



Harmon

NOLA Rebels MC - New Orleans - Book 3

MACKENZY FOX

HAWK

NOLA REBELS MC

NEW ORLEANS
BOOK 3

MACKENZY FOX

CONTENTS

[Author's Note](#)

[Blurb](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[NOLA MC Committee Members](#)

1. [Hawk](#)
2. [Jasmyne](#)
3. [Hawk](#)
4. [Jasmyne](#)
5. [Hawk](#)
6. [Jasmyne](#)
7. [Hawk](#)
8. [Jasmyne](#)
9. [Hawk](#)
10. [Jasmyne](#)
11. [Hawk](#)
12. [Jasmyne](#)
13. [Hawk](#)
14. [Jasmyne](#)
15. [Hawk](#)
16. [Jasmyne](#)
17. [Hawk](#)
18. [Jasmyne](#)
19. [Hawk](#)
20. [Jasmyne](#)
21. [Hawk](#)
22. [Hawk](#)
23. [Jasmyne](#)
24. [Jasmyne](#)
25. [Hawk](#)
26. [Jasmyne](#)
27. [Hawk](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Mackenzy Fox](#)

[Also by Mackenzy Fox & Dakotah Fox](#)

[Want More?](#)

[Sneak Peak - Harlem](#)

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*For all you enemies to lovers fans out there... and those who love to see a
man grovel... this is for you x*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

CONTENT WARNING: Hawk is a steamy romance for readers 18+. It contains mature themes that may make some readers uncomfortable.

It includes: violence, trauma, foul language, tragedy by drink driver, custody battle, cheating (by her ex), OW drama and the usual MC antics. If you love enemies to lovers and a bad ass biker who has to grovel, I hope you enjoy Hawk and Jas's story.

If you loved my best-selling Bracken Ridge Rebels MC series, you're sure to love this new spin-off too.

You also don't have to have read Bracken Ridge to enjoy this new series as it is written to be read stand-alone.

BLURB

Hawk

I've always been the protector
To my MC brothers
To my Prez
My club
And then there's her
Jas is the kind of woman who was made to drive me insane
She hates me, but our paths still cross
She thinks she has the upper hand
But she doesn't know me, not really
She has no idea the depths I will travel to keep her safe
Or what I will give up to make her mine
She can fight it, but I can't let it go
I never will

Jas

He thinks he has the upper hand
He thinks because he's a biker he can boss me around
Well, I've got news for him
And it's all bad
Hawk may be larger than life in every way
Devoted to his club
But I never expected him to be the rock that I needed
When life turned upside down we were forced together

Hawk had to choose
They say tragedy can bring you closer
But this may just be the very thing
To tear us apart for good

SYNOPSIS

NOLA Rebels MC - (New Orleans Series Book 3)

Hawk is as broody biker MC romance with enemies to lovers, a spit-fire heroine, OW drama, surprise parenthood, plot twist and lots of steam.

The men of the NOLA Rebels MC will do anything for their club. They're a brotherhood, a club who stands mighty, and above all else, they take care of business, New Orleans style.

The bikers may rule this city, but the women of the club have their hearts, and the men will do anything to protect what's theirs.

It is part of a series but can be read stand-alone with a HEA. This book is recommended for mature readers 18+

NOLA Rebels rule...enter at own risk!

NOLA MC COMMITTEE MEMBERS



Cash – Founder & President

Ryder – Vice President

Harlem – Enforcer

Tag – Sergeant at Arms

Jett – Treasurer

Hawk – Road Captain

Riot – Secretary

Nevada – Tail Gunner

Bronco – Tail Gunner

Priest – Club Chaplain

Other regular club members:

J.J.

Bullet

Chains

Current prospects:

Pipes

Giggs

Rodeo

HAWK

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO

I wake up with a headache the size of Brazil.

That was one wild night. I don't even remember most of it.

Cracking an eye open, I wince.

The curtains aren't quite drawn, and the sunshine doesn't help the throbbing in my head.

I lay an arm across my eyes and groan. Then the bed next to me moves.

I immediately look to my left.

A blonde.

Holy fuck.

Did I finally fuck Jasmyne and not remember it?

I need to lay off the tequila.

Then she turns over and I almost fall off the bed.

Star.

Not Jas.

Fuckin' Star. She's one of the sweet butts and I don't remember fucking her. I don't remember a goddamn thing.

I run a hand over my face and lift the covers. We're both naked.

Shit, no.

This can't be happening.

I tap her on the arm, and she murmurs.

"What the hell you doin' here?"

She yawns. "Figure it out, Hawk."

I sit up, motioning between us. "You... Me..."

She groans. "One-word grunts. I'm used to that."

"What the fuck happened?"

"Tequila."

"And?" I press.

"You know, Hawk, most men would be happy to have me in their bed when they wake up."

"I'm not like most men."

"No shit," she mutters.

"Did we fuck?"

She sighs. "Actually no, but I sucked you off for a little while... Speaking of which, I don't think your girlfriend took to that too kindly." A smile spreads across her face, and my stomach drops.

"What?"

I already know the answer.

"Jas. She saw everything." Why does she sound smug?

"Everything?"

"We were on the couch..."

"Holy fuck."

"I don't know what she's so upset about. You barely got it up and didn't even finish."

"Fuck."

She snuggles back down. "So, now that you're sober..."

"Get out of my bed, Star," I bite out.

"Don't be mean, Hawk." She rolls her eyes, and I'm one second away from losing my mind. "I don't know what she's got to be upset about. You weren't screwing her, right?"

"I'm not discussin' this with you. Out!" I shout. But she doesn't seem to care.

"But I can make you feel good."

My head starts to spin.

Nevada's weed. That's what did it. I had one goddamn puff, which is why I don't smoke the shit.

If Jas really saw, she's gonna be mad, and I'll have blown my chances with her.

Fuck.

This is a mess.

“Do you not speak English?”

“I speak dick just fine, baby.” She runs her hands over my stomach.

My cock doesn't even stir. It hasn't stirred for sweet butts for a while now, not since I've been chasing Jas. And I haven't fucked her. We were just getting to that part.

Or the 'getting to know you' part, which I can safely admit, I haven't really done much of that in the past, either.

It's new territory for me. At the thought, my head pounds harder. I want to escape this moment. And even more than that, I don't want Star in my bed. She's a nice enough chick but is persistent and damned annoying. Growling at her is the only way I'll get her to leave.

“Not in the mood,” I reply. “If you really wanna make yourself useful, how about makin' me a coffee.”

“Screw you,” she says, finally flipping the duvet over and flouncing out of bed.

She hops around the floor, trying to get into her tight jeans. Scowling over her shoulder, she gives me a one-fingered salute, and I shake my head as she storms out. Thank fuck, she's gone.

I can't think straight.

I need to fix this.

Jas is gonna think I'm into Star when I'm not. I didn't even blow... according to her.

But still, if Jas saw us, she's gonna think the worst. I can't say I blame her.

Five feet tall with a feisty temper, a brain the size of Texas, and an ass I'd love to ride from behind. She's the whole damn package. Sweet lips, pretty face, green eyes... And she wears chunky glasses to work and a pencil skirt that makes me want to get down on my knees and beg for a taste of her pussy.

And I don't beg for no one.

I roll myself out of bed, my feet hitting the floor with a thud as I make my way to the shower.

Turning it on high, I step in, enjoying the scalding hot water on my skin. It's what I need in order to wake up.

Was Jas even there last night?

Yeah, she was for a bit.

Would she have seen? Star said she was pissed.

I groan.

Jas doesn't get close to any brother in the club, and she's made that stance very clear. She's here to cook the books - being a qualified accountant - and keep the club's finances flowing and up to date. She made no bones about telling everyone when she arrived here, she's not a fuck toy and won't be treated as one. Lucky for that degree, or Cash would've dumped her on her ass.

Now she practically runs the joint.

I snort.

This is what happens when you give women too much fuckin' power. They end up taking over. I've got a thing about smart women, though; I think that's what turns me on so much about Jas. She's nothing like the women I'm used to.

Because Cash loves her so much, he lets her get away with more than what she probably should. Finding good help is hard these days.

Thinking about her in her little skirt and blouse, looking up at me above her glasses, has me hard.

Before long, I'm jacking myself off in the shower, imagining her on her knees, taking my dick between those sweet, southern lips that I could get lost in.

I fist myself harder. *Fuck yeah.*

"Take it, baby," I mutter.

My cock's big.

There's no other way to say it without sounding like an asshole, but it is.

Imagining fuckin' her tight little hole from behind while she sticks that ass out has me groaning like a horny teenager.

I imagine reaching around, cupping those big breasts of hers, pulling her nipples while she begs for more. And I'll give her more. I imagine ramming my cock in and out while she moans, our skin slapping together.

I'd make it good for her. I'm good in bed. I know how to please a woman, not that I've done much of that lately. Usually, it's a *wham, bam, thank you, ma'am* and we both get off quickly. With Jas, I'd want to take my time.

Explore every inch of her body. Fuck her everywhere. Her mouth. Her pussy. Her ass... Fuck, that has my balls drawing up tight.

She'd love it, I know she would.

The nerdy types are always the dirtiest.

I squeeze my cock harder, fucking her faster, in out, in out... Then she calls my name, and I explode, literally, all over the tiled wall.

Jesus fuck. This woman is going to send me to the goddamn nut hut.

I splash water on the tiles to wash my cum away and stand under the spray. My hand isn't nearly as good as the real thing, but it'll have to do for now. Until I fix this mess.

I run a hand over my face.

And it is a mess. I can feel it.

I know Jas. I know that she likes me. Or... *liked*, being the operative word.

Now she's just gonna think that I'm fuckin' sweet butts, which I'm not.

I'm gonna fuckin' kill Nevada. Not that I can even blame him since I took the joint and smoked it. *What the ever-living fuck is wrong with me?*

I need to make this right.



I didn't get the chance to make it right until three days later. She's giving me the cold shoulder.

The whole week, I'm out at the shipping yard, making sure the fuckin' one-percent club, NOLA Devils don't come anywhere near the yard.

We've had bad blood with them for a while, and Cash isn't taking any chances since they like to play dirty and their attempt at a hostile takeover has us in a stranglehold the club is trying to get out of.

"Hey..." I start.

I need to see Cash about something but stop by Jas' office which is next door. She looks up when I poke my head in. When our eyes meet, I know I'm in the shit.

Her eyes immediately narrow. "Hawk."

Okay. Frosty I can deal with...

"How are you?"

She turns away to look at her computer, and as I step into her office, she glances at me like I'm lost.

"What do you want?"

Fuck, okay. A glacier is forming all around her.

"To see how you are."

“Like you care,” she mutters.

I frown. “What does that mean?” Oh, I know what it means all right, but I don’t know how much she knows. And that’s what I need to get to the bottom of.

“Work it out. I’m busy.”

I close the door behind me, and she sends me a glare. “Can we talk?”

She shakes her head firmly. “No. We can’t. Like I said, I’m busy.”

“Until when?”

“Forever.”

“If this is about Star?” I feel like an idiot asking.

She snorts. “Who? Oh, the chick who was sucking you off in front of everyone, making a real show of it, too. Nope, I don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

“Okay, I know it looks bad.” I raise my palms, fuck knows why. What do I owe her? I mean, she’s not my ol’ lady... Yet. “But Nevada... He has this weed... and I haven’t smoked it in a long time.”

She gives me a look that says, ‘*Go fuck yourself*’ and ‘*Are you kidding me?*’ at the same time. I can see that this is gonna take work to fix... If it’s fixable.

