Denial said in a quiet monotone that made my blood run cold. I didn’t miss the effect it had on Shimmer, either.

“You’re nobody,” Shimmer said, trying to match the level of threat in Denial’s voice. “I’m vice president. You’re nobody. I don’t give a fuck what you think.”

“To you, I might be nobody. But this nobody can tear you in two without laying a hand on you. Would you care to try me?”

A threat is even more unsettling when there’s no inflection in the words. Just one tone. Dead. Flat. Chilling.

Shimmer swallowed.

“Orchid is right,” Soul said. “That’s not the story you told us when I stopped you from killing your own crewmember.”

“You’d kill me if I was the one responsible for selling Haidee,” Shimmer said in frustration.

“I won’t argue that,” Soul said. “But your stories between now and five minutes ago don’t match. Would you like to try again?”

“We really don’t have time for that,” I said. “Soul, Secret is going to die if we don’t get him somewhere he can heal.”

Soul looked down, his nostrils flaring. He turned his attention back to Shimmer. “If Secret dies, so do you.”

Although he tried to look unaffected by the threat and glared harshly at Soul, there was no hiding the fear in his eyes. Or the way he swallowed in unease.

“I’m telling you, he’s responsible for Haidee’s death!” Shimmer insisted.

“Third story,” I singsonged, turning my attention back to Secret. His eyes were still closed. His breathing had quieted. But I wasn’t under the impression that was a good thing. I was pretty sure he was giving up his fight to live. “Hold on a little longer,” I whispered.

“It is a lie.”

All of our attention jerked to the side where the quiet, feminine voice came from. For a few seconds during which my heart raced like I was sprinting, we didn’t see anyone. And then Haidee moved out from around the bikes, standing as she did.

It took everything in me not to fling myself at her in relief that she’s here

and alive.

Because I was staring at her, I missed Shimmer's initial reaction to seeing her standing there. I looked up at him in time to see him force his scowl away and replace it with the fakest expression I'd seen on him yet.

"Haidee," Soul murmured, sighing.

"What happened, Haidee?" Denial asked.

His tone made Haidee stiffen, but she swallowed down the fear as her eyes landed on me and Secret. I nodded encouragingly.

"I went to the bathroom at the restaurant alone. When I came out, Shimmer hauled me through the back door. With more of the same promises he made at the apartment, but this time assuring me that he was going to make sure I was sold to the cruelest bidder instead of the highest—*after* he raped me until he was satisfied." She tilted her head up, staring at Shimmer. Despite her shaking right now, I was so fucking proud of her bravery. "Then he dropped me down into a hole where I've been running from untamed for who knows how long. I finally found an exit." She gestured behind her to somewhere across the street. "And I saw Denial, so I was trying to get to him when Shimmer found me. This time he was trying to kill me, but Secret got in his way. Instead, he tried to kill Secret."

Her gaze fell to Secret, eyes glassy with tears.

Secret took a deep breath and opened his eyes. I didn't think he could see Haidee. He didn't have his glasses for one. And he wasn't completely lucid. But his eyes cracked open, and a small smile formed on his lips before he fell back into the nearly catatonic state he was in a second ago. Like he'd woken up enough to make sure Haidee knew he appreciated her clearing his name.

Tears trickled down Haidee's cheeks as she stared at Secret, her hands wringing together in front of her. Denial stared at Haidee, unmoving. As if he were frozen in time. Soul's gaze was on Secret, furious.

I brushed Secret's hair from his face, trying to keep myself together. Secret was a good guy; one of the best guys in the club. Not just because he was a great secretary, but a legitimately nice demon.

He shouldn't die like this.

Yeah, we had our differences from time to time, and he can be a bit of a crude tool, but so can everyone. That didn't make him a bad demon. He wasn't. He was a fucking great demon. He couldn't die like this. He didn't deserve it.

I looked up, meeting Haidee's eyes as her lips trembled. She was dirty

and banged up. There was dried dirt all over her with a bit of blood mixed in. Her clothes were rumpled and torn in several places. But she was here and whole.

Taking a breath, I bowed my head. Haidee was fine. Now we needed to focus on finishing off KOK Suckers and getting Secret home, so he had a chance to live.

Haidee



It wasn't that I thought Soul was going to believe Shimmer's lies. None of them were that stupid. But that they all thought I was dead was a different story. That was why I stood from where I'd been crouching, hidden from everyone but close enough to hear what was going on.

I hadn't made it to Denial. He'd been moving around too much. While I knew I wouldn't be any help to Secret, I couldn't convince myself to run further away from him to get someone else. That meant more people would see me. And I wasn't sure who, more than the handful of demons I'd been spending time with, were allies. I was too afraid that someone would see me and either take me away again or kill me.

I was afraid I'd run into another Shimmer.

Thankfully, Soul and Orchid had intervened in time. But as my gaze dropped to Secret, my chest squeezed. Maybe they'd made it in time? Secret didn't look too good.

Silence hung over us. The din of the fight was fading as the silence stretched on. While my words were processed, I glanced between the faces but kept a keen eye on Shimmer. He was furious. His entire body was stiff. His jaw clenched, teeth grinding. I didn't know what he was going to do, but I'd already disproved his words.

Besides, I knew who took me. And it wasn't even hard to believe, given that he'd been gunning to sell me since I arrived.

I didn't even have time to scream when Shimmer barreled at me with a furious roar. Neither Soul nor Denial had a chance to move. I'd barely gotten my hands up and taken a step back when there was a body between us.

Time slowed as I stared wide-eyed. Echoes pounded in my ear as they hovered there, their collision freezing them in place. And then they both fell.

“No!” I screamed, dropping to the ground and shoving Shimmer off Arrow. The knife that had been meant for me was now lodged in Arrow’s ribs. He blinked up at me, his face white. He stopped breathing.

“Arrow!” I cried, dropping to his chest, gripping his shirt. Why him? Why did it have to be him?

I was only vaguely aware of movement around me as my sobs overtook my body. This couldn’t happen. I couldn’t have found the one demon who might love me only to lose him again. That wasn’t fair.

“Shh,” a voice said in my ear as hard, cold hands held me off the ground. I tried to get away. Not because I was afraid of who had me, but because I desperately needed to get to Arrow. I couldn’t let him die. I couldn’t lose him.

Couldn’t I just be selfish for once in my miserable life?

“We’re going to get out of here. The sooner we can get Arrow and Secret somewhere safe so they can begin to heal, the better off they’ll be. But we need to go now.”

The voice was talking to me. Low, even, unfeeling. As were the arms around me. Restraining, not comforting. I didn’t have to look to know I was in Denial’s arms.

“Shh, Haidee,” he murmured, bleeding a little more life into his words. “It’s going to be okay.”

“Will he live?” I asked. My gaze caught on Secret, and I shook violently. Two demons were going to die today, from trying to save my life. “Will they live?”

“They have a much better chance of living if we can leave now. Can you calm down for me?”

With a shaking breath and not feeling anything but dread, I nodded and turned so I was curled into Denial’s arms. His hold hesitated for a minute before he adjusted me.

A short exchange happened around me as I breathed him in. He was covered in blood, but beneath that coppery scent was something else. Something cold and barren but spicy; something just him. I concentrated on that, ignoring the way my stomach churned and fear clouded my head.

They wouldn’t die. Demons were pretty hard to kill. Right?

Denial stood me on my feet and encouraged me to climb onto his bike.

Some irrational part of me wanted to argue that I couldn't ride with him. Bike rides were only something I did with Bone Breaker. But this was not the time for arguing.

Once on the bike, Denial climbed on behind me. One of his arms circled my waist, and I tried not to curl into him. That probably wasn't safe, after all. I didn't enjoy the ride this time. Like the first time I was on a bike, I was shaking and terrified. This time, that fear wasn't for myself.

I didn't register the walk through the clubhouse. I only realized I was there when hot water washed over me. Blinking through the fear-induced haze, I looked around. My arms covered my chest as I spun, trying to figure out who was in here. Who put me in the shower?

But the bathroom appeared empty when I peeked out of the stall. Needing to see Arrow and Secret, not caring that I was probably dirty, I climbed out as the door opened.

Denial frowned, shaking his head. "Back in. Wash."

"But I—"

"You're not getting near either of them if you're dirty, Haidee. We can't risk infection. Get in the shower."

His voice made me shiver, my entire body became covered in goosebumps. I held his cold eyes for a moment before turning back around and getting under the water. I stood there motionless, letting the water wash over me.

He sighed. It was close enough that I jumped and glared at him on the other side of the glass stall door. "Haidee, you can climb into bed with them if you're fucking clean. Don't make me wash you, woman."

I snickered, despite my best efforts. Turning my back on him, I reached for the shampoo. I'll admit, it felt good to get clean. I had to wash my hair twice and then I scrubbed my body thoroughly, making sure every trace of dirt, blood, or tunnel grime was gone. Before I turned off the shower, I faced Denial.

His head was bent as he stared at his phone screen. I bit my lip as I watched him, waiting for him to look up. When he did, I rested my hands on my hips.

"You weren't watching. How do you know I'm clean?" I challenged.

"Get out," he said, clicking off his phone and pocketing it.

Shoving the glass door open, I stepped out and waited. His gaze trailed over my body before he circled his finger in the air to tell me to turn around. I

did, rolling my eyes.

“Very good,” he murmured. “Now dry off and dress. There are clothes in the closet there.”

He stepped toward me with a towel. I took it from his hands and he reached behind me to turn the shower off. This close, I found that he was only a couple inches taller than me, though he was broad and strong.

“Are you hurt anywhere?” he asked.

A smile tugged at my lips because it sounded an awful lot like he was trying to make his voice gentle. I shook my head. “Just some bruising.” Glancing down, said bruises littered my body. Some far bigger than others. But I was happy to note that it didn’t appear that I had any true injuries. Superficial scrapes and bangs, but nothing damaging. Except my leg.

I shifted to show Denial where the untamed had sunk their claws into me. He glanced down but I didn’t see any change in his expression.

“Sit,” he said, pointing to the counter. I wrapped the towel more securely around me and climbed up. He pulled a red soft pack from under the sink and opened it. From within, he pulled out some moist pads that he wiped at my lacerations with. It stung, making me flinch. His eyes flickered up to mine briefly when I did and awkwardly patted my knee.

Biting my lip to hold in my amusement, I watched as he quickly but thoroughly cleaned my cuts before covering them with bandages. Then he closed it and stuffed it back under the sink before getting to his feet.

Denial studied my face, his eyes never straying south. “Good.” I was surprised when he touched my hand softly. “Get dressed, Haidee. Hurry.”

A new fear made me rush through drying and dressing. When I burst out of the bathroom, I was in a large bedroom. While I might have wanted to check it out, my eyes were drawn to the bed. It was easily the biggest bed I’d ever seen. But on the mattress covered in white sheets were Arrow and Secret.

Neither looked good.

I stumbled to the bed; once again, every nerve ending in my body burned with desperation. They couldn’t die! These demons had stepped in to save my life. Why should they deserve to die?

Although there were demons around, I wasn’t looking anywhere but at Arrow. Beyond him, further onto the bed, was Secret. They were cleaned up, bandaged, and asleep. This didn’t look like a hospital. There weren’t tubes and wires and machines making noise.

It felt more like they were on their deathbed.

Tears ran down my face as I leaned over Arrow and gently touched his cheek with a shaking finger.

“Get up there,” Bone Breaker said, his voice soft. Hands landed on my waist and lifted me onto the bed.

I crawled carefully over Arrow so that I was between the two of them. Based on appearances, Secret was in far worse shape. His skin was still a sickly gray and his eyes were slightly sunken in. He was covered in lacerations that looked angry from around the edges of the bandages. Hell, he looked like one big bandage.

Arrow, on the other hand, besides looking pale, had a single bandage over his ribs. Already I could see blood seeping through it.

“Lay with them,” Denial said. “We’re going to stay close so we can help them heal. Alright?”

I nodded, lowering myself onto the mattress. Curling up against Arrow’s arm, I reached behind me to grip Secret’s hand. The bed dipped several times around us until Bounce, Bone Breaker, and Denial were situated with us.

I’d heard about this. Demons who are close could lend each other strength and energy when injured or sick. I’d never been involved with that before. How would I have been? I was the one being injured. No one cared enough about me to help me heal.

Before these men, I hadn’t experienced a kind hand since I was a small child, and those memories were long gone at this point. There was a faint feeling. A glimpse here and there. But otherwise, the past I had so carefully tried to store away was now lost to time.

I squeezed my eyes closed and willed everything in me to help these demons heal. I’d give them all my strength. Every breath. If only they could breathe easy again. If only they’d live.

Sadist Soul



My heart stilled when Haidee stepped out. The relief I felt was like a fucking rain shower, dousing the fire burning inside me.

Her words following made the fire spit and quake before flaring brightly once more. Her words were dooming for Shimmer. I really didn't give a fuck what argument he had at this point. I was done with his games. With his utter bullshit. If I let him walk away from here alive, he'd be fucking lucky. A broken arm wasn't enough.

Before I could make the decision to kill him, he launched himself at Haidee. Denial and I lurched forward, but neither of us were quick enough.

A blur of a demon wedged himself between Haidee and Shimmer before everything froze in place once more. The fury in Arrow's eyes slowly died out as his life slipped away. I watched it from a distance, as if I were somewhere outside my body looking down on it all, as they slowly fell to the ground.

I blinked, horrified, unable to move.

And then Haidee's screams filled the air, and time sped back up again. Denial pulled her up before she accidentally shoved the blade in his chest deeper. I fell to my knees and touched him, feeling the way his soul shuddered and shook, ready to let go.

"Hang on, Arrow," I muttered.

Pulling my shirt off, I fisted it in a ball before carefully extracting the knife from his chest. He didn't flinch. Didn't make a sound. Pushing the shirt firmly to the wound, I looked up at Denial.

Haidee was flailing around, screaming, desperately trying to get to

Arrow. My heart ached. Not just for her, but for my fallen demons as well.

My enforcers were suddenly there. The relief on their faces at seeing Haidee was almost palpable. Until they took in Arrow and then Secret.

“What the fuck?” Bone Breaker hissed.

“Get them home,” I said. “Clean them. Get them healing. I’ll finish this.”

Bone Breaker stared at Arrow for a minute before looking at Secret in the same way. He didn’t need to say what he was thinking. We were already too late.

“Just do it,” I whispered.

He nodded and bent to scoop Arrow up while Bounce took Secret. Orchid got to his feet and stared after the six of them, Denial bringing Haidee with them.

When they’d rode off, I dropped my attention to Shimmer. The one positive that had come from this was that Arrow killed the vice president. Finally. And with enough of us witnessing the bullshit, there wouldn’t be any backlash, either.

He not only attacked a defenseless civilian, he did so with the intent to kill her. As he had already made plain before I got to them. Not to mention all the other things Haidee reported.

“Are we done here?” Orchid asked, his gaze turning to the battlefield. And that’s just what it looked like. There were bodies everywhere.

The remnants of KOK Suckers and Dirty Demons were sitting or leaning where they fell. Standing and staring absently. Taking it all in as if they were looking at ghosts. Maybe they were. This had been a needless fight.

I glanced over at their president, the demon I killed first, recalling that he swore he didn’t have Haidee and that he knew nothing about her whereabouts. Guilt settled on my shoulders.

We’d been played. Not just me, but KOK Suckers too. In hindsight, I should have asked more questions. How could no one have seen or heard someone come and go with Haidee in tow? It wasn’t just unlikely; it was probably impossible. We weren’t a small group, and we’d been pretty well spread around the restaurant.

“Let’s go home,” I said and picked my way to the bikes. I had no words of solace or even apology. That would have to come at another time.

I was joined at the bikes with the dozen or so Dirty Demons left alive. Glancing at the bodies on the ground and then at the empty bikes, I shook my head. For right now, they’d be collateral. Penance. They hadn’t deserved this

attack.

“You can’t just leave them here,” Pegger said, glaring at the bodies on the ground as if they’d personally offended him.

“I can and am,” I said, tiredly.

“And Shimmer’s death? Our vice president?”

“You mean the demon who actually kidnapped Haidee?” I asked. Pegger’s eyes narrowed. “Or do you mean the demon who nearly killed Secret and Arrow while trying to kill Haidee?”

Pegger’s jaw tightened, his gaze moving towards where I’d left Shimmer’s body.

“What proof is there of that?” someone else asked.

“You mean other than my own eyes?” I snapped.

The demon flinched and sat back on his bike.

“This isn’t up for discussion. This was orchestrated by Shimmer. He didn’t just play me, he played all of you until he got his desired outcome. And quite frankly, come at me. I’m tired and pissed off. I’m in absolutely no fucking mood to deal with any of your mouths right now.”

No one argued.

“You’re also welcome to stay the fuck here,” I growled.

Sweet Love dropped a heavy hand on my forearm. “Lead us home, prez.”

With another glaring look at Pegger and whoever else was behind me, I turned and revved my engine before peeling out onto the street. KOK Suckers deserved an explanation. An apology, not that it would do anyone any good. But I didn’t have it in me right now. I needed to see that my demons were going to live.

The drive home was longer than I could handle. The only thoughts that plagued me were that Secret or Arrow would be dead by the time I returned.

I silently kicked myself, over and over again, that I let this happen. I let Shimmer get out of control. I should have said fuck the rules and dealt with him before it led to this disaster.

But I didn’t. And now there were dozens of demons dead. Far too many. And their blood was on my hands.

I barely made sure my bike was standing before I was off it and storming inside. It didn’t take me long to find the six demons I sent ahead. They were clean and huddled together on the bed, surrounding Secret and Arrow, with Haidee nestled between the two of them. A faint glow rose over them as they facilitated healing.

Orchid slipped behind me and sighed at the sight. He moved to the bathroom and a minute later, I heard the shower kick on. I watched the pile of demons for many long minutes, trying to think of anything I could do to help this.

“Secret could use some help,” Bounce said quietly. “I think he’s far too gone for this to work on its own.”

Pressing my lips together, I nodded and turned out of the room as Orchid left the bathroom. He climbed on the bed in nothing but his briefs and cuddled into the pile. Bounce opened his arms and tucked him in.

While I was covered in all manner of shit, I didn’t waste time hunting down antibiotics and whatever other drugs I could for Secret. He’d been lying there for far too long while we dealt with Shimmer. That might have been his plan all along. Delay us until Secret died of infection or bled out. Either had been equally possible. They still were.

Rounding the corner, I nearly ran into Pegger.

“Soul—”

I held my hand up, cutting him off. “I don’t have time right now. I need —”

His hand covered mine, and he squeezed. “I’m sorry. All I saw was our VP amidst a bunch of chaos. What do you need right now?”

Releasing a breath, I nodded. “Antibiotics. Pain meds. Anything to help them.”

Pegger nodded. “I’m on it. I’ll be right back.”

He turned and headed for the door. I watched him go, letting my shoulders fall. While my fingers still itched to do *something* to wake them up and make sure they’re healing properly, I needed to shower so I could be in there and not risk making it worse.

It was probably the quickest cleaning I’d ever done. My skin burned with how hard I scrubbed, which did nothing to placate the aching of my own injuries. A cursory glance said that they weren’t serious. All superficial wounds.

Pegger returned as I headed back to their room. “Okay,” he said as I approached, his eyes scanning the bottles he had in his hand. “This one is a really, really strong antibiotic, according to the pharmacist. It needs to be injected.” He held up the clear glass vial. “She said give him a third. I guessed at his body weight. We should see an improvement in his color and breathing within an hour or two. If that’s the case, we can move to the pills.”

He held up a second bottle. "One every eight hours. And we should make sure he takes them 'round the clock. Set an alarm. Then she gave us a few different pain meds, depending on how badly they're hurting when they wake up."

He set them all in my hands and looked at me. "What about you, prez? What do you need?"

I shook my head. "For this day to be over without losing any more of my demons," I answered, resting a hand on his shoulder. "Thank you for getting these."

Pegger nodded. "I'm sorry about earlier." He frowned. "I was... stressed. There were a lot of them and while they weren't overly skilled or strong, we were severely outnumbered."

"We were set up," I said. "Shimmer got at least one of the outcomes he was looking for."

Pegger nodded again, frowning. "He tried to kill Arrow and Secret?"

The way he looked in my eyes said that he really wanted me to deny it. To tell him that's not what happened. "I stopped him from killing Secret," I said. "He had every intention to and was just preparing the killing blow when I stopped him. And while the hit that took Arrow down wasn't intended for him, he is mortally injured, nonetheless."

He swallowed, looking away. I couldn't read the expression on his face. When he met my gaze, he nodded. "Let me know if you need anything else. I'm going to take a shower, then I'll be back to check in."

"Thanks."

Turning away, I slipped into the room, shutting the door behind me.

No one had moved since I poked my head in last. Most eyes remained closed as I moved to the bed. From the large emergency bag, I found a syringe and administered the liquid antibiotics to Secret. Since he and Arrow were still unconscious, I didn't try to feed them pain meds. They would have to wait.

I brought bottles of water to the bed and lined the tables on each side.

"Stop puttering," Denial said. "Get your ass up here."

Sighing, I crawled onto the bed and pressed my back to his. His eyes closed, and we settled in.

"Everything okay, out there?" Bone Breaker asked quietly.

"Yeah," I said, exhausted. "Pegger will check in shortly."

"Do we want that?" Orchid asked quietly.

“We were all stressed. He apologized. I believe him,” I answered. “And I know you do too. He’s always had my back.”

Orchid nodded. “Sorry. I’m just not feeling very trusting right now.”

“I know,” I answered, reaching over Denial to pat his arm gently. “I don’t think any of us are. But while we are down, we need to concentrate on healing those who are injured. And taking those left at face value. When we’re back on our feet, we’ll clean house for good. I’m done playing by the rules. That led us to a fucking massacre based on lies. No more. Things change starting now.”

“Here, here,” Bounce said quietly.

But for right now, I was just going to close my eyes for a bit.

Haidee



I was vaguely aware of people coming and going over what I presumed to be a couple days. While I wasn't significantly injured, the entire thing left me exhausted. I'd sustained the bump on my head, but it seemed to have cleared up quickly once I fell asleep in the demon healing bubble.

Voices came and went. I wasn't sure if I was waking and falling asleep during the same conversation or if I'd wake up briefly during each new one. I recognized most of the voices as the demons who have been taking care of me. Those I could trust.

There were a couple I wasn't quite so familiar with. One I'd identified as Sweet Love and I got the impression he was a big, cuddly demon. Another frequent visitor was Pegger, bringing food and drink and handling operations while Soul was with us.

Maybe that meant Soul had acquired injuries as well. I wasn't sure. Having not moved much since I laid down, I didn't take inventory of who was here. I focused all my energy on listening to Secret and Arrow breathing.

When I woke up today, we were alone in bed—me and the two injured demons. They'd been fast asleep every time I opened my eyes for even a brief time to eat or drink something, or use the bathroom. My back was to Arrow, pressed against his arms so I could feel him. That left me facing Secret.

His skin tone was much healthier now and I could see that the areas around his injuries weren't as sickly and angry as they had been. He was breathing easier too. But he was still unconscious.

Shifting, I perched myself on my elbow to look down at him. To study his

face for any signs of stress. But right now, he seemed to be sleeping peacefully. I brushed a few strands of hair from his forehead before leaning closer to him, pressing my forehead to his temple.

“Please wake up,” I whispered.

I didn’t receive a response, which wasn’t surprising. It would have shocked me if he did wake up.