“You smoked weed, and that’s why Star was all over your dick?” she utters in bewilderment. Shaking her head, she turns back to her computer. “I don’t actually care. I don’t even know what you’re doing here. You don’t owe me anything.”

Relief.

“Ah, so we’re good?”

She frowns, and I don’t like it.

“Good?”

I motion between us. “You and me... Back to what we were.”

She takes her glasses off. *Uh oh*. Then she pinches the bridge of her nose.
Fuck.

I’m six-foot-five, and built like a beast, and this tiny woman scares the fuck out of me.

“Are you actually deranged?” she manages, still shaking her head.

“Uh, not that I’m aware...” The look on her face almost has me stuttering.

“You think I want sloppy seconds? After Star has had her mouth on your cock? What kind of woman do you think I am?”

“I don’t think...” I can’t even gather a thought before she’s cutting me off.

“Just go away,” she dismisses me. “I don’t want to speak to you.”

“Why are you so mad?” Like it isn’t obvious, but I need to hear her say it.

“Hawk... Don’t do this...”

“Tell me.”

She chews on the end of her glasses. “Fine. If it’ll make you scurry off into that hole you crawled out of, I’ll tell you. I liked you. For half a second there, I thought you were a good guy. But you’re just like the rest of them. You’ll bang anything in a skirt or any hole that’s willing. Stupid me thinking we had some sort of connection when I should’ve known all you really wanted was to be the first one to get into my panties. That clear enough for you?”

Okay, straight between the eyes.

“Okay, I get you’re mad. I like you too... I fucked up... But it’s not like we were seein’ one another...”

When her eyes meet mine this time, it’s ice cold. “Okay, Hawk. You just go about your life, and I’ll go about mine. And fuck whoever you want to, but it won’t be me.”

“Don’t do this.” Here I am begging. Who the heck am I?

“I didn’t do anything. I don’t want a guy who sleeps around. I’m not looking for a hookup, or I would’ve done that ages ago with any one of you. Fuck, Nevada comes on to me ten times a day. I don’t want that... Not that that’s any of your business.”

“Nevada comes on to you ten times a day?” I’ll choke that little fucker.

He might be the best looking out of all of us, with baby blue eyes and a face of an angel, but he’s fucked everything in this club... aside from Jas and the ol’ ladies, of course.

“That’s all you got out of that?”

“I’ll kill him.” I lean over her desk. “I’ll kill anyone who comes near you.”

She snorts. “Oh my god. You should hear yourself. Do you honestly think you have some claim over me because I fell for you for just a split second? I clearly need a lobotomy.”

She fell? If she fell before... then there’s hope... right?

“You’re gonna be mine, Jas. We both know it.”

She continues to laugh at me. Then she really lets loose, wiping her eyes

as I stand there and stare. “You need to lay off the weed, it’s doing things to your brain.”

I slam my fist down on her desk, feeling this truth deep within me. “I’m not kiddin’, Jas. I need...” Fuck, this is insanity... “I need another chance.”

She shakes her head, and after dabbing her eyes with a tissue, she puts her glasses back on. “Well, you’re not getting one. Goodbye.” And she smiles.

“I didn’t even come,” I blurt out.

Her face turns into a grimace, her nose wrinkling with disgust. I don’t mention that I did come this morning, in my own goddamn palm, while thinking about her. But right now, she looks like she wants to throw a stapler at my head.

“You have three seconds to leave, or I swear to God...”

She moves her hand to said stapler and my eyes go wide. “Jas... be rational.”

“Rational?” She stands with a huff. “The last man who made a fool out of me lived to regret it... Out!”

“You can’t talk to me like that!” I bark. I can’t fucking believe this.

She doesn’t hesitate, lobbing the stapler at me, and I manage to duck in time before it hits the door and bounces off, crashing to the ground.

“Get out!”

“You’re fuckin’ insane,” I tell her, swirling my finger around the side of my temple, knowing I’m only making shit worse. “Fuckin’ nuts. That was a perfectly good stapler...”

With a groan, she grabs the office phone, and my hand is on the doorknob before she can lob that at my head too.

I shut the door behind me as she yells a string of profanities.

Cash wanders by a few moments later while I’m sagged against the door. “You okay? I heard screamin’?”

I’m panting like I’ve run a marathon. “I upset Jas.”

Cash frowns. “Why?”

“Don’t ask.”

“Does this have something to do with Star?”

Fuck. Good news travels fast.

“Somethin’ like that.”

Cash points at me. “You’re a dick. You know Jas as well as I do. She won’t stand for that shit.”

“She’s throwin’ goddamn staplers at me and cursing like a sailor,” I yell,

loud enough for her to hear.

Then she yells back, “Fuck you!” and Cash chuckles.

“Fix it,” he says when he sobers. “We need her.”

“What about me? She should get fired after what she just said and did.”

He pats me on the shoulder, giving me a squeeze. “The tax benefits Jas has in place for our businesses far outweigh any little spat you two have goin’. Jas can’t be replaced. Fix it.”

“She just screamed at me.” No chicks scream at me, at least not like that. In bed, they scream for me.

I don’t do the hearts and flowers shit, which is probably what Jas wants, but hell, I’m not a total lost cause. But this? This is a goddamn joke.

“Stop actin’ like a baby,” Cash says as my eyes bug out. “She’s one little girl, how fuckin’ scary do you think she is?”

I shake my head. “You’ve clearly never been on the receiving end of her anger. She needs therapy. I can fuck whoever I want.”

He pats me on the arm again, harder this time. “Great. Go do that. But don’t go fuckin’ with Jas.”

I hold up a hand. “Fine. Rub it in my face. We’re all replaceable, *except Jas*.” I mimic a girly voice. “Pathetic is what this is. Bitches runnin’ this club instead of balls,” I mutter, walking off, my temper flaring as Cash laughs at me.

He’s right, though. I’ve fucked it up.

Even if she has no right to tell me what I can and can’t do and who I can and can’t fuck... I knew when we first got talking that she’d had a bad break up and the dude cheated, or something like that.

I should just write it off.

Too bad.

Plenty more fish in the sea, and all of that.

But then I remember what she said... that she liked me. Obviously, that’s why she’s so fired up. And I liked her too, enough to not fuck anyone else. Well, until that all went out the window last night.

Instead of cutting my losses and moving on, I decide I’m going to make her my new obsession.

Winning her back.

My little spitfire.

A grin spreads across my face.

Yeah. She can say what she wants. She can throw shit at my head, hurl

abuse, hell, she can even slap me. But I'm not giving up.

Jasmyne is mine.

And I'm gonna make it my mission to win her back.

JASMYNE

PRESENT DAY

I do a lot for the NOLA Rebels MC, but I wouldn't want it any other way.

Cash has been good to me, and he pays me a lot of money to stay here. Rightly so. I'm worth it. This club's finances would be all over the place without me. It's not boasting, it's just the truth.

Jett, the club Treasurer, keeps the books in a reasonable order for me, which makes life a bit easier, and we work well together. The only trouble with a club this big is everyone works multiple jobs. So when I need to talk to Jett, he's usually over at the shipping yard, where the club has large containers, or working the door at the Vault; the gentleman's strip club downtown, or setting up new security cameras for the club's security business.

Everyone works hard, I'll give them that.

I love what I do.

I love figures. I love working things out and crunching numbers.

I probably don't look like the kind of woman who works for an MC.

In fact, I'm the opposite of what you'd probably expect.

I'm barely five feet, with long blonde hair I usually wear in a plait because it gets in my way. I like my makeup simple but flawless. My eyes are my best feature, though some would say my boobs are, but whatever. And I wear glasses, mainly when I'm on the computer, because I can't see shit.

The boys respect me, not because they're forced to, but because I've

earned it.

If they piss me off, nobody gets paid. So I've kinda got them where I want them, not that I make that known. With all the chest pounding that goes on around here, you've gotta play the game. And I know how to play it. I grew up with a lot of cousins and neighborhood kids. Suffice to say, I know how to get what I want. I'm super close with my cousin, Lyndall, she's a single mom to my niece that I adore, though I don't get to see them often since they live a few hours away.

I hear a knock at the door. "Hey, beautiful," Manny, the club's cook says, leaning against the doorjamb.

"Hey, yourself," I say with a smile.

Manny has to be one of my most favorite people on Earth. He's completely off the charts, a little like me—as in, he doesn't fit what you'd picture a cook working for an MC would look like. We all think he looks like Adam Lambert, and while he's easy on the eyes and bi, he's more into guys than girls.

He waves a plate in the air. "Have you been a good girl?"

My eyes go wide. "You haven't?"

"I did. But it means you'll need to do a few extra rounds on the treadmill." He laughs, and I do too, because it's our running joke.

"Uh, tell me about it."

I smell the delicious smell of peanut butter. Yep. Peanut butter and jelly toasted sandwiches. It's my downfall.

"You know, you craving these can only mean one thing." He waggles his eyebrows.

I almost choke on my own saliva. "Uh, if you're insinuating that I may be pregnant, I'm pretty sure unless it's an immaculate conception, it's not possible."

He flounces over, placing the plate in front of me. Two rounds. He's the best.

"I love you, by the way," I mutter, wasting no time in grabbing one half and diving into it like a woman possessed.

"Of course you do," he chuckles. "And I've no idea why you're not gettin' dick every night. You're hot as fuck."

I give him a grateful look. "You always do wonders for my ego."

"Let's make a pact. If you don't get laid by your birthday, we'll fuck." Then he gives me a wink. "I'll make it good for you."

I almost choke on my sandwich. “That’s, like, eight months away.”

“I know. Plenty of time for you to get out of it,” he laughs.

And this is what we’re like. The best of friends. We’d never, ever fuck. Not that I don’t think he’s cute, but we’re friends. And not with benefits. It’d be like screwing my brother or something... Ew.

“God.”

“Don’t look so horrified.”

“I’m not. I just...”

He waves a hand at me. “I’m kidding. It’d be gross for me too, not that I don’t find you attractive... But you know, for one, Hawk would have my dick in a vice.”

“Fuck Hawk. He has no claim over me.”

He snickers. “That’s what you think.”

“Why does everyone always have to ruin the mood? I’d rather fuck you than Hawk any day of the week.”

“So you never got that close?”

I open my mouth and close it again. Uh, yes, we did. Aside from actually doing the deed, we got very, *very* close.

We made out... We... almost...

Then he had to go and fuck it up.

And I’m not anyone’s second choice.

Nope. I’m not and never will be.

“We made out,” I admit. “And it was... good.” I sigh, because hot damn, as much as I don’t want to admit it, Hawk is a very good kisser, and he’s good with his hands too.

“So, you can’t forgive him for that one tiny thing?”

That being him getting sucked off by a sweet butt.

I sigh again. “I know I’m being childish, but I can’t help it. I thought we had a connection, you know? I feel so stupid. I thought he was different.”

He smiles with sympathy. “He really does like you.”

I snort. “Well, I don’t share. Despite what he says he’d only expect me to be his weekend fuck buddy while he also fucked any other hole in this goddamn club. I won’t be a fuck buddy or a glorified sweet butt. I have a reputation to uphold.”

Manny’s shoulders start to shake with laughter. “A reputation?”

“Yes!” I exclaim. “Once you’ve fucked one of the brothers, the members treat you differently. I’ve spent a lot of time gaining respect in this place.

That doesn't come easy when you're a woman in a man's world, so to speak. They may just be bikers, and who gives a shit what they think, but it would only complicate things in the long run."

"All I hear are excuses, cupcake."

I take another bite with a little less vigor.

I just can't seem to let it go.

And I know why.

It's my ex. Jeremy.

He cheated on me with more than one person, and I was the last one to know.