Rolling over, I examined Arrow. The blanket had fallen low on his stomach, so I had a good view of the bandage over his chest. Gently, I brushed my finger against it. Bruising was most evident, but it looked better. From what I could see outside of the bandage.

When I’d first crawled into bed between the two demons, bandages covered their wounds, all I could see were the angry lines surrounding them and the way their skin looked sick and hot to the touch. I hadn’t actually seen their injuries. Which was fine. I didn’t need to see them. But they were both looking remarkably better.

I let my eyes travel to Arrow’s face and my breath caught. His eyes were open as he watched me, a small smile on his lips.

“Are you doctoring me, Haidee?” he asked quietly.

Tears sprang to my eyes. I mean, why wouldn’t they? I haven’t cried in like a day or something. But this was different. I was so filled with relief that I could barely contain it.

Mindful not to hurt him, I pressed my face to his. “You’re alive.” I meant to say ‘awake’ but apparently my fear that he was going to die was too raw.

Arrow’s arms came around me. “I’m alive,” he assured me and rolled so he was on his side, taking me into his arms. I hugged him tightly, keeping my arm away from his injury.

“I was so scared,” I whispered. “I thought—”

“I won’t leave you, sweetheart,” he interrupted. “Ever. I’m here.”

My breath caught at his words, tightening my chest. His fingers dug into my hair, scratching against my scalp soothingly. Sniffling, I pulled my face from his chest to look at him.

Arrow smiled and leaned in to kiss me. I closed my eyes when our mouths met and sighed. He was really here. I could feel him. Feel his heart beating against mine. The warmth of his skin—not burning hot with infection but warm like normal. Strong.

Just for a minute, I let my fear fall away and reveled in the feel of him. His presence. His affection. His kisses that were slow and claiming. Inviting.

He rolled me onto my back as his mouth fell away, dropping to my neck. His sigh was heavy as his weight settled on top of me. “Are you okay? Were you hurt?”

I shook my head. “Just hit my head, but it’s fine now. And Denial bandaged my leg. Are you? How do you feel?”

Arrow chuckled. “Like I’ve been stabbed.”

My arms tightened around his shoulders. My fingers digging into his hair and gripping him tightly. “I’m sorry. I—”

“You don’t have any reason to be, Haidee. If I’d seen the knife in his hand, I’d have accounted for it. But I missed it. My own carelessness.”

“You saved my life,” I said quietly.

He shifted, so he was looking down at me. “Whatever was going on, it was clear that our guys were a little distracted. I saw the look on Shimmer’s face. Irrational fury that he’d been beaten. His game was up. He blamed you and was determined to take you out, since there was no doubt that he’d be taken down soon. If he was going to suffer, so were you.”

“You saw all that in his face?” I asked, brow raised.

Arrow grinned, placing a quick kiss on my lips. “That, and bits of conversation I’d overheard here and there. In addition, I’ve made it my business to trail Shimmer at every turn once I realized he was dead set to sell you.”

“You learned a lot,” I said.

He nodded, rubbing his face against mine for a minute before resting his head as if it were heavy. “I did, but I was keeping it to myself until I had something solid. Apparently, I missed his solid plans. Or he never spoke them aloud. He was a paranoid fucker, so I wouldn’t doubt if they were in his head alone.”

“I shouldn’t have gone to the bathroom by myself,” I said.

His lips pressed gently to my neck. “You will be safe, Haidee. Shimmer’s gone now. And I’m sure Soul will take care of whatever cronies are left. You’ll be safe, sweetheart.”

I nodded, though I wasn’t sure if I believed it. Arrow shifted on top of me and I felt the way his body moved against mine. And what was pressed against me between my legs. My cheeks heated as I gripped him tighter.

“Sorry,” he murmured, chuckling. “Clearly being unconscious for a while makes my body think it’s appropriate right now to be aroused.”

The sheepishness in his voice made me smile, and I turned my face into

the side of his head. "It's okay."

"I can move. I'm too heavy to be lying on top of you anyway." He pressed a kiss to my neck again. "I just wanted to be as close as I could get. I needed to feel that you're whole and okay."

"I am. To both. And I don't mind you on top of me. I like your weight."

His grin against my sensitive skin sent chills down my body. "Yeah?"

I nodded. "I learned something when we were at the party run, or whatever it was."

"What's that?" he asked.

"Well, besides confirming that my own fear makes me dumb and oblivious, I learned that—that sex doesn't have to be a bad thing."

He was still for a minute before he picked his head up to look down at me. His brow raised. "No?"

"You think it is?" I asked, surprised.

Arrow laughed, shaking his head. "No, Haidee. I love sex. I'm surprised that you learned something at that party to counter your years of abuse."

"Oh, well..." My cheeks heated. "I ran inside and threw open a door before shutting and locking it behind me."

"What scared you?" he asked, eyes narrowed.

I shrugged. "Just Shimmer's people talking about wanting to get rid of me still. I overheard some of them telling the other club about it is all. So I ran, wanting to get away from it."

"You should have found me. Or Soul or someone," he said, frowning.

"Yes, yes. Hindsight." He smirked, taking the hint that this wasn't the point of me bringing it up. "Anyway, the room I ran into was occupied by Orchid and Bounce."

Arrow winced. "Oh, no."

I smiled, my cheeks heating. "At first, I was even more terrified because Orchid was tied up and gagged."

"Fuck's sake," he muttered, laughing under his breath and shaking his head.

"It's okay. Bounce untied him immediately and Orchid assured me it was all consensual. That he liked it. Without going into it too much, I uh, I joined them. Because I could see that it was enjoyable for both of them and I just thought... is that a thing? Is it possible? I wanted to know. And they let me be in control of myself and stop if I wanted to."

Arrow's smile was soft. He trailed his fingers over my face. "And your

conclusion?”

“That it can feel good for me too,” I said quietly. “I guess my point in telling you this is that, well, if you wanted to... I don’t... I mean, I’m not—”

With a grin still on his lips as he listened to me flutter, Arrow stopped my rambling with his mouth to mine for a minute. “Yes, but not now. Not like this.”

“But we can. You want to. I’m just saying—”

“Let me tell you a thing about a dick. It has a fucking mind of its own and will harden for no fucking reason.” I laughed, my cheeks hot. He kissed me again. “Trust me when I tell you, now is not the time. Yes, I want to. I’m so fucking thrilled that you trust me enough to share that with me. After all you’ve been through, I’d have accepted if you never wanted sex. I was already ready to make that my life. You’re entirely worth it. But that you trust me with all of you, to take care of you and make you feel good, I can’t tell you what that means to me.”

I smiled, my heart fluttering in my chest.

The door cracked open, and we turned our heads to look. I could just make out Soul, but he paused before coming in. A quiet conversation in the hall made us listen.

“What do they want?” Soul asked.

“To talk about what happened,” someone answered, a voice I didn’t recognize. “Soul, all of their executives are dead. There are barely a couple handfuls left. I think they want to make peace.”

Soul was quiet for a minute. He let out a sigh. “I don’t know. I’m definitely not in the mood to deal with being set up.”

“All that’s left is blue and green blood. There’s no threat to you. And they didn’t just ask for you. They asked for our club. A meeting.”

“Look deeper into it. Before I agree, let’s make sure they’re not partnering with another club as an act of retribution. Not that I’d blame them for it, but I’ve got bigger things to worry about,” Soul said.

“I’ll find out.”

“Take Sweet Love with you,” Soul said.

There was hesitation before assent came. “Will do, prez.”

Footsteps moved down the hall. The door swayed slightly, and then Soul walked into the room. He didn’t look at the bed as he stepped inside, closing the door behind him while he wiped a tired hand over his face. He paused where he was and took a breath before picking his head up.

A smile broke out. “Good to see you’re feeling better, Arrow.”

“Much,” Arrow said. “Still exhausted and sore, but I’m feeling good.”

Soul sighed again as he got closer. Resting a hand on Arrow’s shoulder, he studied his face. “Need some pain meds?”

“We have some?” Arrow asked.

Soul chuckled. “Yep. A few different kinds.”

Arrow thought about it before shaking his head. “Nah. I think I’m alright, actually.”

Soul looked over us, to where Secret was still asleep. His lips pressed into a line. “Now if only Secret would wake up.”

I turned to look at him, my gut twisting in worry. He was peaceful and breathing steadily. So, there was still a good outlook. For now, anyway. I really hoped nothing would change for the worse.

Sadist Soul



I was incredibly wary of those left. Roughly half were demons I *knew* supported Shimmer. Whether by their actions in front of me and/or vocalization, or because I've seen it within the hidden camera feeds. Some had surprised me. Others had not.

At the moment, I didn't have the mental capacity to deal with them, this meeting KOK Suckers was asking for, and my injured demons. Right now, my sole priority was healing Secret. It's been four days now, and he still hasn't stirred.

It was a relief to see Arrow wake up. And that he felt good enough to roll himself on top of Haidee was fucking amazing. I could see the strain on his face and knew he was in pain. Hopefully, I could convince him to take some pain relievers at some point, but I'd take the victory that he'd pulled through the stab wound.

Those moments, that entire encounter, still ran through my mind every time I closed my eyes. It's still so fresh. My fury at seeing Shimmer nearly kill Secret. The indignation that he then outright lied to my face so many times he couldn't keep his lies straight. Then the fucking relief when Haidee walked out alive.

It was her sudden presence that distracted us all and allowed the next few moments to happen. She said her piece. Countered all of Shimmer's bullshit with the truth. I was so consumed by her presence and focused on the steadiness of her voice even as she trembled, that I wasn't paying close enough attention to Shimmer.

Since Denial hadn't reacted in time, I assumed he was in the same state.

Shimmer's unexpected and quick lunge at Haidee had only acted as another shock that I was slow to process. Denial moving pulled me from that moment, but I was already filled with dread, knowing that those precious few seconds were all it would take for Shimmer to kill her and have gotten the outcome he desired.

And then Arrow was just... there. Out of nowhere, he became the obstacle that took the killing blow meant for Haidee. I swear, I could almost feel the knife slam into his chest. I choked, tears stinging my eyes. Everything felt suspended for one horrific moment that stretched on and on when it was probably just a matter of seconds.

Shimmer was dead. Something I couldn't find solace or relief in at the moment because the glowing purple in Arrow's eyes had faded quickly as his life left him. He probably should have died right then. I'm still not sure what kept him alive.

I shook the thoughts from my head and sat forward at my desk. That was only the fourth time today that I relived it. No big deal. Scrubbing both my hands over my face, I tried to rub away the fatigue with the friction of my skin. When that didn't work, I gripped my hair tightly before sticking it in an elastic behind my head.

The knock on my door was a welcomed distraction. Sitting back, I called them in. Sweet Love, Pegger, and Denial stepped into my office. Denial remained on his feet, standing off to the side while the other two took the chairs in front of me.

"It's legit," Sweet Love said. "KOK Suckers would like to talk."

"What's their goal?" I asked, hearing how tired my voice sounded.

"Last week's events. Clear the air. Set it straight that they never took Haidee."

Closing my eyes, I nodded. "Did you tell them we already know that?"

"Not my place, prez," Sweet Love said. "But I think they want to clear the air. No more bad blood between us."

Pegger snorted. "Not that it would matter. They're stripped down to nothing right now. Not a threat in any way."

Sweet Love looked at him, frowning. "I heard the same words you did, so unless you're adding shit to what they said, there was no indication that they were making a threat."

"Not what I meant," Pegger said, shaking his head. "We're the threat to them and their territory. I think they just want to make a deal of peace until

they can get back on their feet.”

“I’d rather have peace, period,” I said. Pegger and Sweet Love nodded. “There are better things to spend our time doing outside of constantly fighting with other clubs. Yes, we need to make sure the surrounding clubs understand that Ash Hollow is ours and that we’re going to enforce the city limits and its boundaries. But they also need to know that for the foreseeable future, we’re not interested in taking their territory.”

“Good idea,” Pegger said. “I think KOK Sucks and Maple Roots will appreciate that.”

“I don’t much care what they appreciate. We have issues at home that need to be addressed. We need to become a better club than the fuckshow we’ve been. As soon as Secret’s awake, I’m cleaning out the dead weight and we’re starting new. If that means we need to rewrite some fucking rules so my hands aren’t tied with another idiot like Shimmer, then so be it.”

Pegger grinned. “I never understood how he got away with the shit he did.”

“Because he was a bully who promised shit he could never deliver on,” Sweet Love said. “But he talked a smooth game. He was a powerful enough demon to be considered a threat. And he knew the rules.”

“Those Secret allowed him to know,” Pegger interjected, brow raised.

I smiled. “Yes. Secret had a part in leading Shimmer into a sense of false security because he knew that my hands were tied unless he royally fucked up. He was staging all kinds of treachery. And while he liked to preach that it was for the good and growth of Dirty Demons, we all knew it for what it was.”

“A power play,” Pegger said.

Nodding, I steepled my fingers with my elbows on the arms of my chair. “Yes. Now, back to KOK Suckers. Thoughts?”

“No harm in it,” Sweet Love said. “We can arrange to cart our bodies home and the bikes while there. We can offer help to clean up the bloody mess since it hasn’t rained and I’m sure it smells like a slaughterhouse outside their clubhouse.”

I nodded.

“We can leave everyone here,” Pegger said. “So you’re not worried about Secret and Arrow.”

“Not everyone,” Sweet Love said. “But the enforcers. Denial. You could spare them. Their force isn’t needed for this meeting.”

“Yeah, though I’d really rather wait until Secret is awake. Him being unconscious still is too distracting for me.”

“Then wait,” Pegger said, shrugging. “Who are they to argue?”

“Except we owe them an apology,” Sweet Love said. “More than that, really. We killed a lot of demons under false pretenses. Under outright lies. For the banner we came in under, they were innocent of.”

“Though they did want to purchase Haidee,” Pegger said.

Sweet Love nodded. “They did. And while we may have our own moral code about that, we’re not the innocent, squeaky clean demons who have any place to judge their illegal activities.”

Pegger laughed. “Yeah, alright. Fine.”

While the conversation paused for a minute, I considered the benefits of getting this meeting done now as opposed to letting it hang over our heads for a later time. It wasn’t just an apology and picking up the trash we left behind. It would only be right to offer something in return as a token of our guilt.

I wasn’t willing to give up any of Ash Hollow. Perhaps I could just let them have Sticks and Bones’ territory without challenge from Dirty Demons. It’s not like we had the numbers to enforce that territory now that we were stripped down to a very small core. And it would be made smaller once I weeded out the rest of the bad blood.

“How is she?”

Distracted from my thoughts, I blinked blankly at Pegger. “What?”

He grinned. “Haidee. How is she? She’s been through hell these last weeks.”

“Her entire fucking life,” Denial muttered from the corner. Pegger glanced back at him, his brows puckered in confusion before he faced me again.

I nodded. “She’s alright. Since she was out of most of the fight and only had several run-ins with Shimmer, she managed to come out the other end, mostly unscathed. Physically anyway.”

Pegger frowned. “That’s good, at least.”

“She’ll be fine,” Sweet Love said, resting a big hand on Pegger’s shoulder and smiling at me. “The girl is surprisingly strong and resilient.”

Pegger relaxed, a smile in place again.

“We’ll head out tomorrow. Let’s make it neutral ground. Maybe the restaurant where Shimmer dumped Haidee down a hole. I’d like to see where the hole is,” I said.

“A hole?” Pegger asked.

I nodded absently. “There are catacombs spider webbing under the demon states filled with untamed. He dropped her into one. I’m assuming, like most of our population, Shimmer viewed the untamed as a superstition. A childhood ghost story meant to give you the creeps. But as a demon who can drain away your conscience and leave nothing but an untamed in its place, I knew them to be real; even having never seen one I didn’t actually create. Haidee confirmed they’re there. And I’d like to make sure that hole is sealed so we don’t have an untamed pandemic on our hands.”

Pegger shuddered. “Yeah, let’s do that.”

Yep. Honestly, that would be the last thing we needed. A war with those that are fearless, pain-retardant, and stupidly difficult to kill.

Orehid



Secret finally woke up six days after the fight with KOK Suckers. I knew about the meeting they'd asked for with us and that Soul pushed off until he knew for certain that Secret was going to live. I didn't blame him for his hesitance in not wanting to leave when one of his club members was so severely injured.

I was so relieved when I walked in that morning to see him propped up on his pillows and talking to Arrow and Haidee that I almost let some tears fall. Almost.

While Secret and I weren't the best of friends, I liked him. He was a nice guy, despite being rather crude and inappropriate when he was in a mood. But like most demons, that's just how things go. I can also be rather sensitive and dramatic.

He grinned at me when he saw me standing in the door. Taking that as an invitation, I crawled onto the bed and lay next to him, using his body and hip as a pillow. Secret chuckled, his fingers going to my hair.

"Miss me?" he asked. His voice was raspy, probably from not being used in nearly a week.

"You know, I may hate you some days, but it was some sick kind of torture watching you nearly die in my hands," I muttered.

His fingers stilled a minute before he gently moved them again. I could feel his exhaustion. How much energy it took for him to do that alone. "Thanks for being there," he said. "Not sure I deserved your concern."

I pinched his leg. "I forgive your crude remarks. Though, I don't know why you even say them since you don't like dick."

He laughed quietly. "Because some people piss me off and I take it out on others. You know how it goes."

Snorting, I closed my eyes, and the quiet settled around us. After a few minutes, I sat up to look at him. The bruises staining his body. Bandages covering his skin.

"You're going to ask me one of two things," he said, smirking. "Whether I'm alright or how I'm feeling. The answer to both is that I'm feeling fine."

"Hm," I said, letting my eyelids droop before swinging my attention to where Arrow was wrapped as big spoon around Haidee, both of them facing this direction. "And you?" I asked Arrow.

"I'm good," he said. "Breathing still hurts. I think my lung is still a little sore."

I nodded. "Hungry?" Shifting my gaze to look at Secret so he knew I was including him in these inquiries too. "Thirsty?"

"Pegger is already getting us lunch," Arrow said.

Sighing, I lay down again and Secret's hand went back to my hair. The silence was welcome and relaxing. It felt new and comfortable. Knowing that Shimmer was dead left the clubhouse in a much calmer state.

That's not to say that there weren't still issues to be dealt with. There were still at least six of his cronies hanging about. But without a leader, it wouldn't be long before they dispersed, were disposed of, or chilled the fuck out. Already, they were losing steam when they had no one to lead the way and no one to listen to their mindless prattle about stupid shit that Shimmer had somehow convinced them was important.

The door opened, and Pegger stepped inside with a tray. He grinned at me when I looked up. "Good thing I brought enough for half a dozen demons," he said.

I gave him a tired smile and moved to help arrange the tray between Secret, Haidee, and Arrow. He leaned against the edge of the bed when he was done, and we all had sandwiches in hand. Haidee handed him one, and he grinned at her. "Thank you, lovely."

We weren't through the sandwiches and chips when Soul joined us with Bounce, Bone Breaker, and Denial. Bounce climbed onto the bed behind me, wrapping his arms around me and kissing the side of my neck. I smiled, closing my eyes as I finished chewing.

"When we're done here, we're heading to KOK Suckers," Soul said.

I looked at him wearily. He wasn't looking at any one place in particular.

It was written all over his face, plain as demon fire that he didn't want to do it. He didn't want to go. "Denial, Bounce, and Bone Breaker will stay with you three." He looked at Haidee, Secret, and Arrow. "The rest of us will head out."

Leaving the strongest behind to defend the injured should anything go down. Nothing should. No one was going to bother us. What good was our clubhouse right now?

"Got it," I said, chewing my sandwich a little slower.

"It won't be a long meeting," Bounce assured me. "I think both parties need to say their piece and be done with it."

I nodded, shrugging. "Whatever is needed. I can go wherever."

He kissed my cheek. The remaining sandwiches were spread around and we ate in comfortable silence again. I think we were all thinking about the upcoming meeting. Not with any kind of concern but in reluctance to do so. We were badly crippled right now and in no position to be split up. While this was necessary, it wasn't an immediate concern. Really, I didn't know why Soul didn't just say 'later' and wash his hands of it.

Probably because he wanted to get it out of the way and not waste any more time on KOK Suckers. Then he could focus all his attention inward. Healing our club. Rebuilding. Securing the city.

We left a short while later. With the six demons left behind, we had sixteen heading out toward KOK Suckers. We were meeting at the restaurant where Shimmer stuffed Haidee in a hole. I didn't want to go back there. It was too frustrating. Infuriating. We'd been had in this parking lot.

The ride wasn't long enough and yet far too long at the same time. There was no meandering about to get there, taking scenic routes and stopping at fun places that Sweet Love planned ahead of time. A straight route took us there in less than half an hour as we drove through alleys and parking lots, parks, and a footbridge over a creek that we shouldn't have driven over.

But we needed to get there and back. Focus all our energy at home.

We pulled in just as they did. I counted twenty bikes and as I looked at the demons, I knew that the strongest one was an orange-eyed demon. A single one. Not a threat to our club at all. We really tore them down. Yes, we also lost a lot of demons in the process, but we lost the weaker ones while they lost what strong few they had.

Not that the weaker demons are any less valuable. I'm a weak demon with a green demon soul. Nothing special. Because my power is defensive in

nature, my survival rate in fights is higher.

I didn't recognize the demons left in KOK Suckers. A couple, presumably the new president and vice president, stepped forward to meet Shimmer and Sweet Love. I hadn't heard that Sweet Love had moved into vice president, but he'd be a great one.

The four of them shook hands, and I listened half-heartedly as they exchanged pleasantries before Soul got tired of it and started in.

"I'm sorry. *We're* sorry," Soul said. "I know no amount of apologizing is going to resurrect the demons we killed of yours, as it won't bring back our losses either. Because my hands were tied and I was abiding by rules that didn't allow me to deal with the bad egg within my ranks, a lot of demons died. Hindsight is what it is, and I can't change that. I am sorry."

The demon who I still didn't know his name nodded. "We're sorry as well. And we want you to know, Sadist Soul, that while we had bid on your open lot, we were completely prepared and intending to make good on the transaction. We wouldn't steal from you, yours, or any other club. Despite that we may not be upstanding citizens, we're not those kinds of demons."

"That's the thing," Soul said, "she was never up for sale."

The new president looked at him with surprise. "Really? I was sure the voice on the other end of the calls I heard was yours."

Soul frowned. "I explicitly forbade the notion of selling Haidee," he said with a growl. "We were in the middle of investigating who had disregarded my command and done so behind my back when this whole thing went down."

He nodded slowly, biting the inside of his lip. "I'm sorry, Soul. We didn't know this was going on behind your back." He hesitated, and Soul gave a bitter laugh.

"I didn't expect you did, Harvest. I believe the source of the animosity all around has been eliminated. So the confusion should stop. I'm sorry that you were their target too."

Harvest nodded his head again. "Why were we his target?"

Soul laughed and tipped his head up to the sky. "If only I knew why he did the stupid shit he did. My guess is that he wanted something you had. Territory, perhaps. I really don't know. Shimmer was a loose cannon. But as I said, we have some fucked up rules that tied my hands. Rules I intend to rewrite so that this sort of bullshit never happens again."

"And Haidee? Did you find her?"

Soul nodded. “We did. She was at your club.” Harvest opened his mouth to defend them, but Soul raised his hand to stop him. “She already said it wasn’t you. It was Shimmer, all along. He orchestrated the entire thing. His downfall was that he didn’t anticipate Haidee finding her way out of the catacombs, conveniently right across from your clubhouse.”