It scars you. People think it's just something you can get over, but I can't. I really loved him. When I love, I love fucking hard. And I know now he didn't deserve me, I get it. But tell that to my broken heart.

Where Hawk is concerned... he has that power; the power to break me. And that's what makes me want to run.

I've never felt that connection with a man since Jeremy. He was my everything.

Hawk is intense. The most serious guy I've ever met. The way he looks at me, like I'm fucking him, I can barely hold on to my senses when he's around. Yet I push him away. I can't get hurt again, and he's already hurt me when we were not even a thing.

What does that tell you?

It tells you there's a massive red flag, and I need to listen to it.

"I know," I say. "But every time I even think about Hawk, all I can see is goddamn Star."

"He was stoned."

"That's no excuse."

"You wanted him to just be into you." It's not a question.

I shrug. "Wouldn't that be stupid?"

He shakes his head. "No, it's not, Jas. You deserve the best, cupcake. You do. You're an amazing woman. Smart. Successful. Hot as fuck. You don't need to settle, baby girl. You could have any guy you wanted."

But I wanted him.

I just can't share... I'd never be able to trust him. There're women throwing themselves at him left, right, and center.

Tall. Handsome. A strong jaw. Bright blue eyes that are striking. But he's grumpy as all hell. Seriously, I've seen Tag smile more, and that's saying

something.

“I know. But I barely have time to sleep at the moment, never mind get laid.”

“Well, maybe we need to go out. You, me, Summer, Deanna, Luna, a couple of the other girls... I’ve been dying to ask out Summer’s work colleague for ages, but haven’t got the guts. He’s a young Brad Pitt, and Summer says he’s so sweet.”

Summer is Jett’s ol’ lady and Deanna is Cash’s wife. They’re best friends, and since they moved here, we’ve become close too. Luna works at the bar sometimes and also helps out Rock, Jett’s twin brother, at his trucking business.

We’re just about to partner with Rock and put a shitload of money into expanding the business state-wide. Hence why I’ve had so much on my plate lately.

“Jamie, right?”

“Yup.” He wrings his hands. This isn’t like Manny to get flustered over anyone. He must really like this guy.

“Uh huh. So you give me all this great advice but don’t take any yourself?” I chuckle.

He gives me a look. “Very funny.”

“You know what you’re right, let’s do it. Aren’t they having a ladies’ night at Solo this weekend? Male strippers and all. Inked Men XL, I think it’s called.”

“Ooh, that sounds like just the pick-me-up I need.” His shoulders dance, making mine do the same.

“Those tickets are hard to get, but I know someone.”

He gives me a look. “Uh huh.”

“It’s not like that, unfortunately.” I wave him off, laughing. “But I could try to get tickets.”

“Sounds like a plan. I’m in.”

“Deanna is about to pop, so this could be just the kind of excitement she needs to induce labor.”

“Don’t tell Cash that.”

“He’s got nothing to worry about. Those two are gonna be a baby breeding factory. I know when his doors closed not to go barging in. Let’s just say, I’ve learned the hard way.”

“She is cute pregnant.”

“Tell me about it.”

He gives me a chin lift. “What about you and kids? Want any?”

I shrug. “Maybe someday. I always wanted to be a mom when I was younger.” I’m thirty-one, though sometimes I feel like I’m sixty. “Now, not so much. I have my career and my family... you guys... I’m happy. I love working here. I love my apartment. I have a good life, Manny. I can’t complain.”

It’ll happen for me. I’ll find the guy, I know I will.

Why does my mind wander back to Hawk every single goddamn time?

“I know, baby girl. I just don’t want you sitting it out like a wallflower. Sometimes when you let things go, it opens a door to something new, ya know?”

“Like letting the Hawk thing go?”

“You’re so angry with him.”

“Because I liked him.” I don’t want to sound weak, but this is Manny. He doesn’t judge.

“Just saying. You do you, boo. But I know he’s sorry. He’s not fucked anyone since... Not that I know of.”

My eyes go wide. “That can’t be true.”

Hawk is... *Hawk*.

I often think about what might have happened that night if we had gone the distance. Would that mean he wouldn’t have strayed? That he wouldn’t have needed to get sucked off by slut-face Star?

Anger boils my blood and it makes me want to explode.

“He must have. He’s a guy.”

Manny looks at me curiously. “You really have no clue, do you?”

I give him the same look back. “What about?”

He rolls his eyes. “He’s got a real thing for you. Always has. I would know if he was screwing anyone in this clubhouse and he isn’t.”

“That doesn’t mean he’s not fucking Star on the side.” I screw up my nose. “Or some other chick. Men can’t go without sex. Hawk wouldn’t be able to.”

“I love how you just surmise the male population. Men are capable of being celibate.”

“I don’t know any.”

“Just because you don’t know any, doesn’t mean it isn’t possible, cupcake.” He gives me a smile. “I’m sorry, but that fuckface Jeremy really

screwed with your head.”

I start on my second peanut butter sandwich. “Urgh. Don’t remind me. Stupid bastard.”

“Hawk will come crawling back.”

“As if I’d take him back. I can’t even look at him.”

“You go, girl. Remember your worth,” he says. “I feel the same about fidelity. You know I got cheated on and it hurt for such a long time. Then I stopped giving a fuck, and I went downhill. Relationships are hard. Our hearts really do rule our heads.”

“I really need to get drunk this weekend,” I sigh.

“Me too. Especially if I’m gonna see Jamie.”

“Well, there’s only one way to find out. Ask him.”

He nods. “I will.”

“No, you won’t.”

He rolls his eyes. “Why do you know me so well?”

I laugh. “Because we’re two peas in a pod, remember?”

“Well, if you don’t wanna fuck me, you better get laid this weekend...” he sing-songs, just as the devil himself appears in my doorway, his fist about to knock on my door.

Hawk.

One thing I don’t like is anyone just barging into my office, door open or not. They’ve all learned the hard way.

Hawk frowns. Standing in the doorway, larger than life, he’s like a Greek god, almost an apparition.

Aside from his attitude, he’s the whole goddamn package.

My pussy certainly thinks so as I feel that pull in my lower belly and my clit begins to hum. This is what it’s like with him. We have sexual attraction, we always have... But I need so much more than that. It isn’t just about fucking.

Whenever another man pays attention to me, even one of the brothers who are just being friendly, Hawk acts like a man possessed. *Stupid idiot bikers.*

“Yes?” I say, before he can get a word in.

The furrow between his brows deepens. “You and Manny?” He looks troubled.

Manny bursts out laughing. “On that note, I’ll leave you two lovebirds alone.”

He stands, ducking under Hawk's arm, leaving us alone.

"What do you want?"

"Answer me."

"No. I don't have to answer you. You're in my office."

He looks down at his feet. "Technically, I'm still in the clubhouse."

"Smartass."

He stares at me, and I stare back.

Is Hawk intimidating? Yes.

Is he unnerving? Double yes.

Can I hold my own? Oh, fuck yeah, I can.

He may make me weak at the knees, and my heart races like it's going to explode out of my chest, but I'll never let him know that.

His eyes, though... that's what gets me the most. They're so goddamn sexy.

When they say the eyes are the window to the soul, it's a hundred percent true with Hawk.

"Cash wanted me to collect you. The meeting at Rock's is today."

"I can drive myself."

"Your car is at the garage, remember?"

Shit.

"I'll borrow someone else's."

"I'm going there, may as well ride with me."

I know what he's doing.

Any excuse.

Any goddamn excuse.

I already sat in a car with him, Jett, and Tag recently when we did a stakeout on the NOLA Devils, a 1%er club who no longer exists, but that's a whole other story. And sitting in the same car as Hawk... that was four hours too long. All we do is argue. Every damn time.

Most of it is due to my attitude toward him, but he started it.

I don't know why he doesn't just give up and move on. I have... Well, sort of.

A part of me has this yearning for him that I can only suppress for so long. But we can't be a thing.

Hawk has the real power to end me for good. I can't let another man do that to me again. I had two years of my life wasted with Jeremy and all his lies and deception.

Stupid me thinking we were okay. I never even saw the signs. Aside from the fact he was a very smooth talker. Just watching him in action was a sight to behold.

What gets me the most is he acted as if it was his goddamn right to fuck around. We were practically living together, both accountants with the same hours and everything. I thank the good Lord that I held on to my apartment, or I'd be up shit's creek right about now.

"Did you do this on purpose?" I demand.

"Do what on purpose?"

"Arrange this, so we'd have to ride together."

"Cash's orders..." he says, looking more tense than usual. "He's Prez, remember?"

Duh.

"Whatever."

"Ready to go?"

I lick the peanut butter and jelly from my fingers as he watches me. His eyes do that thing again that drives me wild, flaring as they take me in.

"I haven't finished my lunch."

"You'll give yourself a heart attack eatin' that shit."

I give him a look. "I don't eat it every day."

He glances down at my body very obviously. "I can see that."

I swallow hard and clench my pussy. He always does this to me... Maybe I should throw him a bone? I almost laugh at my thoughts. Bone. *Bone*. Oh God, I so need to get laid.

"Somethin' funny?"

I shake my head. "My eyes are up here."

"Know that."

"So keep them there."

He steps into my office. The air around us becomes a little more uncomfortable.

"Shouldn't wear such figure huggin' outfits if you want my eyes to remain in my head."

I glance down at my seemingly innocent white blouse and pencil skirt. *What is he going on about?* There is nothing sexy about what I'm wearing. *Fine...* My blouse is fitted, but you can't see any skin.

"Trying to flatter me?" I coo, quirking a brow. "You must want something."

“Oh, I want somethin’ all right.”

If he’d have grabbed his dick through his jeans and groped himself, he couldn’t make it any more obvious.

“Pity you won’t ever get to experience that, isn’t it?”

“You were into it once. I remember quite vividly.”

“Vividly, go fuck yourself,” I reply, my tone on the edge of biting.

He runs a hand through his hair. “Why are you such a fuckin’ bitch to me?”

I huff a laugh without humor. “Why do you come in here and eye-fuck me when it’s not wanted?”

He presses his hands on my desk and leans over. “Not wanted?” he scoffs. “Really, Jas? You tellin’ me if I slid my hand up your skirt, I wouldn’t find your pussy wet right now.”

“You’re disgusting.” My expression gives nothing away as I glare up at him. Because he’s right, I’m definitely wet.

“Fine, baby, but you know how good I can make you feel.”

“So does my vibrator,” I throw back at him.

He stares at me. Then a slow grin spreads across his face, and he laughs.

He never laughs. Fuck, he barely smiles.

I don’t know if to be afraid as this isn’t normal Hawk behavior.

I glare at him. “What’s so funny?”

He shakes his head. “Nothin’.”

“Spit it out. The suspense is killin’ me.”

He rights himself, folding his arms over his chest. “If you’re usin’ your vibrator, it means you’re not fuckin’ anyone else... Hence why you might resort to fuckin’ Manny, and we both know that’s not gonna happen. He’s not your type.”

“Who is my type, smartass?” I lean back, crossing my arms over my chest to match his stance.

He thumbs to his chest, and I’m already shaking my head. “Me.”

“You need to stay out of my office.”

“You work for the club. Can’t do that.”

“Fine, I’ll start locking my door.” I shrug.

“You do that, and I’ll take the hinges off.”

My nostrils flare, but he knows he has me. Before I can yell at him to get the hell out, he thumbs to the door. “I’ll be out in the lot in five minutes. Don’t wanna keep Cash waitin’.”

He strides out like he's all that, and I give him the finger behind his back.
This is why we will never be. Because he's an asshole.
That, and he knows exactly how to rile me up.

HAWK

1 MONTH BEFORE STAR INCIDENT

Jas. Fuck, she's hot. And she's sitting in my truck with a little skirt on.

Why it's so damn short isn't something that I need to be annoyed about right now, as I'm the one who gets to see her bare thighs and hopefully a lot more.

It's not a date. In fact, it came about by accident.

We've been flirting a lot. She has my dick hard every fuckin' minute of the day.

I want to fuck her so bad.

But Jas has rules.

She won't fuck any of the brothers in the club. In fact, I'm the only one she's gotten this close to. I don't know much about her except that she's too smart for her own good and has a body and mouth made for sin.

What I'd give to have my head between her legs to see how sweet she tastes.

I pull up to her place.

She didn't have a ride home because one of her friends borrowed her car. Of course, I gallantly offered to be the one to drive her. Even though we're in a cage and not on my bike, this is better. It means we can be a little more discreet, should parking turn into something else... My cock twitches in response.

"Thanks, Hawk, you're a lifesaver." She beams at me.

Little ray of sunshine, that's what she is. Well, most of the time.

She's sassy but mostly kind. Smiling. Like nothing in the world bothers her. Even when I see her crunching the numbers at her desk, she does it with ease and grace that I could just stand there and watch her all day.

"Anytime."

I fuckin' hope she asks me in.

"Nice place," I add, looking up to the condo.

It's in a nice area of town, which is good.

I don't want her living anywhere unsafe.

"It costs enough," she laughs.

"You own it?"

She nods. "Well, the bank, technically. It took a year and a lot of haggling to even get my foot in the door in the building. I jumped at the chance when the opportunity came up."

"Did good."

I'm good at chit-chat.

I mean, I can do it... For a short period of time. But I prefer to listen.

I could listen to her talk about anything.

She leans over and squeezes my knee. "You're a nice guy, *Hawkie*."

I snort. "Hawkie?"

She grins. "What? Not manly enough for you?"

"You can call me whatever you want," I say honestly. "But not in front of the guys."

She taps her nose, her hand still on my leg. Fuck, if she goes much higher, she's gonna feel my cock.

"Of course not." She thumps her chest. "Me Tarzan, you Jane."

I shake my head, trying not to grin. "Very funny."

She laughs again, and I stare at her. She stares at me. With our gazes locked, something passes between us.

Her hand grips me tighter, and I lean closer to her. I cup her face, and before I know what I'm doing, I press my lips to hers. The most beautiful sound escapes her lips at the contact.

She leans toward me, kissing me back. It's soft at first, since I'm testing the waters, but the way she's gripping me tells me she's into it.

Fuck yeah.

I cup the other side of her face, parting her lips my tongue meets hers and it's so fuckin' hot that I almost come in my pants.

I don't kiss.

In fact, I never do.

Kissing is too intimate.

Sure, a chick can kiss my dick all she wants, but mouth to mouth? Not my usual jam. With Jas, though, I have no limits to how I want to have her. And I will have her.

She moans as our kiss deepens. My heart hammers in my chest as she pulls back suddenly.

“Hawk... We shouldn't.” Her lips still touch mine.

“Yes, we should.”

“I... I don't sleep with bikers.”

“I'm not a biker. I'm *Hawkie*, remember.”

I kiss her again, and this time her other hand grips my bicep. It's enough to encourage me to keep going.

I need to touch her.

I snake one hand down her shoulder, then her arm. Then I cup her breast.

She groans louder... *Fuck*... Is my girl a screamer? I fuckin' hope so.

I'd love to hear my name on her lips while giving her everything I've got. And trust me, I plan on taking my time with her. There are places I can take Jasmyne that no man ever could.

She is *mine*.

Fondling her, I whisper, “So fuckin' beautiful.”

“*Hawk*...” she murmurs, but says nothing more.

I knead her breast, testing the weight as my dick grows harder and harder.

Her fuckin' hand on my inner thigh is making it very difficult to be comfortable. But if she wants to climb aboard and ride me in my truck, hey, I'm cool with that.

“Right here, baby,” I murmur back. “Feels so good.”

I twist her nipple, and she cries out. “Fuck, Hawk.”

I fumble with the buttons on her blouse, then her big tits covered by black lace stare back at me. I feel my cock leaking.

Feeling her tit again, I twist her nipple as she groans for me. “That feels...”

“Good, baby?” I finish.

“Y-yes.”

I grin into her neck as I plant kisses on her soft skin. Scooting forward, her hand slides up and brushes my cock. She gasps at the same time I hiss.

“Holy shit,” she whispers.

“It’s okay, it don’t bite.”

She bites down on her lip as I try and fail not to watch her hand stroking me through my jeans.

“So big,” she murmurs.

Music to my ears. And not the first time I’ve heard it.

“So fuckin’ hard too,” I mutter.

I move my mouth down to her tit and suck her nipple through the material. She cries out, gripping my cock harder. *Jesus*, she’ll be the death of me.

Her tits in my face, taunting me, I move my mouth to the other one, and when that isn’t enough, I yank her bra down.

Come to papa.

“Fuck, Jas.” I cup both tits. They sit perky and round, her bra pushing them up as I stare down at her. “Natural.”

“You thought they were fake?” she questions breathily.

“Couldn’t tell under all these layers.”

She smiles, then her mouth forms a perfect ‘O’ as I move my mouth to one nipple and suck, my eyes never leaving hers.

“Oh God...”

Normally, by now, she’d be flat on her back, and I’d be ramming it home. But Jasmyne isn’t like any other girl I’ve been with. I want to take my time. I want to draw this out.

I care about making it good for her, which in itself is odd.

I don’t wanna go too fast, or too slow.

But her hand fondling me... Fuck, I have to rein it in or I am gonna blow.

I suckle, making grunting noises as she squirms against me. I know she wants me to touch her between her legs, but I wanna hear her beg me for it. I wanna make her so goddamn wet that she can’t take it anymore.

I move my mouth to her other nipple, and she whimpers with need.

“You wet, baby?”

Her lips are bruised and swollen, and I imagine that mouth sucking me off. Just as I think it, she grips me harder.

“Why don’t you find out?” she breathes.

Holy shit. It’s my lucky night.

Her knees are tucked up behind her on the seat, so she shifts to give me

better access. Letting one knee fall to the side, it gives me all the room I need.

As her fuckin' skirt rides up her thighs, my eyes cast down in between her legs.

Fuck.

She's wearing a goddamn G-string. It's black and see-through. She's fuckin' bare.

"Jas," I groan.

I waste no time cupping her pussy. She's so wet I can feel her through the material.

Jesus Christ. I want my head between her legs so bad.

I pull her panties aside and run my fingers through her slit as she moans. Her tits are still in my face, but I can't take my eyes off her pussy. It's goddamn perfect, just like the rest of her.

"So pretty," I mutter. "Fuck, so wet, baby."

I flick her clit with my thumb, and her hand grips my hair so tight I feel my head prickle. It's a good pain. I want it all.

As I swirl her slickness over her swollen clit, I know it won't take much for her to come, or me, for that matter. I want to make it intense, so I move my mouth back to her nipple and pull on the other one while my other hand rubs her until she's breathing heavily and squeezing my cock.

"Say my name," I mutter. "Say it, Jas."

Then, she comes.

It's glorious hearing her say, "*Hawk, oh Hawk...*"

I know every sensation in her body is on fire, but I'm not done yet. I move one finger to her hole and slide inside. She parts her legs wider, and fuck me if this isn't a sight I'll hold in my memory forever. Jas with her tits out, her nipples hard, her pussy slick and wet and bared for me as she spreads her legs and that pert little mouth parts as she watches me.

"Wanna taste you," I mutter. I insert one more finger and fuck her slowly as she throws her head back, groaning.

"What are you doing to me, Hawk?"

I take the opportunity to clamp down on her tit again, pulling a little on her nipple as she sticks her chest in my face. I've never seen tits like hers. So fuckin' beautiful. They're gonna look good with my cum all over them soon, too.

Her hand has stopped moving, thank Christ, but it still rests on my hard-

on.

My thumb brushes her clit, and she explodes again, all over my goddamn fingers.

She practically screams my name. Just like I knew she would.

“We should go inside,” her voice quivers. “I’ve got neighbors.”

I ignore her. Moving my seat all the way back, I get down on one knee and pull her by the ankles until she’s flat on the seat and her pussy is inches from my face.

“Hawk... Oh God...”

I blow on her exposed pussy, and she writhes on the seat.

“You’re not gonna...” she begins, then I lick her slit. “Oh fuck, you are.”

“This pussy,” I grunt. “*Fuck, Jas...* You gotta be so goddamn sweet, woman?”

She sits up on her elbows and watches me. I loosen my jeans, not taking my cock out but so it has some breathing room.

It’s an awkward position, being half on the floor, but I had to have her like this. I want to fuck her with my tongue and remind her what else I can do if she’ll let me. And she better let me. We both need this out of our systems.

I lick her again, then suck on her pussy lips as she cries out.

God, she looks so beautiful. Her tits out. Her hair messed up. Her legs spread with her skirt rucked up to her hips. I pull her legs over my shoulders and then really go to town.

I start to eat her out like a man possessed. When my tongue circles her clit, she comes again immediately, and I suck hard, drawing it out as she groans and moans like nothing I’ve ever heard. It’s been a while since I went down on a woman, so I’m kinda proud of my efforts. Especially when she grabs my head and starts to fuck my face.

I insert my fingers into her hole and fuck her harder. As I do, I unzip my jeans and pull my cock out. Fisting it, I groan. Goddamn, I need my dick inside her.

“Hawk!” she screams as she comes all over my face. She pants and grinds, even when I pull my face away. Crawling up her body, I barely fit on the seat, but she grabs my head and tastes herself as we kiss. We’re all tongues. I know I’m going to fuck her.

And it’s gonna be here, right now, in my truck.

She glances down. “Holy shit.” My pants stretch awkwardly down my thighs as my dick hangs out. It’s leaking, and fuck me, I’ve never been so

hard.

“Jesus, Hawk... that thing is huge.”

I chuckle. “Think you’re wet enough, baby.”

“Here?” she gasps.

I frown. “If I’m allowed?” Consent is big for me... My little sister was almost raped on campus a few years ago at a party. She never even knew who it was, and was lucky to get away. And that sort of shit just boils my goddamn blood.

“Allowed?” She stares at me strangely.

“You gonna let me in, baby?”

She reaches for me and strokes my cock. “Yes.”

“Unless you ride me, can’t fuck you like this.”

She starts to jack me off as I close my eyes. And then it happens... my fuckin’ phone rings.

The ringtone is Cash.

Fuck.

Not now.

I shouldn’t, but I ignore it. Then, two seconds later, it rings again.

“Fuck,” I mutter. “Sorry, baby, it’s Cash. I gotta answer.”

She lies there, panting and hot for me, and I reach into my back pocket for my goddamn phone.

“Yeah?” I bark.

“There’s a fire at the shipping yard.”

“What?”

“Need you down there.”

God-fucking-damnit.

“Done on purpose?”

“Think there was some faulty wiring in the old system. Fire brigade is on its way.”

“Fuck.”

We hang up.

Jas frowns, sitting up next to me. “Hawk, are you okay?”

“Sorry, baby,” I say, running a hand over my face. “There’s a fire at the shipping yard. I gotta go.”

“Oh God, is everything okay?”

“I don’t know yet. Fire brigade is on its way.”

I look down at my cock. Fuck, that’s gonna be fun to get back inside my

goddamn jeans.

Jas straddles over me in the next second.

I shake my head, using every ounce of self-control I have left. “Wanna fuck you so bad, but not like this. In thirty seconds? I need to take my time with you, make it good.”