That news made Harvest look wary. “Across from our clubhouse, you say?”

Soul chuckled. “I’ll get her to show me where in a few weeks so you can seal the door. Which you’re going to want to do. She was chased by untamed.”

Harvest shuddered. “Thanks,” he muttered, looking at the paled demon to his right.

I listened absently to them talk as I frowned. My mind kept going back to what Harvest said about swearing it was Soul who called them to sell Haidee. I knew for a fucking fact that Soul had no intent to sell her. Trafficking has come up several times as a means to make money. To control some of the dark market sales within the demon states instead of keeping our business solely within Ash Hollow.

For as long as I’ve known Soul, he’d been adamantly against selling people. Killing them for hire, he was considering. Torturing for the right price, sure. Okay. But selling them? That’s where he drew the line. I was sure it was because he would only get into that market if he vetted each contract first. Making sure the target on the other end was dirty.

Demons have moral codes too.

So then, how could someone fake sounding like Soul? Who had done so? My internal musing was interrupted when Soul’s hard voice broke into my thoughts.

“What do you mean you didn’t ask for this meeting?” Soul said, his voice low. My spine stiffened and my eyes widened.

Shimmer is dead. I reminded myself of that several times. He’s dead. He couldn’t have set this up from beyond the grave.

Harvest rubbed his eyes. “Fucking hell. Again, it sounded like you on the phone. I thought you called the meeting. I thought every time we spoke, it was you.”

Soul’s muscles tensed as he turned his pinking eyes to Sweet Love. Someone can make their voice sound like Soul.

The answer was just there. A memory. Something that I needed to recall.

Just out of reach.

I didn't get a chance to figure it out as an explosion shook the ground in the distance. We all spun around to look for the source. In the distance was a black cloud of smoke rising into the air.

Right about where our clubhouse would be. My stomach dropped. Everyone I loved was inside our clubhouse.

Haidee



Arrow and Secret spend a lot of time asleep. While I knew it was necessary because they'd been through so much, their bodies were still healing; it made me worry every time they closed their eyes. Fear that their eyes wouldn't open again.

So I tried to sleep when they did. Just so I wouldn't have to spend those hours working myself into a panic. It didn't always work though, because I couldn't force myself to sleep as often as they were. But I'd lay between them with their hard bodies pressed tightly to mine and I could feel both of their hearts beat. Assuring me that they were alive.

I didn't leave the room we'd been put in. It's not that I didn't think I wasn't allowed to. And especially now, when everyone was out of the clubhouse at a meeting outside of the city, it was probably the opportune time to look around.

But outside of this room felt too... daunting. Like I didn't belong there. I wasn't a part of this. As I thought about it, because I had nothing better to do than stay lost in my thoughts, I felt like a visitor. Temporary.

Shimmer was dead. I saw that with my own eyes, even if I didn't look at him because of being concerned about Arrow. But I was sure he was dead. I should feel safe now. He was the threat. He was the demon organizing my sale. With him dead, it should have all ended. It *did* all end.

Yet, I couldn't bring myself to leave the room.

Since it wasn't pressing that I did, I didn't spend a lot of time trying to convince myself to walk around the clubhouse. But after the club left and my two injured demons fell back asleep, when I'd had enough of all the errant

thoughts spinning in my head, I slipped out of bed and into the attached bathroom.

I took a long, hot shower, standing under the relaxing spray for many long minutes after I cleaned. Taking deep breaths, I imagined that with the water slipping down the drain, so was the life I led before this.

I could let go of the fear. The need to fight and be the strong badass I read about. Release the unease I saw whenever I met someone new. I let all the worries about tomorrow fall away with the water running off my skin, shedding a layer and letting myself be raw and new.

When I got out, I tried to keep that image in my head as I stepped back into the room. Bounce and Bone Breaker were there now, sitting on the floor against the side of the bed. I didn't often see them wrapped around each other, but it was clear when I walked in on them that they were deeply connected. They were possessed demons.

It made my heart swell with longing. To be loved by someone so much, to trust them so implicitly, that you allow them to truly become a part of your makeup.

Finding the demon that you belonged to in such a way was every demon's dream. Their fairy tale. It's the one thing I tried to hang onto all those dark, terrifying nights when I was abused. Somewhere in the world was the demon I'd share that connection with. That I'd want a possession with.

Bounce looked up and smiled. He was at Bone Breaker's side, but wrapped slightly around him, so Bone Breaker was leaning against his chest as they spoke quietly.

"Hey, hunny. You okay?" Bounce asked.

I nodded. "Just wanted to get clean."

He nodded and held his hand out to me. I let him pull me onto their laps and both big demons cuddled against my body. Basically swallowing me and sheltering me from the outside world.

"They're going to be okay," Bounce said. "You know that, right?"

"Yeah," I said and tried to put some conviction in my voice. "I know they will be. I know they're still healing."

"They are," Bone Breaker said. "But they're strong. They'll be good as new soon enough."

"Then what?" I asked.

"Then we carry on but do so with lighter hearts and less stress," Bounce said. "Shimmer is dead. We all saw it. He was the mastermind behind the

bullshit. And most of his cronies are dead as well. It's only up from here."

I nodded. The lightness I wanted to feel still weighed on me. Like something hung over my head. "What about the... people who put bids on me?" I whispered.

"They're not a concern. You're not for sale," Bone Breaker said, his voice hard. "And I'm sure Soul will make it known that we had a treasonous asshole in our ranks that we've eliminated. It'll be fine."

I believed him. I did. But something about this sat uneasily with me. Probably because I've never been safe. And every time I began to feel secure in my surroundings here, that bubble had popped. Over and over again.

It stood to reason that it shouldn't anymore. If Shimmer was the choreographer behind everything working against me, and he's dead, then I was safe now. Right?!

We sat quietly for a while. I enjoyed being in their arms and not having to think. At least when I had both enforcers with me, I *did* feel safe. It was hard not to.

They slipped from the room after a while and I sat in the window, looking out at the city. I didn't have a far view because there were buildings in the way and I wasn't sure what direction I was looking in, but it was nice to see people moving about their business. Living their lives.

I wasn't facing the back where all the apartments were. And since I couldn't see the wide driveway, I had to assume I was looking out one of the side windows. There was a tall building just off to the right that I watched people move in and out of quickly. Always in a hurry. Needing to be somewhere.

There was also what looked like a coffee shop across the street. People walked in empty-handed and came out with steaming cups and sometimes white paper bags. One demon even had three trays stacked full of drinks that he balanced as he navigated the crowded sidewalks.

A park I could just barely glimpse was beyond the tall building. Every now and then, I could see someone jogging. A dog running.

This was what life looked like. This was what it looked like to live.

The door opened again, and I shifted. Denial studied Arrow and Secret in bed before coming to sit with me at the window. His knees brushed mine. The emptiness and cold of his eyes were different. Because I'd see how he truly looks when he's murderous. The way he looked at Shimmer still haunts my dreams. He was probably one of the most terrifying demons I'd ever met.

But with that complete abandon missing from his gaze, while still chilling, it was also a little comforting in the familiarity of it. In the drawn expression on his face, still blank and unreadable, but there was a bit of life there. Some color.

“What’re you watching?” he asked.

At least his voice had varying tones again. It made the slight hammer of my heart when he sat next to me calm. “Nothing really,” I said. “Just observing what people do all day.”

His hand brushed my knee, and I looked at him again. With such a frozen exterior, you almost think that his touch should be cold, too. Like ice. But he was warm. Comforting. “You can do anything you want, Haidee. See whatever you want. We’ll make sure that happens.”

I smiled and bowed my head. His fingers skimmed my cheek as he pushed strands of hair behind my ear and I looked up at him again. Denial licked his lips and scooted a little closer. “We’re going to keep you safe. I know that maybe we’ve broken that trust given the events of the last week, but we *will* keep you safe, Haidee.”

“You didn’t break my trust,” I said, settling my hand over his. “What happened wasn’t in your control.”

Denial sighed and looked outside. “Rules are supposed to be to keep people safe. To prevent tyranny and other nastiness within a place. I’d really like to know who thought through some of the rules and why. Not being able to take action against Shimmer was fucking shit.”

They never shared their rules with me. I only knew that they often cursed them where Shimmer was concerned.

“It’s still not your fault,” I said. “You didn’t condone his actions in anything that he did.”

He didn’t answer. I watched as his neutral face remained motionless for several minutes. His only movement was that his hand moved slightly against his thigh. Finally, he looked at me with a sigh. “Can I hold you?”

His question surprised me and he smirked a little at how wide my eyes were. My mouth was even slightly open. With a light burn on my cheeks, I nodded.

Denial had a way of moving quickly. He was just there, his hands on my hips to pull me onto his lap, and before I could take the next breath, I was straddling him. I flushed further as he bent his knees under me, making my head rise higher than his. Making me sit on his hips instead of his legs.

He looked at me, watching me. I tried to see through his expression, but he didn't let me in. It didn't falter as he stared at everything he could see in my too-open features.

"You don't have to fear me," he said. "I know I can be off-putting, but I won't ever hurt you, Haidee."

"I know." My words came out as a whisper. My mind flashed to when I was on top of Orchid and my cheeks burned hotly. It was hard not to squirm.

His fingers brushed my cheek, trailed down my neck and over my collarbone. Down my arm and onto my waist. His eyes never left mine.

With my hands firmly on his chest bracing myself from giving into gravity and falling onto him, I bit my lip and waited for him to say something else. Anything else. Conversation of any kind. I welcomed it. Because all I could picture in my mind was that moment with Orchid and Bounce and the way my body heated in a similar fashion to what was beginning to happen.

Denial sat up. I nearly lost my balance as the movement had me almost falling onto my back. A burst of nervous, startled laughter broke free as I grabbed his shoulders. When Denial righted me, he was smirking again.

Before either of us could speak, our mouths were together. I didn't know which of us moved, but he was suddenly kissing me. It wasn't like Arrow's kiss. While Arrow didn't hold back how much he wanted me, there was a bit of care in it. Not wanting to push me.

And the soft brushes of lips I'd shared with Soul, Bounce, and Bone Breaker were just light promises of a future. An offering.

Denial was none of those things with his mouth on mine. It was hot fire. Demanding control of me. Requiring submission to his mouth. The way his tongue moved inside me was a high I didn't understand.

While the whole thing together should have sent me back into fight-or-flight mode, it didn't. Because while his mouth ordered me to do as he wanted, that command wasn't harsh. It wasn't at my own detriment but as a means to care for me. And while his hands on me were firm, he held me close but allowed me space if I needed it. The embrace was intimate. His arms were hard and steadfast around me, but it was also soft and sweet.

And then a sound that was so loud that it felt like my eardrums had exploded shook the house with such violence that we tumbled to the ground. The window we'd been sitting in splintered before shattering. Denial dragged me under him just before the glass came down and shielded me from the blast. I looked up in time to see the door fly open and another blast rang out.

This one was just as loud, but also blinded me.

Denial flew off my back and slammed into the wall. I screamed again, spinning around to look for him. His entire right side was covered in blood and flayed open.

The scream that filled the room was filled with so much fear, but I could barely see anything other than Denial.

Haidee



His mouth hung open slightly, as if he were going to say something. He was slouched against the wall and though his eyes were open, the vacancy in them wasn't the same as it usually was. There'd always been life there, even if it was cold and unfeeling.

I stumbled through the glass shards to get to him, putting my bloody hands on either side of his face. "Denial!" I screamed. "No, no. Please, no."

His chest under my weight rose slightly, and a sob broke out of me. He was alive, but barely. I didn't know what to do.

"Haidee," Soul said, his voice sharp.

Jumping, I spun around to see his shadow in the door. I couldn't see him clearly through the dust in the room and my own fear. Then he disappeared as a scuffle in the hall took his attention. Staring wide-eyed, I could hear the struggle. A door slammed. Someone was hit and fell to the ground.