“But you made me come, like, five times,” she argues, her plush mouth pouting.

I can’t help but smile. “And you were beautiful.” I kiss her lips, but have to pull back before I get too carried away again. “Rain check?”

She glances down, my cock still hard. “How about I jack you quickly?”

I shouldn’t be doing this, nor should she... I’ve got to go... but that does sound good.

“Jas.” I’m like a fuckin’ glutton for punishment.

She cups my balls, and then starts to work my cock so fuckin’ good in her hand.

“Come on my tits,” she says sweetly. “Hawk, you need to...”

I cup them as they stare at me in the face, but my eyes move back to hers.

She squeezes, biting down on her lip as I lose myself in her touch.

Moving my hand to her pussy, I rub her through her folds, then swirl her clit as her eyes flutter closed.

She feels amazing. I wish it was my cock in her tight pussy, but that won’t do. I don’t wanna be rushed into fuckin’ her in five seconds. So this will have to do until I can come back... Oh yeah, I’m gonna be back all right.

She starts to moan, and then rubs herself into my hand as she cries out.

My balls pull tight, and I start to come too, then she bends toward me, lowering her chest as I coat her tits with my cum and stare at the beautiful sight as she pants and moans until I’m spent.

Holy fuckin’ shit balls.

I take her face in my hands. “You’re a bad little girl, Jas,” I mutter, kissing her again. “And this tight little pussy is so fuckin’ hot.”

“I liked your mouth on me,” she pants as our foreheads push together.

“I could eat your pussy for hours,” I tell her. “And I will next time.”

“Next time?” she coos. How could she even question it?

Nodding slowly, she smiles in response, and I give her a chin lift. “Some tissues in the glove box.”

She reaches over and starts to wipe myself off her tits.

I watch in silent appreciation.

“You better go,” she says, climbing off me. “Should I come too?”

I shake my head. “Ain’t nothin’ you can do. Safer here.”

She nods, pulling her blouse together. “Well, I guess I’ll see you at the club.”

I hope she doesn’t regret what we did, because I want to do so much more.

“I guess I will.”

When she licks her lips, I lean over to kiss her one last time.

“Goodnight, *Hawkie*.”

“Goodnight, *Jas*.”

Little did I know then that it would be the first and last time I ever put my mouth, or my hands, on her again.

JASMYNE

PRESENT DAY

Reluctantly, I climb into Hawk's truck.

I haven't been in here since... *that night*. The night he laid me on this very seat and made me come over and over with that skillful mouth of his. The man is a machine.

I've never acted so recklessly in my entire life, but that night I was so hot for it.

I can't even blame the booze, as I was perfectly sober.

I would have fucked him in his damn driver's seat if Cash hadn't rang and broken the mood. Of course, at the time, the fire was more important. Luckily, they stopped it in its tracks before too much damage was done. The whole place has since been rewired.

But man, that was unbelievable.

I press my thighs together remembering every single detail.

Fine. I'll admit... His cock is impressive. More than impressive, it deserves its own zip code. But aside from that, and his amazing body, Hawk has no other redeeming qualities.

I've resigned to the fact that all he wanted to do was get into my pants and be the first to do so. That's how he rolls. That's how they all roll.

He starts the truck, and we pull out of the lot, driving through the city to Rock's yard.

Of course, this was completely unnecessary and just another way for

Hawk to try to assert his authority over me.

I don't know who he thinks he is.

I fold my arms over my chest protectively.

"See the game on the weekend?"

I give him a look.

He knows I love the Saints. Always have.

"You don't have to do this."

He gives me a sideways glance, and I keep my gaze from straying to how tight his t-shirt hugs his biceps.

"Do what?"

"Make small talk."

"You wanna sit in silence? Fine."

Let's see how long that lasts...

"Just... The last time you were in this truck," he goes on, less than ten seconds later, "you were doin' a whole lotta talkin'." Yup. Knew this was coming.

"Maybe I should get out and walk."

"I get what I did was wrong." Wow, it's as if I haven't even spoken. "But come on, Jas. Star meant nothin', and we didn't even fuck."

I'm tempted to put my hands over my ears like a child and sing *la la la*.

But I ignore him instead.

"And you know what else?" He snorts. "If you didn't care, you wouldn't be actin' like this."

I finally snap. "I'm not acting like anything. This is the real me. Get used to it."

He shakes his head. "Nope, wrong again. I've seen the real you, and I won't settle for anything less."

I laugh without humor. "You'll be waiting a long time."

"We'll see."

Annoyed, I turn to look at him. "Why can't you just get it into your thick skull that I'm not into you anymore, okay? I'd been drinking that night... I wasn't myself." We both know that's a lie. "So just drop it. It was a mistake."

"This whole thing is bullshit and you know it," he goes on once again, and my chest tightens with frustration. "Draggin' this out because the reality is... I got too close, didn't I, Jas? And you don't like anyone gettin' too close just in case they see what's beneath."

"Aren't we a regular Dr. Phil." I roll my eyes. "Close? You had your head

between my legs if I remember correctly.”

Why that flies out of my mouth, I don’t know. I slap a hand over my traitorous lips.

Hawk, of course, revels in my momentary lapse of judgement and my loose lips.

“Yeah, and I think about that night all the time.” He grips the steering wheel enough that his knuckles turn white. “What you tasted like... How you screamed my name.”

I swallow hard. Cleaning my throat, I say, “Well, I’m glad that’s a good memory for you. It’ll serve you well in your future spank bank.”

“We’ll see.”

“No, we won’t see. I’ve got a date this weekend anyway.”

Facing forward, I feel his eyes on me, and a thrill rushes through my body.

I’m a master at keeping my feelings in check, so I shrug, bringing my gaze back to him. “If that’s okay with you, Dad.”

His nostrils literally flair at my taunt. “You know what will happen if you go on a date with another man, Jas. Don’t push me.”

“Stop being an arrogant prick. You don’t own me because you sucked on my pussy once and I liked it. Sue me. I hadn’t been laid in a while.”

“And you haven’t since... Have you, Jas?”

My mouth opens and then closes again. Fuck.

He smirks, and not for the first time tonight, I want to slap it off his face.

Damn asshole.

“That’s none of your business.”

“Don’t even think about tryin’ to get laid this weekend. Not gonna happen.”

Of all the nerve!

“Since when is that up to you?” I snort. “And for the record, I don’t have to try, *Hawkie*. I have men wanting to fuck me all the time.”

He makes a guttural sound in the back of his throat.

Good. Two can play the jealous game.

“What about you?” I throw back at him.

“What about me?”

I roll my eyes. “Have you had sex with anyone since...” I wave my hand between us. “*This*.”

He palms the back of his head. I mean, it’s not like he’s going to tell me

the truth. It's not exactly biker behavior to remain celibate, but Manny's words keep playing on my mind, and now I need to know. I cannot imagine Hawk going three months without sex. It would have killed him by now.

"What's the point? You won't believe me anyway."

"Then what does it matter?" I press.

"It doesn't."

"So tell me."

He hesitates. He knows I'll be even more pissed if he has, but then if he hasn't, I'll assume he's lying.

Hawk isn't good at lying. In fact, he's shit at it.

"It's been..."

I try to coax him with my hand, helping him get the words out.

"Yeah... Three months, four days and..." He glances at his watch. "Six hours, forty-four seconds."

My eyes meet his, narrowing as my heart beats faster. "You're lying."

He shakes his head.

I swallow the lump in my throat. "Why not?"

He runs a hand through his hair. Talking and feelings aren't exactly his strong point.

"You know why."

"Hmm." Sighing, I take a breath, trying to collect my thoughts. He sounds so sincere... could he be telling me the truth?

"What's hmm?"

"You could just be saying that to get back in my good graces, because you think it's what I want to hear."

He shakes his head. "So now I'm a sociopath? I think I'd have more luck flyin' to the moon."

I try not to smile, but it's hard.

He hasn't had sex in three months?

Holy shit.

"What?" he barks at me.

I pop a shoulder. "Nothing."

"Spit it out, woman."

"Just... your hand must be getting really tired." It takes everything in me not to laugh.

His lips twitch when I turn to look at him, but he doesn't smile. That's not his style.

“You’ve no fuckin’ idea.”

“Where do you do it?” I go on, looking away again.

“Where do I jerk off?”

How the fuck did we go from hating one another to this?

“Umm, yeah.”

A normal thing to say would be to mind my own business or shut the fuck up. But not Hawk. He takes everything literally. *Everything.*

“The shower, mainly.”

I swallow hard, my mouth now dry.

“Then there’s my bed. The bathroom stall,” he goes on. “Shippin’ yard when no one’s around, upstairs at church, the restroom at the Grill that night you had that white dress on. Fuckin’ got my hand in my pants so damn much, I could make a living off it.”

I almost let out another laugh at that, but then I frown in confusion. “White dress?”

“You were with Cash and Deanna. Your tits and that sweet ass... *Fuck me...* I jerk off to that memory the most, along with the time when you spread your legs for me right here and I fucked your pussy with my tongue, I thought I was gonna have a heart attack.” My thighs clench, my pussy aching from everything he’s saying. Why did I ask that question?!

God, I’m so damn horny.

No, Jasmyne! Now is the time to be strong.

You can’t let him do this. Hawk equals pain, remember?

“What about you?” He gives me a chin lift, but I don’t meet his gaze. “Did you fuck your dildo and pretend it was me?”

My answer is immediate. “No.”

“Liar.”

Thanks to him, I had to buy an oral sex vibratory stimulator, which isn’t nearly as good as the same thing.

Just imagining him flicking his tongue over my clit over and over...

“You’re thinkin’ about it now, aren’t you, babe?”

“Nope, more like ways to murder you and make it look like an accident.”

“You screamed.” I gave him an inch, and he’s running with it. Dammit.

“I was momentarily insane.”

“You rode my face, Jas. And you liked it. You liked your titties bein’ played with and my mouth on those too. You’re wet now, I know it.”

“Shut the hell up,” I bite out.

He snorts. “If I felt between your legs right this moment, you’d be ready for my cock, wouldn’t you?”

I glance at his lap inadvertently and see he’s hard, the thickness pressing against the material of his jeans.

Then I remember him spurting his cum all over my tits as I jerked him off. I barely refrain from moaning. Definitely gonna need BOB tonight.

“No, but just try it, and I’ll punch you in the balls.”

“Just keep tellin’ yourself you hate me, babe. I can be patient. I proved that already. And when you need me to come and fuck you like a real man, until you’re screamin’ your pretty lungs out, give me a call.”

I wet my lips, ready to... I don’t know... do something. Strangle him, most likely. I’m just not sure if it would be with my thighs around his head. I hate that he does this to me.

But we pull up to Rock’s just as I start to spiral, Hawk swiftly parking and jumping out of his side before my seat belt is even off. I watch as he adjusts his dick in his jeans.

Holy guacamole.

I’m soaking. Literally.

And I’m so mad with myself for being a pushover.

One little word from Hawk’s potty mouth, and I’m drooling all over myself and needing friction.

Well, I’m not going to do it.

I will not use my favorite vibrator and picture him on top of me, thrusting as he holds my hands above my head, pinned to the ground, while he fucks me stupid. Fuck him.

Damn asshole. Who is he to remind me anyway?

Nope. This is not going as planned. And it’s exactly why we never should have made out in the first place because it all becomes way too awkward when things don’t work out. Or in this case, when he decided to use smoking pot as an excuse to let another woman suck him off.

I cringe at the idea.

Maybe he’s right, I should let it go. But that doesn’t mean he gets another chance.

Maybe I am a fucking bitch, I don’t care. I was fine before, and I’ll be fine now.

And if he stays out of my way, we’ll both be better off.



“There’s nothing untoward in the contracts,” I say to Rock. “You can have your attorney look them over. You’ll retain fifty percent share with the club and the profits will be split after the necessary deductions and outgoings etcetera.”

Rock nods. “I trust you, Jas.” He gives me a smile.

“Take the time to read everything through,” I say. “There can be a lot of jargon in contracts such as these. So I want to make sure you understand how everything is going to work.”

“Appreciate that. Thanks, Jas.”

I try not to let Hawk’s penetrating stare get to me as we sit in Rock’s tiny office.

Why Hawk had to be here is anyone’s guess.

He seriously needs to get a life and stop being a general nuisance.

I don’t know why he isn’t getting it. Then again, I realize that my body reacted to his dirty words... And my mind, well, my mind has no excuse to not behave. But all I can think about is Hawk and his fat cock spurting all over my...

“What do you think?” Cash is asking me.

Shit.

So this is what happens when you’re seriously distracted. I need to rid Hawk from my system once and for all. And no, not by Manny’s fuck buddy suggestion, though I admit it isn’t the first time the thought has crossed my mind.

I don’t know how people do friends with benefits. For me, there’s always feelings involved. And Hawk and I are not even friends. We’re... I don’t know what we are.

“Uh...”

I see Hawk smirking. *Bastard.*

“The changeover date,” Cash prompts.

I recover quickly. “The contract has the start of next month. Once we do inventory and settle all the outstanding accounts, we can start a new slate on the first of the month.”

I look at Rock. “You’re okay with that, Rock?”

I just need to be sure.

I’m in this for everyone. Everybody has to be comfortable. It’s a big step,

giving up fifty percent of the company that you've spent the last two years building. But without capital and cash flow, there is no room for Rock to expand any further.

I would never agree to anything that would screw him over, and neither would Cash. Rock and Jett are family. We're all one big family, really, but Cash took Jett under his wing when he was a wayward teenager and he's been with the club ever since.

Rock only just officially joined after Cash, and the committee members agreed to waive his prospect duties, being he'd already served them with another club.

"I'm sure," Rock says. "This is gonna be good. I feel good about it."

"Perfect." I smile. "I'll be looking after all the accounts, and if you're happy to keep Luna on reception and taking orders and payments, eventually we'll get more help as the business expands."

"Sounds good."

I nod, then glance to Cash. "Well, that's excellent. Everyone's happy."

"That's what I like." Cash leans over and shakes Rock's hand.

I know Cash has wanted to buy in for a while now, but Rock was being stubborn.

Now he's realized that other people can do the driving and heavy lifting, he can concentrate on selling the business to new clients. He seems a lot happier about that.

I still don't know what Hawk is doing here, but I can feel him staring at me again.

Does he ever let up?

I try not to think about the things he said.

He had no right to bring that up when I was about to head into a meeting. It's like he enjoys making me frazzled.

If I felt between your legs right this moment, you'd be ready for my cock, wouldn't you?

The thing is, Hawk is smug because he knows the truth. He knows that I'm not wet between my legs. I'm fucking soaked. Because no man has made me feel anything like he did that night.

He made me feel beautiful.

Worthy.

Sexy.

And I hadn't felt that in so long after my ex.

And then he went and ruined it all. No matter how I try, I can't unsee goddamn Star sucking him off. I want to scratch her fucking eyes out.

We had a confrontation, and I called her a slut who'd suck anyone off. She hadn't even put up a fight. What does that even tell you?

She doesn't care about him, not the way I do... *Did*. The way I *did*.

There is nothing between us. All it was that night was lust. Nothing more.

Even if all I am doing right now is picturing him jerking off all over his house... And public bathrooms... And his workplaces... Jesus, that is so fucking hot.

Just one little taste... I squeeze my legs together as I rustle the papers, trying to distract myself. I can't let myself go there.

I don't want to be just another fuck to him. I can't do the 'benefits' thing, but I also can't stop the yearning my body has for him.

Especially with the way his scrutiny has me withering in my chair while I try to compose myself.

Cash and Rock stand and chat about the upcoming merger and what they expect to happen in the coming weeks.

Hawk leans across the table. "You okay, princess."

"Don't call me that."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"You seem a little... *distracted*."

Sure enough, I feel the heat rise in my cheeks.

"It's the air conditioning," I complain, trying to sound nonchalant.

"Uh huh."

"And stop staring at me while I'm conducting a meeting. It's not appropriate."

"Where else am I supposed to look?"

"At anyone else but me," I throw back.

He steels himself, like I'm trying his patience. Good. I hope I am.

"You know, anyone else would haul you outta here and spank you rotten for speakin' to them like that."

"That's called assault." I glare up at him.

"Not if it's wanted."

"It's *not* wanted." Moving my hair over my shoulder, I huff, twisting the ends of my strands.

His lips curl into a half-smile, half-grimace, and I can't tell if he's

annoyed or pleased with himself. With Hawk, I'm always left guessing.

"You do this thing, when you're turned on."

My eyes go wide as I gape at him. "Excuse me?"

He lowers his voice, looking over my shoulder to make sure Cash and Rock are out of earshot. "You play with the ends of your hair," he goes on. I immediately drop my hair.

"Then you fiddle with your glasses." Just as he says it, my fingers reach for them as I fumble, then drop them onto the table. "But best of all, you get this fuckin' beautiful flush across your skin that reminds me of the first time I made you come."

I swallow hard. *He's just trying to rile you. Do not give him the satisfaction.* "The first and last time," I mutter.

"That's what you think."

"You're being Tarzan again."

"Fine. I'll start callin' you Jane."

I glare at him. "Stop doing this, Hawk."

"Not until you forgive me."

Ha. Like that's going to happen.

"What does it matter if I do anyway?"

He looks down at the table, and his eyes actually look... sorrowful for a moment.

"I don't like you bein' mad at me." His voice is so quiet and faint that I'm sure I'm hearing things.

Well. That kinda does sound remorseful...

I don't even know what to say to that. My mouth opens, but no sound comes out.

"It wasn't just physical, Jas. We both know that."

"Stop it."

"I'll stop when you really fuckin' mean it." He straightens, looking down at me menacingly as I shake my head. "And trust me, princess, I can be frustratingly patient when I want to be."

I want to tell him to go fuck himself, but something in his eyes is sincere.

"You going to grovel now?" I say, knowing he'd never do such a thing.

Then, I watch in horror as he gets down on his knees, his beautiful blue eyes never leaving mine. I stare in stunned silence, then croak. "What are you doing?"

"What does it look like?"

“You’re not seriously going to...”

“Jas. I need you to forgive me.”

I open my mouth then close it again.

“Hawk. You don’t have to do this.”

“Clearly I do, and if you decide not to forgive me for being a dick then I’ll accept it and move on.”

“Really?”

He shifts his eyes to one side for a moment, then back to me. “No. I’ll stalk you to the ends of the earth and never leave you the fuck alone until you’re so sick of me, you have no choice but to relent.”

I can’t help but giggle.

This isn’t Hawk.

He doesn’t behave this way. He doesn’t plead or beg, or get down on his knees. He must be really fucking serious.

“That is kinda romantic... In a seriously fucked up way.”

“So you forgive me?”

I bite my lip. I know I have to let him off the hook, but seeing him like this is kinda hot.

“I don’t know. I kinda like seeing you like this, in grovel mode.”

“You just won’t let me out of my misery, will you?”

Now I feel bad for the guy. We made out... it wasn’t like I was his girlfriend. *Wait! Now I’m defending him?*

“Fine. I forgive you. But things can’t go back to how they were.”

“Why not?” He frowns again and begins to stand, but I shove him back down.

Because I’ve been hurt before. Not by you.

“We just need to keep things professional. I work here, remember?”

“I don’t see that as an issue.”

I shake my head. I can’t tell him the truth... that he has the potential to ruin me for good. That won’t help matters here.

“Let’s just... agree to be friends... for now.”

“Friends?” he spits the words and looks at me like I’ve grown two heads. It has to be this way.

Hawk will destroy me if I fall for him, and deep down I know I could. Easily.

“Yes.”

“I don’t want to be your fuckin’ friend.”

I shake my head, this time I let him get back to his feet.

What did he think? I'd just fall at his feet.

"I'm not punishing you, Hawk. I just need to work my shit out—"

"Sounds like an excuse."

I'm about to reel off all the reasons I've carefully crafted on why we shouldn't be together when Jett knocks on the door, ready to go over the figures. He's the club Treasurer and we like to keep a close eye on how all the businesses are going. Everyone's busy.

"Jas? Oh, if you're busy I can come back?" he says, looking from me to Hawk.

I wave him in. "No. It's fine. Hawk was just leaving."

I need to freaking digest him being down on his knees and looking at me like that.

Hawk grunts and leaves. Maybe he'll regret what he just did because clearly he was expecting a little more from me.

I'm dumbstruck, because my head is fighting my heart, and I don't know how long either one can hold out for.

HAWK

I SAID THINGS I SHOULDN'T HAVE, BUT I DON'T REGRET GROVELING.

I never should have told her shit about what I do with my goddamn palm either, but she wanted to know and, frankly, I wanted to tell her. I want her back and she needs to know I'm serious.

She's the highlight of my showering routine, and every other minute in between.

The hot water cascades over me, and tonight's no different, aside from it's Saturday night and I'm at church. I normally leave my jerking off sessions for at home, but after running into my little spitfire all damn week, she's got me harder than ever.

I slide my hand over my cock and then tug. Bracing myself with one hand against the wall, I find a steady rhythm, one that keeps me close but not quite ready to blow...

She's there again. Her tits bouncing in my face as I suck on her pert nipple. I cup her tits and push them together, flicking the other nipple with my thumb as she grinds against me, moaning as I keep her on the edge.

Then I think about the dirty things she'd say to me.

I'm not much of a talker. I like tellin' her how pretty that pussy and her tits are, but dirty talk doesn't come easy to me. I love to hear it, though. Her talking about my cock is enough to make me explode.

"Fuck, that big cock, Hawk," she whispers as I grip her ass with my hands. "I love how full you make me feel. You're made for my pussy."

I grunt, moving my mouth to her other nipple so as not to leave it out. Her hands are in my hair, pulling on my scalp, but I welcome the pain.

“Fuck me harder, baby,” she groans.

I move my hands to her hips, bouncing her up and down harder. Letting her nipple go, her tits bounce freely in my face as I stare up at her.

Her eyes lock with mine.

“Whose cock belongs here, baby?” I grind out.

“Yours, Hawk...”

“Only mine?”

“Yes.”

“Ride me harder, Jas... Get yourself off, baby...”

She starts to moan, and when I move my thumb between us to her clit, she explodes in a second. Riding out her orgasm, I don't let up.

“This body,” I groan. “Should be fuckin' illegal.”

“So should your cock.”

“This cock's yours, baby, only yours.”

“Fuck me, Hawk... God, I need it so bad.”

I meet her rough thrusts, and we fuck like animals. Moaning and groaning as my truck shakes and balls draw tight. Then I'm coming inside her tight pussy as she calls my name over and over like she can't stop...

I come in my hand, my cum spurting like a goddamn water fountain.

I can't keep going on like this.

I can't not have sex; it's a part of who I am. But I only want it with her.

It'd be so easy to go and fuck one of the sweet butts downstairs, hell, plenty of them would hop on my lap in seconds. But I don't want that.

If I wanted Star, I would have fucked her that morning when she was naked in my bed.

But the only woman I want naked is Jas.

Groaning, I wash myself off and then shampoo my hair.