I crowded in on Denial, not sure if I was trying to protect him or if I was willing him to wake up to protect me.

Then Soul was back. "Let's go, Haidee. I need to get you to safety."

There was a moment's hesitation as I got to my feet and looked down at Denial. I'm just supposed to leave him here like this? Soul was going to leave him to die? My gaze flickered over to the bed where both demons were out cold. They almost looked like they'd been drugged.

My heart raced as I dropped my gaze to Denial again. Where were Bounce and Bone Breaker?

"Now, Haidee. Hurry," Soul said, sounding impatient.

I shuffled a few feet to the door but then decided not to go toward him. Something was wrong. He wouldn't just... this wasn't right. Looking frantically around the room, I tried to spot anything I could use as a weapon.

That was my mistake. Turning my back on Soul.

His heavy footsteps crossed the room to me and I didn't have time to get away before his hand curled roughly in my hair, yanking me toward the door. "I said we're leaving," the voice that was no longer Soul's growled.

I screamed as I fought against him, every yank of my body sent piercing pain through my head. His grip was strong as he dragged me down the hall to the stairs. He said nothing, and held me at such an angle that I couldn't see him either. I couldn't see his face.

We passed Bone Breaker on the stairs, and my heart caught in my throat.

"You've caused far too many issues here," the demon said as he gave me another harsh pull. Bone Breaker's eyes were closed. There was a bloody gash on his head, but it wasn't bleeding too much. His chest rose and fell, so I knew he was alive. "Once you're gone, we can get back to business. But you're far too much of a distraction."

When we hit the second floor landing, I tried again to pull away. Gripping the railing, I braced myself for the pain to sear through my scalp when he continued to move. It didn't disappoint and tears flooded my eyes. But his hand loosened.

He spun around and came at me again. Instead of trying to run, I lashed out, digging my fingers into his face. His growl was that of an animal, and I flinched when his hand came across my cheek roughly in a slap so hard that my head instantly began pounding.

I whimpered and fell back. I'd seen his face, though. He stepped forward again, jaw hard and eyes blazing with fury. "Shimmer was right. There's only one place in this world for you."

Pegger's hand wrapped around my neck and yanked me forward. With a grip tight enough that he slowed my airflow, I could only kick at him weakly.

"I really hope they break you," Pegger hissed. "Tie you up and fuck you until you can't stand. Until you can't see. Until you can't do anything but lay there, limp."

I stumbled down the stairs, my feet not remaining under me at all. Part of it was me trying to make this as difficult as possible. To stall in hopes that someone would catch him. Stop him.

"Maybe I'll make a clause to this deal so I can fucking watch," he

snarled.

My knee hit the banister, and I cried out, once again weakly trying to break free. The door Pegger dragged me to was at the side of the house. There was a van waiting with demons I didn't recognize.

Pegger picked me up and tossed me into the back. I hit the hard, uneven metal floor and skidded as I tumbled inside. My head hit the tire well, making me whimper again.

Barely able to pick myself up and look at him through the mess of my hair. Pegger's expression was cruel and angry. There were three other demons with him, faces I don't recognize.

"Fuck her up," Pegger said. "She's going to need a really good beating to silence her, followed by a lesson in obedience to take the fight out of her, and a solid reminder of where her place is."

"Done," one of the demons said, a nasty smile on his face. I knew that look. It'd been a little while at this point, but I knew that look. I knew what came next.

In a last ditch effort to escape, knowing that I wasn't going to be able to, with every effort I could muster, I launched myself at them with a shrill scream. Pegger's hand landed harshly on my face, stopping me like I ran into a wall. And then I was hit with a blow to the stomach that had me falling backwards.

I was so dazed, curled in on myself to try to alleviate the pain, that I barely registered their dark laughter and the doors swinging shut. The back of the van became dark as night. I squeezed my eyes shut against the sting of tears.

I'd rather die than be put back into this life. I can't live like this again. There was no way I could survive being beaten and raped every day until they're bored of me and sell me to someone new. I can't do this.

The van shook again, then two doors shut. The engine came to life. And we were moving.

There was no way for me to get out of this. I curled in tighter and thought of the faces of the demons I'd just been stolen from. I'd found them again once. It was far too much to expect to escape and find my way back to them a second time. Not when I had actual jailers this time.

The story of the cage fighter who found her feline shifter mates played out in my mind for a while. I imagined them and how she'd somehow find her way out of this. Maybe she'd shift and tear open the side of the van.

She'd attack her captors and tear them to pieces. And then her mates would come and finish them off, not satisfied that she'd left their bodies even resembling the demons that they once were.

The van rocked, and I swallowed hard. I wasn't as weak as I had been when the Dirty Demons found me. But I was smaller and powerless.

Taking my lip between my teeth, I bit it hard and let the story of the feline shifter drift away. Instead, I spent my time in the back of the van picturing Arrow's arms around me. Secret's smile. Bounce and Bone Collector's laughter. Orchid's pout. Denial's reverence. Soul's encompassing protection of everyone he cared about.

With everything in me, I clung to their memories. Soon, I'd have to store them deep inside me, where they'd be safe. Like I had with those from my childhood. Put them somewhere they wouldn't be tainted or sullied by what my life would become again. Hold them to look at when I'm left alone for a couple nights.

But they won't be beacons of hope. Once again, I found that hope was a weakness. I'd hoped far too many times in these last weeks.

Now, they'd just be memories of a life I was never meant to have.

Sadist Soul



I was in shock as I stared at the black cloud rising into the air. It looked like time had stood still with how slowly it appeared to move. Rising into the air as if it were a siren. A blinking sign with an arrow.

“We need to go,” Orchid said, his hand on my arm and pulling me toward the bikes. “Now, Soul. We need to go.”

For another couple of seconds, I moved in a daze. This wasn’t happening. How was I still being played? Shimmer was dead. I had all of his fucking cronies right here with me.

“He was dead, wasn’t he?” I asked absently as I climbed on my bike. I looked at Sweet Love with a desperation I was sure he could see. “Wasn’t he?!”

Sweet Love nodded with a frown, his expression tight. “Yeah, prez. He was. He *is*. So we need to get back.”

The thought that maybe KOK Suckers had orchestrated this sent a cold chill through my body. But how would they know that we’d leave some behind? Maybe they didn’t know that. Maybe they thought that we’d take everyone to this meeting and then they could strike a blow without killing anyone else.

The thought didn’t sit right. Everything Harvest said flit through my mind as we drove closer. As the distance between the restaurant and the clubhouse lessened. They’d thought we’d called the meeting. They thought it was me selling Haidee. It had been my voice they dealt with.

That meant we had an imitator. Someone who could mimic voices.

My stomach turned sour. Something familiar tried to push its way

through the murkiness of my mind. But I had a hard time concentrating on anything that wasn't getting to Denial and Haidee. My enforcers. My secretary. These were my closest friends. Everyone I loved in the world.

The tightness in my chest made it hard to breathe. With as fast as we were going and the air moving against my mouth and nose, forcing air in and away at the same time, I was almost dizzy by the time we slid in front of our building.

The detonation hadn't been in our clubhouse but in a building next door. While that should have been relieving, it wasn't. The entire side of the house was basically ripped away. A corner had collapsed. The explosion had been so fierce that all the windows were shattered, the roofing and siding stripped away in several large spots.

My bike fell to the ground as I jumped off it and raced to the door. We found Bounce first, just inside the front door. Orchid dropped to his knees, gripping the front of Bounce's shirt and shaking him. I heard his screams as if they were far away. Like a storm whooshed in my ears and I couldn't hear anything else.

"Is he alive?" I asked.

Baba Yaga got to his knees and gently pried Orchid's hold away so he could check Bounce's pulse. A minute that might have dragged on for days passed. Finally, Baba nodded. "His pulse is strong. He's just out cold."

Sweet Love's hand rested heavily on my shoulder. "Baba, get him upstairs to the room. Let's go, boss."

I led the way to the stairs where we found Bone Breaker. He had a bleeding gash on his head, but the blood had already stopped. His eyes were blinking open as he tried to regain consciousness.

Okay, better news the further we get inside. This was good. It had to be good. Just an accidental explosion across the street.

The assurance felt like a lie. Something I couldn't believe.

We left Licks and Achilles on the stairs to get Bone Breaker up and headed to the third floor. This side of the house, opposite the explosion, felt solid. It gave me confidence that everything was alright. That the remaining four demons were fine. They were just staying in the room.

Even that felt like a lie. Because I knew Denial wouldn't remain in the room.

The door was open. My gaze went immediately to the bed to find Secret and Arrow unconscious. That couldn't be. They couldn't have slept through

My thoughts became nothing but an echo when my gaze fell on Denial. Bile rose in my throat as I rushed across the room. Falling to the ground beside him, my hands hovered. His eyes were open, dead.

“No,” I whispered.

I choked on the breaths trying to work their way in and out of my lungs. Shock made me forget my involuntary bodily responses. Like breathing.

While it felt like an hour passed as I just stared, my hands hovering over him, not daring to touch him, it had likely only been a few seconds. Then Sweet Love was there, his fingers going to find the pulse.

This time, when I held my breath, it was by choice. He couldn't be dead. I wouldn't survive that.

“His pulse is weak,” Sweet Love said. He turned to me, gripping my face in a strong hand. “I need you with me right now, prez. I need your help to get him to the bed and cleaned up. We need to deal with his wounds. We need to get antibiotics into him. I need your help with that, Soul.”

I nodded. My entire body felt numb. We moved about the room, adjusting Denial so we could do just as Sweet Love said. Once he was on the bed, his entire right side covered in bandages, and I could visibly see the rise and fall of his chest, even if minute, I let out a breath. My enforcers were on the bed now, too. Bone Breaker's eyes were open as his gaze shifted between Bounce and Denial. Fear and near panic bright in their yellow depths.

“Soul?”

Tearing my eyes away, I met Orchid's. His brows were knit together, but the horror in them I thought might be a little over-exaggerated at this point. They were all alive. We'd wait for them to wake up and tell us what had happened.

“Haidee isn't in here,” Orchid said quietly, his voice shaking.

My eyes widened, and I immediately felt like a fucking idiot. I spun around, searching the room for her as if I hadn't believed him. As if she'd pop out of nowhere as she had at the fight. I waited for it. Willed it to happen.

It didn't.

“Sweet Love,” I said.

“I'll look. Stay with them.”

I nodded, waiting. My breaths coming harshly as I felt my panic turning into something ugly and uncontrollable. Something that was violent and ready to tear everyone down. She better be here.

He returned far too quickly and without Haidee. I didn't need to hear his words. I already knew.

"How did this happen?" I snapped, turning my attention to the demons milling about in the hall. They'd all been with me. I knew they wouldn't have answers. And yet...

I strode forward and grabbed at the nearest of Shimmer's minions, hauling him to me by my claws in his face. He gave a pained scream. "I'm fucking done. You better start talking," I growled.

"I was with you," he stammered.

"Physically, yes. But who did this? You better start fucking telling me everything you know right now."

Demons around me were backing away and I let the painful touch flood out of me until every single demon in the hall was on their knees, their bodies searing in pain.

"I will kill every last fucking one of you. You know what? For every fucking hour Haidee is missing, one of you dies."

"You're going to kill your entire club," Pegger said through gasps. "She's not here, Soul. We looked."

There was something in his tone that had me dropping the minion to the ground. He looked up at me, and I could see the pain glowing in his eyes. I shifted the reach, watched as his body jerked as if I'd sent electrical currents through his body.

"It's over," Pegger said through the pain, each word coming out slightly contorted. "We can rebuild and move on. Without her. She was the cause of all the turmoil. She was the reason we had such a chasm splitting this club in two. It's over now."

That's when the memory that had been trying to fight its way through became whole. Pegger could 'peg' any voice. He could sound like anybody he'd heard talk for more than two minutes. He could mimic someone *exactly*.

Anger flared brightly inside me as I took him by his arm and hauled him to his feet. I shoved him into the room and out of the bubble of pain I was tearing down every demon in the hall with. He dropped to the ground and stayed there.

"What did you do?" I asked.

Pegger looked at me with irritation in his eyes. "What needed to be done. She's gone, prez. It's over."

"Pegger, you have thirty motherfucking seconds—"

“Even if you kill me, she’s still gone, Soul,” he said, his voice harsh and filled with loathing. “Because she didn’t belong here. She should have died in the temple. She was raised and trained as a pleasure breeder. That’s the life she was meant for. That’s the one she was returned to.”

Something inside me snapped. I moved forward to grab him again, ready to rip his head clean off his shoulders, when it suddenly wasn’t there. I blinked, staring at the spatter and pooling of blood as his body from the shoulders down slowly slumped to the floor. Like it needed to be sure it was dead before succumbing to death.

I blinked and looked up at Orchid standing there, holding Pegger’s head in his hands. His entire body covered in thorny vines. He was breathing harshly, shuddering violently. His glowing green eyes met mine. “You better kill the rest or I will,” he said, tears running down his face.

“No!” someone in the hall shouted.

Orchid was right. No more second chances. No redemption. They were all going to die.

I released the demons I knew were with me. Those who had always been with me. And told them to get out of the hall. The only demon that had been Shimmer’s I pulled free and handed to Sweet Love was Licks. I wasn’t sure why, but I wasn’t ready to kill him yet.

Closing the door to the bedroom, I tore their bodies apart from the inside out, letting their screams animate my soul. Fill me with fire and life. Feed and soothe the reaching flames of fury that burned.

As the last one fell lifeless, a gaping hole in his neck that looked like something clawed its way out of his spine, the only thing I was left with was fear. Fear for Haidee.

Pushing the door open, I looked at Orchid still standing there with Pegger’s head as if he wasn’t sure what to do with it.

“Put him in the hallway,” I said. Orchid tossed his head through the door and shuddered. Sweet Love heaved his body there as well. “I’m going to find Haidee. Protect them with your life.”

Orchid nodded, turning his attention to the bed. “Hurry, Soul,” he whispered.

I knew the distress in his voice wasn’t for any of our injured. They’d be okay. The faint line of the healing bubble was already forming around them. He was talking about Haidee. I needed to go before it was too late.

With a last look at Denial, my heart lodging in my throat for a minute, I

turned and met Sweet Love's eyes.

"I'll stay," he said. "No one gets in this room until you return."

Nodding, I stepped through the bodies in the hall and made my way outside. Still covered in blood and body parts. Debris of yet another massacre hung off my body as if it were a suit. I wore the murders like a badge.

I didn't know where I was going or why I started in the direction I did. But I revved the engine of my bike until the sound echoed off all the buildings around me and tore onto the road. I didn't know what I was looking for, but I would find her. I had to. She would not be a prisoner of that world again.

Haidee



Everything in me ached. I could barely move and it was made no better by the rough rocking and lurching of the van as I was tossed around in the back. As often as I tried to get my bearings and sit up, I was tossed down again.

Each fall sent more pain spiking through me. My head felt like my scalp was nearly ready to come off. My hands and knees were covered in little glass shards from trying to get to Denial. And they stung.

For a while, I remained laying still. Letting the van throw me around without trying to stop myself from slamming into the walls or tire wells. I couldn't fight my way out of the van. What good would it do if I managed to throw open the door if we were speeding down the road? Let's say I did throw myself out. I was already banged up to the point where the landing just might kill me.

Arguably, that would be a better ending than wherever I was being taken. But if I survived, I won't be in any shape to fight back or run. They'd just catch me again and toss me back in the van.

I had no choice but to wait until the van stopped. Maybe if I conserved my energy until then, I could have a fighting chance.

So I waited.

The back was dark and empty. I reached around to touch all the walls and found I was the only piece of cargo back here. Not even a nail or something I might use in my fist when I hit someone.

My body slid across the floor as we turned a corner, and then the engine whined as the van sped up. How long had we been driving? How far away

from Arrow and Denial and everyone else was I now?

And then I was slung up from the floor, my body suspended in the air, as the van ran over something while moving too quickly. I lightly touched the ceiling before crashing down. I screamed, but the air was knocked from my lungs as the van lurched again.

I slammed into the wall on my back and then rolled to the ceiling. A comedic image of me inside a clothes dryer went through my head before I came crashing down on the side of the van again. It rocked a little, like a rocking chair. Finally settling.

My head spun. There was ringing in my ears. When it cleared up, I could hear what was unmistakably the sounds of fighting. Weapons. Hollers. Demonic growls that made me shiver.

It took more energy and strength than I thought I had in me, but I finally got myself to my hands and knees. At this point, every inch of my body hurt, so I barely felt the glass pieces. The doors at the back of the van were barely hanging together. I pushed on them, but they held strong.

Shifting, I tried with my shoulder but jumped back when I caught someone through the crack between the doors where they were crunched, allowing daylight in. My heart raced as I watched out the tiny hole. The sounds continued.

While my kidnappers were distracted, I tried again to push on the door. Finding the lever to release the latch—which was jammed, of course—I threw myself at the door. The second time, my head gave a throb and stars danced before my eyes. A third time and I could feel the resonance of that hit throughout my entire body as it settled harshly in my bones. The fourth time and I was spilling out onto the road.

I rolled and landed on my back. For a minute, I stared at the sky in a daze. But the scuffle and cries around the side of the van made me move. I moved quicker this time, but probably because I was high on adrenaline. My hand hit something, and I picked it up. A pipe. Not too long, but a little heavy.

Trying to get to my feet, I spun around when I heard someone approaching. “You’re not getting away,” he hissed as he came toward me.

The next few seconds happened as if I didn’t have control over my body. My eyes widened as I gave a feral screech and swung the pipe with all the strength I had. He was bending to grab me, since I had only made it to my knee and a single foot flat on the ground.

With a sickening *crack*, the pipe connected with his head, and he was

suddenly prone on the ground, laying at an odd angle, and bleeding from where I hit him with the pipe. Terrified, I stared numbly for a minute, my hands shaking so violently that I dropped the pipe.

A sickening noise behind the van had me launching to my feet and running as fast as I could. I heard my name but didn't stop; I couldn't stop. I wasn't looking where I was going, nor did I look behind me. I just ran as fast as I could, ignoring all the aches and pains. The cramp in my side. The way my head spun so viciously that I almost stumbled several times.

A bike was suddenly in front of me as if it magically appeared between one blink and the next. I tried to stop, a scream forming on my lips, but through blurry eyes, I thought I recognized Soul. Since I couldn't stop anyway, I threw myself on him.

He caught me, picking me up and cradling me in his arms.

"There you are, baby," he murmured. "You're safe now. I have you and I won't let you go."

I was pretty sure I blathered for a while. Rambled about the van and the demons who were chasing me. That Pegger had thrown me in the van. That he'd made his voice sound like Soul's.

But Soul continued to reassure me, tucking me against his chest and speaking in a soothing, gentle voice until I calmed down and my breathing evened out. When I realized I was motionless and my body was coming down from the high of my fight-or flight response, I groaned and blinked my eyes open.

The sun was setting in the distance. I looked up at Soul to find his eyes were still a faint shade of pink. He watched me intently. Maybe waiting for me to speak.

"Can we go home now?" I whispered.

Soul released a breath and rested his forehead gently against mine for a minute. "Yeah, Haidee. We can."

Gently, he shifted me in his arms, turning me so I was facing him and my legs wrapped around his torso. My head tucked against his shoulder. I tried to keep in all the whimpers and winces as he moved me, but I didn't think there was so much as an inch of my body not banged up.

After what felt like a day, he had me settled. We drove slowly back. One of Soul's hands remained on my back, keeping me securely against him. My arms felt fluid, so I was thankful for his care to keep me on the bike.

The city moved by slowly. Like time was moving in short, drawn out

moments. People watched as we passed, their heads following. A child waved, but I didn't have the strength to pick up my hand and wave back. Street lights flickered on. Storefront windows grew brighter as their lights turned on.

I might have fallen asleep. When I opened my eyes again, Soul was laying me on a bed. Arms wrapped around me, tucking me into them and for a minute, I saw no one. It felt, for one frightening moment, that I'd lost the ability to see.

My cheeks flushed when I realized I was just being foolish and hadn't opened my eyes.

Secret looked down at me from where he was leaning on his arm. He had me tucked into him as he gently pushed my hair away from my face.

"Hey, beautiful. Looks like you were having fun without us," he murmured.

The only answer I could give him was a huff. He smiled and bent low to press his lips lightly to my forehead. "You're going to be okay."

I wasn't so sure. Between mentally throwing myself back into that place and how badly I hurt, I was pretty sure I was going to remain a train wreck for a very long time.

Soul reappeared with Sweet Love.

"We need to clean you up, Haidee," Soul said gently.

I stared at his face. It was no longer enough that I recognized his voice. That had been a neat trick that I wouldn't fall for again. What if Pegger could change his appearance, too?

My pulse increased as I stared, trying to decide if that was really him. How would I know? My hands shook as I gripped Secret with as much strength as I could muster.

"It's okay," Secret said. "He's not going to hurt you."

"Is he really him?" I said, my voice hoarse.

Secret looked at me, confused.

"Pegger is dead," Orchid said from somewhere. "I pulled his head from his shoulders. It's still in the hall. I can show you if it'll make you feel better."

Would it make me feel better? When I didn't move, the bed shifted. A minute later, Orchid reappeared and held up Pegger's head for me to see. Bile rose in my stomach, but I didn't look away. That was really his head. That was the demon who dragged me to the van and sold me.

I nodded, and Orchid tossed the head like a ball back out of the room. I heard it *thump* on the wall and then the floor. My stomach gave a violent lurch as I tried not to throw up.

Orchid leaned over the bed and brushed a soft hand over my cheek. “Want me to come with you?”

“Yes,” I rasped.

He smiled and nodded.

Soul picked me up and the three demons brought me to the bathroom, where they stripped me down, bathed me, and cleaned my wounds. It involved me sitting on the bathroom counter wrapped in several towels as they meticulously pulled out every splinter of glass. Orchid sat behind me, wrapping me in his arms, and never stopped telling me I was alright.

I was so emotionally, mentally, and physically drained that by the time I was being carried back into the bedroom, I could barely keep my eyes open. But I managed a small slit. When the sight on the bed registered, I almost leapt from Soul’s arms.

“Denial?” I asked, tears stinging my eyes.

Soul took a deep breath. “He’ll be okay.”

I looked at him because I didn’t believe that tone at all. The fear in his eyes mixed with so much emotion that I was sure he was ready to cry. “Will he be?” I whispered. “Really?”

He smiled. It was weak, but I didn’t think it was entirely fake. “Yeah. Eventually.”

“Den is a strong motherfucker,” Sweet Love said. His hand touched my ankle lightly, giving it a gentle squeeze. “Believe me, even if Pegger had managed to kill Denial, that bastard would come back.”

His words were meant to be reassuring, but they only made me choke on my tongue.

Soul placed me back in Secret’s arms. He was the only one on the bed awake. It wasn’t just him and Arrow anymore but Denial, Bounce, and Bone Breaker, too. Everyone was hurt.

Secret brushed my hair aside and tucked me close. Orchid brought a handful of blankets over and between the two of them, I was buried.

“Sleep a while,” Orchid said. “We won’t be leaving the room. You’re safe. Sleep and let your body heal.”

I wasn’t sure I was ever going to trust the word ‘safe’ again. But at least I could feel them. So I closed my eyes and let sleep take me.

Haidee



9 weeks later

I let out a breath and closed my eyes as the wind pulled at my hair. The roar of the engine was a soothing backdrop to the way the world whipped by. The sun was high in the sky, beating down on us as we wound through the streets.