I don't need to be consumed by her all goddamn night.

She treats me like something on the bottom of her shoe anyway.

I turn the water off and shake my hair. Stepping out of the shower, I grab a towel and dry myself.

I glance at my phone and see my moms sent several messages and I have a missed call. She's only just recently discovered texting.

I roll my eyes.

Mom

Honey, I haven't heard from you in a few days. Are you okay?

Mom

How's work?

Mom

Have you met a woman? Is that why you're ignoring me?

Mom

Chad Michael Catone... this isn't funny

Mom

I'll call Cash if I have to...

I run the towel through my hair as I type back one handed.

Me

I'm fine, Mom. Calm down. I was in the shower.

Me

Why are you so jumpy? How is Francis?

While I wait for her to reply, I tug my clothes on.

Mom

Finally. I was going to send out a search party.

Me

Busy, Mom

Mom

You're always busy. And Francis is fine. He sends his love.
Your sister wants to know when you're taking her to the movies

I roll my eyes.

Me

She can text me and we'll arrange a time. But I'm not watching the Barbie movie

I think my sister is a little too old for that but what would I know.

My family are about an hour away, and I know for a fact that if they lived any closer, they'd be all up in my business ever more, especially my mother.

Mom

You didn't answer my question about meeting someone

This is my mother. She would have made a great detective.

Me

Nothing to tell. GTG. Call you tomorrow.

By the time I'm dressed and downstairs, I hear Manny before I even see him.

"You didn't!" he declares. "What kind of magician are you?"

When I get to the bottom of the stairs, still shrugging my cut on, I see he's got Jas in a tight embrace and they're both jumping up and down.

What the hell's going on? And why does Manny have his paws all over my girl?

She's wearing a very tight, very short pink body-con style dress that is frankly indecent. Her tits look huge.

I'd love her to wear it in the bedroom so I could peel the damn thing off her.

"I know! Well, like I said, I've got friends in low places."

"What's goin' on?" I hear Priest ask as I slide up to the bar and order a shot.

Manny turns to face him. "Jas only went and got us tickets to Inked Men XL tonight. I'm so pumped! I knew I put on my favorite patent leather pants for a reason."

"Aren't you supposed to be workin'?" I grumble.

I feel Jas turn to face me. I don't meet her gaze. I don't need to look at her to know she'll be glaring at me.

"I have a night off," Manny declares. "Got cover from the Grill, but I already cooked gumbo for you all for the weekend anyway. So turn that frown upside down."

I don't like this at all.

A strip club?

Where men are dancing around naked?

Men who will see how hot she is and want to give her a private performance later?

I know how these shows work with pretty women. And Jas is a knockout.

“Where is it?” I bark.

Jas rolls her eyes, turning away from me, and mumbles something about being a *grumpy ass*.

“Solo,” Manny blurts out, and Jas whips her glare to him.

Great. Looks like I know where I’m gonna be heading tonight.

Not that I wanna see grown men dancing around with their dicks hanging out. No, thank you. But I need to make sure she’s going to be safe. I mean, there will mostly be women there, I’m assuming, but it’s right next to a very hip bar.

I imagine my girl getting drunk and wanting to dance with other men.

My hand clenches into a fist, and then I feel Manny staring at me.

I look up at him. “I’ll take care of her,” he says reassuringly.

I grit my teeth. “That’s my fuckin’ job.”

He shrugs, giving me a sympathetic smile. Like that’s gonna fuckin’ help me.

It’s settled. I’m going.

She won’t see me or even know I’m there, but I’m gonna make sure she doesn’t run into any trouble. And if anyone talks to her, or so help me, if they touch her, I’ll kill them with my bare hands.

The jealousy raging inside me feels nuclear.

Jas is a good girl, I remind myself. She doesn’t get wasted and sleep with random guys.

But then again, it’s been months and months now, and I don’t know how long before we fooled around that she had sex. I don’t want to think about that part too closely.

I crack my head from side to side as my shot arrives, and I throw it back in one go.

Turning back to Jas, she meets my gaze again, but the look on her face is totally unbothered. “You wearin’ that tonight?” My disapproval is evident.

She does a little courtesy. “If that’s okay with you, your Lordship.”

Manny, as well as Luna, who’s just sidled up, both burst out laughing.

“Jasmyne,” I say, trying to rein in my temper. “A word.” I thumb to the

back of the club, near her office.

“I’m busy. And you-” Before she’s even done speaking, I’m yanking on her arm and practically dragging her to her office. The spitfire cusses at me the whole way.

When I let her go, she turns to face me, and I run my hands through my hair.

“That dress,” I growl, making her eyes wide.

She looks down at herself. “What about it?”

“It’s too...” I wave a hand down her body. “Sexy.”

She rolls her eyes. “Hawk. Let me go, I’m not doing this here. I can wear what I like and do what I want.”

“Even if dudes are gonna be tryin’ their luck with you?”

Setting her hand on her hip, she shakes her head. “That is actually the point... I’m single... I want to mingle.” It’s like she’s trying to piss me off.

“Mingle with me.”

“Go away,” she huffs.

I sweep my hand to the door. “You’re free to leave any time.”

My pulse quickens when she doesn’t.

“You know what your issue is?” she hurls at me, making no attempt to move.

“I only have one?”

“You can’t have me, but you don’t want anyone else to have me either.” That’s obvious.

“Got it in one.”

“I’m not here to be claimed, or be *your girl*, Hawk. I thought I made that clear.”

I move toward her, and she steps back, pressing her ass against the wall.

She’s making it way too easy for me to cage her in. Which I take every advantage of.

“And I thought I made it clear that I’m not givin’ up.”

“Even if I want you to,” she says, eyes staring up into mine with fire. But I see something else there too. Something that tells me, once again, that this isn’t pointless. She wants me.

“Say the words, and I’m done.”

Her lips part, and my eyes drop down to them.

Her chest is rising and falling so fast, it’s giving her away. She can rip me a new one, no problem, but as soon as I get close to her, my proximity makes

her nerves go wild. Just like how I react to her.

Fuck, I wanna drag her upstairs to my bed and ravage her. Fuckin' her hard from behind until she tells me she's seen the error of her ways.

"Say them, Jas," I repeat, my tone growing husky as I breathe her in.

"I don't want you." The rejection leaves her lips so quietly; I want to kiss them away..

I smirk. "You mean that?"

She nods, but it's half-hearted.

I pull back from her, and a soft plea hums from her throat, almost sounding like a whimper. Before she even knows what she's doing, she closes her eyes. Her hands press against the wall as she tries to control the shudder going through her body.

I stare at her, in awe.

"You're turned on, aren't you, Jas?" I say, sure of myself. Her body's reaction to me, she can't fake that.

She bites down on her lip.

I step back in. "Yes, you are. But you're too goddamn stubborn to admit it."

"I'm not... I..."

"Did you touch yourself, baby?" I move my mouth to her ear. "I touched myself, just ten minutes ago."

"*Hawk...*" she breathes out, and that's it. I'm hard all over again.

"Fucked my hand, came all over myself thinkin' about you ridin' my cock in my truck. These big tits in my face."

"Jesus," she says shakily, like she didn't even mean to.

I don't touch her on purpose. I want her begging for it. And maybe that'll be to my disadvantage since she's about to go to a strip club, but I'm past the point of caring anymore.

"We can fuck, if that's what you want," I grit out, knowing it'll never be enough for me. "Since you're so hung up on feelings and shit, we can just make it about sex. You can't deny how your body reacts to me."

Feeling daring and wanting to push my luck, I brush my mouth down to her neck, my breath on her skin. She smells so fucking good. "So tonight, while you're out eyein' other men, lookin' at cock, and you feel wet between your legs... just remember, I'm the one, Jas. I'm the one who can make you feel good. Who can give you what you want. *Anything* you want. My hands, my tongue, my cock... it's yours. Remember that when you're ridin' your

dildo tonight, all worked up, 'cause you sure as fuck ain't takin' any other man's dick home. Over my dead body."

I can feel her pulse speed up under my lips, hearing a light moan she keeps in her chest. Still trying to hide from me.

I can't kiss her. If I do, it'll all be over.

Instead, I bite down on her neck, knowing I'm leaving a hickey, and I don't give a shit.

What's more, she doesn't stop me. Her breathing is rapid, and she pants like she wants so much more.

So, I push off the wall and leave her there, trembling, wanting... and marked.

I adjust my throbbing cock in my jeans before I stride back through the clubhouse to the bar.

Manny, Luna, and now Deanna look my way, and when I sit next to Tag on the stool, I'm happy to see that Jas emerges from her office looking very disheveled. She wobbles a little in those ridiculous high heels she has on, and she pulls at the fabric on her dress.

So fuckin' short...

She better have gotten the goddamn message, because if I have to haul her out of that club tonight, it's not gonna be pretty.

I meant what I said.

No man is gonna touch her. No man is going near her. If they do, they'll suffer my wrath.

When she passes me by, she doesn't look at me.

I smirk when I see the mark on her neck and Deanna peers at it and glances my way.

Good.

The more people who know she's mine, the better.

That mark is there for a reason.

The next one I'm gonna put on her will be on the inside of her thighs.

Only I'm going there, and if she has other plans tonight, she's surely mistaken at the lengths I'll go to.

She has no fuckin' clue.

I smile into my next shot.

Tonight is gonna be a turning point, one way or the other.



“That a good idea?” Cash gives me a chin lift.

“What?”

“Jas.”

I snort. “You lettin’ your ol’ lady go to a damn strip club. You tell me.”

He shakes his head. “My woman’s heavily pregnant,” he reminds me. “Plus, she’ll get all horny at the show and come home to me. It’s a win-win.”

I grumble. Exactly my point, but Jas isn’t coming home to me.

I take off shortly after, telling the guys I’ve got some shit to take care of.

I don’t need any of their judgement or mockery for basically stalking Jas tonight. Cash may not be worried about Deanna, in fact, he found it amusing.

But my jealousy is legendary.

I’m also protective.

I have a sixteen-year-old sister, Sistine, who I’m protective of, and my twelve-year-old cousin, Lexi who calls me her Uncle. She’s the apple of my eye, and I spend as much time with her as I can. I’m protective of her because I’m the same way with my mom. It’s just how I’m made.

I’m close with Sistine, and I’m lucky she’s not too much of a pain in the ass.

Another thing Jas doesn’t know about me. I’m good with kids. I like them, contrary to popular opinion that I’m grumpy and can’t hold a conversation. I seem to get along with kids better than I do adults. Maybe because there’s no bullshit. They call it as they see it.

My mom had a tough time raising me as a single mom, so I’ve got a lot of respect for her. She worked damn hard. My dad ran out on us when he hooked up with my mom’s best friend. It was a horrible and confusing time for both of us. Then Mom met her now husband, Francis, and they fell in love, thus resulting in my baby sister being born when I was a teenager.

Francis has been good to my mom, and though I don’t get to see them as much as I want, they’re always happy when we catch up.

My sister is always going on about coming to the club, but she’s not coming here until she’s at least eighteen, and even then. I don’t want to have to knock Nevada’s or Riot’s teeth in, because I sure as shit ain’t paying for their dentures.

My sister is trouble, so her being home for a few more years means I don’t have to kill anybody just yet.

I put out my cigarette, another sure sign I’m losing it since I rarely smoke, and look up to the club across the street.

Goddamn Solo.

It looks like a 90s karaoke bar from the outside.

I palm the back of my head.

I'm not worried about her seeing me here, not that I think she will, but I don't give a shit. I'm more worried about what I'll do if she's talking to another guy.

She's as stubborn as a mule.