Bone Breaker's hand rested over mine where they were wrapped around his waist. His thumb rubbed my skin smoothly as we slowly moved into the residential area. Houses lined the streets. They looked slightly familiar, but we've been traveling all over the city over the last few weeks, so I imagined that they all looked alike at some point.

He parked the bike, killing the engine. I didn't climb off. All these weeks later and I still managed to nearly fall on my face each and every time. Only when Bounce stood in front of me with a soft smile on his lips and his hand out, did I sigh and let go of Bone Breaker.

Bounce smiled, helping me off with more care than was necessary. While they didn't necessarily handle me with kid gloves, they were very aware. Gentle. It was sweet, and I appreciated the attention.

When my feet were firmly on the ground again, he brushed a strand of hair behind my ear and pressed his lips lightly to mine. "Okay?"

I nodded. "Yep. Are you?"

He grinned broadly. "Never better, hunny."

Bone Breaker gave me a quick kiss as well before they headed to the first house and Orchid stepped to my side, clipboard in hand. We were collecting

taxes and while this wasn't something I should really be a part of since I was not a member of the club, no one left me alone. Since Soul, Denial, and Arrow were busy today, I was tagging along with the tax collection.

They'd lowered the tax down to 23% which I was given the impression was quite a drop. They never said what it had been to me, but they were all happy to let it fall quite a bit. Apparently, they'd only been raising it to keep Shimmer from going off on other tangents.

However, there was some unaccounted for money in their accounts that they were still investigating. With so many people dead, even when they tracked down who were making the deposits, it wasn't likely they'd get an actual answer. None of the living were responsible for the influx of money.

Shimmer and every member who'd followed him were dead except Licks. Good and dead! I'd seen Shimmer's body myself when we finally got around to collecting the corpses we'd left at the door of KOK Sucker's clubhouse.

But it wasn't just them who'd died. There were now only thirteen members of the Dirty Demons motorcycle club. Which was roughly a sixth of what it had started with when they'd found me.

Even being so small, they all looked a lot happier now. Less stressed. Less weight on everyone's shoulders. There was something to be said about being a more intimate club. It seemed like their relationships were strengthening all the time.

I watched as the first two houses paid their taxes without complaint. As we moved to the third, Orchid was tapping his clipboard.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

He looked at me, offering me a smile. Switching the hands he held the clipboard with, he draped an arm around my waist, pulling me to his side. He kissed the side of my head, letting his lips rest on my temple. "Nothing at all. I'd just rather be back."

I nodded. Yeah, I understood that. I'd much rather be home than out doing this stuff. And while I was *pretty sure* I was completely safe now, I wasn't ready to be alone. Not in my apartment in the backyard. Not within the clubhouse. I just didn't want to be left with my fears. Not quite yet.

We watched Bone Breaker chat with the demon at the door, and it looked friendly enough. The demon that lived in the house laughed, shaking his head. And I watched a child peek out and look up at Bone Breaker with starry eyes.

"Me too," I said. "But this isn't so bad, I guess."

“Nah. It was worse when the taxes were much higher. This is manageable, and the decrease was much appreciated.”

Living in the demon states made for a constant hotbed for violence and hostility. Demons just give off that energy. We drew the darkest people. And while forcing the city to pay for their protection might not be *morally* right, Ash Hollow was a relatively safe place to live.

Yes, demons moved away, but many moved in, as well. There was something to be said about living your life and feeling safe. And knowing that the Dirty Demons had your back gave the citizens of Ash Hollow a level of security for them to live in peace. To carry about their business and live their lives without constantly looking over their shoulder.

We continued collecting taxes until the sun began to set and we returned to the clubhouse. I rarely spent much time in the clubhouse, much preferring to stay in my apartment. No one seemed to mind, though. My demons were always with me. Moving in and out of the apartment to spend time with me and as a group.

But not just my demons. Those of the club as well. Baba Yaga and Sweet Love spent a lot of time in my apartment. They were nice, good friends. I enjoyed having them around.

When we walked in, Soul, Secret, Arrow, and Denial were all there, moving about the kitchen and preparing food. I received smiles from everyone, save for Denial, who didn't smile much, anyway.

Arrow washed his hands of what he was doing and rounded the island to wrap me in his arms. “Hey.”

I buried my face in his chest and breathed him in. His hands rubbed my back soothingly as he placed soft kisses atop my head.

“You alright?”

“Yep,” I said. “Are you?”

They always asked me if I was alright. All the time. At least once a day by every one of them. I loved that their concern for me was genuine. That they always made sure I was comfortable. Still, I wasn't too keen on intimate physical contact. Besides the time with Orchid and Bounce, I hadn't shared a bed with any of them *in that way*. I wasn't ready for that kind of relationship. I was still learning that I had control of my own body. That I could say no and they'd respect that.

It was a new and strange feeling. One I didn't quite trust. Autonomy had been stripped of me for so long, unlearning all those expectations was

difficult. Right now, that I could say no and I'm respected for it, was what I needed to assure myself that I had control of the situations I was in.

That's not to say I didn't like their touch. Or that I didn't trust them. But I spent almost my entire life with no choice, where sex was not a positive experience for me, so I wasn't interested in going down that road right now.

In return, I always asked them if they were okay. Orchid and Soul had managed to come out of the ordeal mostly unscathed physically. But the rest of them... not so much. Secret still ached in some places. And Denial was blind in one eye. The old absence in his eyes was always a little freaky. Okay, a lot freaky. But now that one was absolutely empty and his other didn't quite match was way more unsettling than I thought he needed to be.

"I have something for you," Arrow said.

"More books?" I asked, stepping back to look up at him.

He chuckled and kissed my nose. "No. Orchid would be pretty irritated with me if I started gifting you books too."

"Yes, I would be," Orchid said. "That's my courtship ritual. Find your own."

I grinned at him over my shoulder.

Arrow drew my face back to his, a finger running along my jaw. While I wasn't exactly *with* any of them, I was at the same time. It wasn't a conversation we'd had outright, but I knew, like the feline shifter in the book, I found my mates.

The only one of these demons I'd had any kind of discussion with concerning what we wanted together was Arrow. Our connection was immediate. As soon as I saw him, I was drawn to him in a way I didn't and still really don't understand. So we *were* together. He's my demon and I'm his. One day, when I was more comfortable in my skin, we'd talk about possession. He was the demon my soul belonged to.

I never forgot how fortunate I was that he wasn't impatient. He was happy to go at my speed with what I was ready to handle. And that never made the way he treated me any less. Right now, as he looked down into my eyes, I could see how much I meant to him. And it made my heart soar.

"What is it?" I asked.

He kissed my nose. "I'll be right back."

I nodded and watched him disappear down the hall. He still stayed here every night, holding me close to him. Between his arms around me and the mountain of blankets I slept with, my dreams were peaceful.

Arrow returned, holding something in his hand. A jacket, I thought. When he was close enough, he let it fall open. On the back, it read, 'Property of Arrow' in patches.

The grin on my face couldn't be contained. I stared at it for a minute before touching his name with my fingers. Meeting his eyes, I found them watching me with such adoration that I swear I could feel it petting my soul.

"You said you were okay if I claimed you at Church," he said.

I nodded. "I was. I am."

His smile grew as he turned the jacket around and held it open. I slipped my arms in the sleeves and he drew it up over my shoulders. Settling it on my body. It fit perfectly. "Your very own cut," he murmured.

Biting my bottom lip, I looked at how it covered me. Protectively. Like a hug. I looked over my shoulder as if I could see the words on my back. I couldn't, but they were still flashing in my mind.

"I love it," I said, and stepped into his arms again. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. I'm glad to have you as my old lady."

I rolled my eyes. The term was their tradition or custom or whatever. To me, it was a little ridiculous. I'm not old. At least, not old enough for that title. But I didn't argue. I knew it was the sentiment behind it. What it stood for and what it represented.

I was part of the club in the only way a female could be. And I was Arrow's, which was *exactly* what I wanted to be.

"So..." Bounce said, "while we're happy for this step." I turned to look at him and he came around the counter. He held something out to me and I opened my hand for it. Turning it over, I found it was a much smaller patch that read 'Bounce.'

Meeting his eyes again, I found him smiling coyly. "It's obviously up to you and where it matters within the club, you belong to Arrow. But, you know I want to be with you too, right?"

"You do?" I asked. It was one thing for me to internally think that I found my mates (plural) but as I was just musing, it's not something we've ever talked about.

"Yes. Whenever you're ready. Two days, two years. Two decades from now. I'm not in a hurry, hunny." He kissed my lips briefly. "And you don't have to wear this if you don't want to. Or you can at a later time."

I nodded. "Yeah, okay."

"That's an agreement to which part?" he asked, his thumb softly brushing

over my cheekbone.

“All of it.”

His smile widened. “Good.” His kiss was still soft and mostly chaste. And then he returned to the kitchen.

“Since we all knew this was coming, we were all on the same page,” Bone Breaker said as he came toward me next. He handed me a patch just like Bounce’s but with his name on it. “Again, no pressure.”

I laughed a little and held it tightly in my hand, nodding. “Can I just give you all a yes, now? You know, if you’re... I’m not presuming—”

Bone Breaker chuckled and covered my mouth with this. “Presume away, bunny. And get ready to receive a few more patches.”

Soul gave me his. And then Secret and Orchid. Denial came last. His right side was still not quite healed, but he was just as pretty as he always was. The scars just added to his beauty. Or his scary. Whichever.

He didn’t say anything as he handed me his patch, but then he cupped my face with both his hands and kissed me in a way none of the others had. Deep and claiming. His tongue stroked mine and reached for the fire burning in my soul.

When he released my mouth, he kept my face in his touch. “You’re going to be so well loved, Haidee. You already are, but you won’t know anything else for the rest of your life.”

“And while we’ll all make sure that happens, Den is ready to tear down everything outside of Ash Hollow, so there’s no one left in existence to challenge that,” Bone Breaker said.

“I’m all for letting him,” Arrow said from behind me.

I smiled and leaned my face against his. “Thank you.”

“Forever,” he whispered.

Acknowledgments

I was thankful when the shared world said we were doing paranormal as I hadn't written a contemporary story to date. It was a lot of fun though it was difficult for me to give Haidee a sweet, sexy story that she deserved after the traumatic and horrific life she led.

As with all my standalones, I know there are some minor questions that have been left unanswered. Mainly, was there something Shimmer knew about Haidee that no one else did? The answer is no. Shimmer was an asshole and saw an opportunity to make some money because the want of Haidee never lessened. That's all there is to it.

First, I need to thank my patrons, namely Lauren and Rosa for giving me all the deets on MC life, having been a part of that life themselves. While I didn't stay *exactly* on legit terms and such, I tried to keep it as real as possible. I loved being able to add this element to the book.

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About the Author

Crea lives in upstate New York with her dog and husband. She has been writing since grade school, when her second grade teacher had her class keep writing journals. She has a habit of creating secondary, and often time tertiary, characters that take over her stories. When she can't fall asleep at night, she thinks up new scenes for her characters to act out. This, of course, is how most of her meant-to-be-thrown-away characters tend to end up front and center - and utterly swoon-worthy! Don't ask her how many book boyfriends she has...

When not writing, Crea is an avid reader. Her TBR pile is several hundred books high (don't even look at her kindle wish list or the unread books on her tablet). Sometimes, she enjoys crafting; sometimes, exploring nature; sometimes, traveling. Mostly, she enjoys putting her characters on paper and breathing life into them. Oh, and sleeping. Crea *loves* to sleep!

Note - Crea is an Amazon exclusive author. If you're reading this ebook anywhere other than through Amazon, it is a pirated copy and has been stolen! Please don't add to that.

Thank You

Thank you for reading Haidee's story. It was a hard one to write but she still received her well-deserved happily ever after.

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Thank you!!

Crea Reitan

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