She's had my balls in a vice ever since I met her, not that I'd let her know how much power she has over me.

I hop off my bike and make my way to the door. Of course, I don't have a damn ticket to get into the club, and just because I don't wanna cause a scene, I take off my cut and shove it in my side saddle.

Walking toward the entrance of the bar, I go right inside. Straight away, I see the door to the event and know I'm gonna have to do some sweet talking to get inside.

Pity I don't know anyone at the door; that would have been easier.

Still. I have my ways

"Don't have a ticket," I say, as the guy looks me up and down when I approach the door.

"Sell them at the door."

Okay, this might be easier than I thought.

"How much?"

"Hundred bucks."

My eyes go wide. "Seriously?"

"That's the price you pay for not booking ahead."

I grimace, reaching for my wallet.

"Here to see someone," I tell him, just in case he thinks I'm here for the show.

"Uh huh."

"Not the show," I clarify.

"Right."

I roll my eyes, and he takes my cash. Handing me a ticket, he rips off the ticket butt.

I give him a chin lift and proceed inside.

I've been in the Vault a million times, but it's nothing like this.

The show is clearly underway and there are screaming women everywhere. It's deafening.

I've a good mind to turn around and go demand my money back, or get some earplugs.

As I work my way through the crowd, I hope I don't get spotted, but really, she could be anywhere.

There must be two to three hundred women in here, and they're all in the throes of yelling and screaming as I see a guy dressed like Jax from Sons of Anarchy parading around in a thong as he twirls his cut around his finger and lets it go as the crowd goes wild.

Holy shit. These chicks are insane.

I spot a table in the back. Thank Christ, most of the women want to be up in the front.

It's elevated so I get a good view of the stage and the front rows.

Knowing my girl, she'll be in the thick of it.

I scan the crowd, willing myself to find her. I realize now how stupid it was for me to be here. I mean, why is she here? It's the after-party that I'm concerned about. I know that if Jas has a few too many, she gets loose lips and starts rambling, and some guys can take advantage of that.

I'm here to protect her. Nothing more.

Maybe if I keep telling myself that very thing, I'll start to believe it.

JASMYNE

WE DRINK. WE DANCE. WE PARTY LIKE IT'S 1999.

All except Deanna. She does all of the above, but sips on lemonade instead of vodka.

I'm toast already, but it's hardly my fault. My friends are to blame.

Manny is next to me, clapping and encouraging the hot strippers to come over.

I have to say, the choreography is really good. Even if it is a lot of hip thrusting and gyrating. These guys really know how to move.

Having said that, none of them really do it for me. I mean, they're hot, but I have a specific type... Maybe it's the vodka talking... Or maybe it's the way Hawk manhandled me back at the club.

That rotten bastard.

I've been wet the entire time I've been here, and not from the damn strippers. Is that what he wanted? To leave me like this? All frustrated and pent up? At a bar? Where he knows I can go hook up. Well, he probably knows I would never do that, and not because I'm a prude, but because... he'll never understand. I need that connection.

I crave it.

I wish I could just go out and give my body what it needs, but I know it will never do.

I've been there and done that in college, I had fun. But it never meant anything.

Ever since Jeremy, I've just not felt very sexual. I've felt... dowdy and not enough.

He made me feel like I was worthless, and it's taken a long time to get that back.

I can't just give it all away because Hawk is overbearing and completely hot.

The way he pushed me up against the wall... not touching me, but so close.

His mouth, his breath... those dirty things he said.

It's almost too much.

He's too much.

Just remember, I'm the one, Jas. I'm the one who can make you feel good. Who can give you what you want. Anything you want. My hands, my tongue, my cock... it's yours.

Nobody has ever spoken that way to me before and... I liked it.

Holy Jesus, did I like it.

I know I shouldn't have let him drag me like that, in front of everyone, but a part of me wanted to know what he was going to say and do when he found out where we were going.

Son of a bitch.

His body, though... Pressed up against mine. The heat coming off him.

The taunt in his words, more like a promise than a threat.

Oh, he means business.

But I'm not going to be a pushover just because my body responds to him.

Nope. Not gonna happen.

I know I'm being stubborn. I could easily give my body what it needs and fuck him, but then it would be like he's getting away with treating me however he wants.

I need some solid advice.

I turn to Summer as the song ends and blurt out, "Do you think I'm being mean, not forgiving Hawk?"

She looks at me, surprised. "I don't think it's mean. You're not a mean person, and he hurt you." She smiles kindly. "I get it. If the roles were reversed, can you imagine how he would be acting?"

True. I'd never quite thought about it like that before.

"He just seemed so... sorry," I admit. "And I like him a lot... But I told myself we would never be anything, after what he did, and now I've got the memory of him and Star." I make a face.

“He fucked up, but at least he’s sorry. Some of the other brothers wouldn’t be.”

“Tell me about it.” I rub my arms. “I guess I’m just not a girl willing to share. No matter what.”

I didn’t confess everything Hawk said to Manny and the girls, but they wanted details.

They clearly know what’s going on, and that I’m resisting.

Deanna thinks I should throw caution to the wind. He’s a guy, and he was bound to fuck up, and if I want to use him as a fuck boy, then I should. Manny agreed. Luna says I should kick him to the curb or fuck his brains out, but I need to choose. So far, Summer is the only one being objective.

“I was the same with Jett,” she says. “I definitely wasn’t going to be sharing him. I didn’t even want to be claimed because I’d been independent for so long, and I thought it meant that I was now going to be right back at square one. Then I saw how he is within the club, and what I mean to him, and I knew that it’s just a formality. It was nothing to be afraid of.”

I nod. “I know. Hawk is so... intense, though. He’s overbearing at best, like he owns me or something.”

Summer laughs. “Better get used to it. They’re all tarred with the same brush when it comes to their women.”

I give her a look. “Assholes.”

She laughs again. “Assholes who mean well.”

The next act starts, and Manny comes back with another round of drinks. I forgot how well cocktails slide right down. Pretty soon, I’m going to be hammered, but I don’t care. It’s been ages since I’ve been out with my friends and had any fun.

And this is just what I need.

Letting my hair down, not having a care in the world, and more importantly, trying to forget all about Hawk and what he does to me.

The fact that Cash even let Deanna come out tonight, knowing where she was going, was a complete miracle. She’s so stinkin’ cute with her baby bump and tight-fitted dress along with her chucks.

Halfway through the routine, Manny gets pulled on stage, and he looks like all his Christmases are coming at once. Oh, these stripper guys don’t discriminate.

The guy dances around in a cowboy hat with spurs on the back of his boots, grinding his ass against Manny as he sits in the chair laughing his ass

off.

We clap along and cheer him on as the guy does his routine and even shoves Manny's hand down the front of his pants. Half the guy's ass is hanging out as he turns and shakes it across the stage.

When Manny comes back, he's clearly frazzled and panting like he's ran a marathon.

"That was so cool!" He laughs.

"That guy was hot!" I call out above the music.

"I so need to get his number," Manny says, fanning himself.

We drink more, laugh, fall around, and egg the dancers on like we're teenagers.

When the show's over, we make our way out to the nightclub next door and more drinks are on the table.

"Oh my god, I haven't laughed that hard in so long," Luna says, as we squish into the tightly packed bar.

We down a round of shots, as Deanna goes wild and orders a Shirley Temple.

"Me either," I agree, my words becoming a little slurred.

Pretty soon, we're dancing and letting loose. I grind against Manny, but there are plenty of guys trying to dance with the both of us.

We down more shots than I'm used to, and at this point, there's no denying I'm pretty trashed. I just haven't had such a good time in a long time. It's been all hard work, and absolutely no play.

When my arms land around a random stranger, and we start dancing together, I toss my head back and enjoy the beat.

I don't know this guy from Adam, but it feels good pressed up against him.

That doesn't last long, though, because I feel two hard hands grip my shoulders, and as I turn to look, my eyes go wide.

Hawk.

What the fuck is he doing here?

I let go of the random dude, and when Hawk stares at him and says nothing, he backs off.

I put my hands on my hips. "What the hell?"

He shakes his head. "Told you what would happen if another man put his hands on you."

"You're following me now?" I stumble in my heels, but he holds my

elbow to steady me.

“Someone has to. Clearly, you can’t handle your liquor.”

“Fuck you.”

Manny tugs on my arm. “Time to go.” He looks at Hawk sheepishly, and I see Deanna, Summer, and Luna gathering around.

So Hawk says the night’s over and everyone just jumps to his command.

“Not going home,” I slur. “Dancing.”

I swing my arms around his neck and continue to sway my hips.

He tries to pry my arms away, but I hang on tight. I’m like a spider monkey when I want to be.

“C’mon, *Hawkie*, don’t be a party pooper...”

I rub up against him as he stares down at me, not amused.

Manny rolls his lips as he watches.

“Let’s go, Jas, you’ve had enough to drink.”

I frown. “You can’t tell me what to do, Hawk.”

“I can when you’re trashed. You work for the club, which means you’re club property, and if Cash knew I let you rub yourself up against a total stranger who could potentially take advantage of you, he wouldn’t be happy about it.”

“Such a do-gooder,” I mumble. I let go of him and turn to Manny. “I’m ready now.”

I feel Hawk’s hands on my hips as he steers me through the crowd behind my friends.

Has he been watching me the whole night?

I don’t know if I should be furious or flattered.

When we get outside, the cold air hits me, and I start to sway.

Of course, Hawk is there to make sure I don’t fall, because he’s all of a sudden Citizen of the year.

“That was so much fun!” Luna squeals. “So many hot guys in there.”

“Guys who are drunk and won’t respect you in the mornin’,” I hear Hawk say.

I start laughing, then snort when Hawk looks down at me.

“Somethin’ funny, Jasmyne?”

Uh oh. He’s using my full name.

“You,” I say, poking him in the chest. “You’re funny, *Hawkie*.”

He looks over my head at Manny. “You let her drink this much?”

“Relax, I was with her the whole time. Those guys were just dancing.”

“Didn’t look like it to me,” he snarls back. “Anythin’ could’ve happened, and you’re all so trashed, who would’ve stopped it?”

“I’m not trashed,” Deanna pipes up. “And she was just having a good time. We were all in a group, Hawk. Don’t get your panties in a twist.”

He points at her. “You girls need to get home to your men. Fuck knows why Jett and Cash allowed this.”

“Party pooper police,” I giggle, scrunching his shirt. “Don’t you girls think Hawk is so fuckable... Look at him... aside from his grumpy pershon... pershonality...” I stutter the words incoherently. “He’s the whole damn package.”

Hawk grinds his teeth, and I laugh again.

“We need a cab,” Summer says, looking around.

“But the nights still young,” I complain with a pout.

Hawk is on his phone, saying something to someone. Who cares? I let go of his t-shirt and spin around. Leaning back against him, he's like a warm teddy bear.

When I rub my ass against him, he stops talking.

If he thinks he can come into my lovely night on the town with my friends and haul me out of the club, he can go to hell.

“Get in the cab,” Hawk says, flagging one down.

“I’m not going,” I declare. “Hawk, you can drive me home on your cycle bike.”

“Oh my god, she is trashed,” Luna says, giggling. “But man, can you drink, Jas.”

I smile and do a little bow, almost toppling over.

“Got a prospect comin’ to collect my bike,” he tells Manny. “I’ll take his cage and get her home. She lives on the other side of town.”

Manny nods. “Okay, but she’s a pistol when she’s like this.”

“When isn’t she?” he says back sarcastically.

I spin around in his arms. “Hey! You two talking about me?”

The girls all hug me in unison, and then Manny gives me a kiss on the cheek. “We live to dance another day,” he says, giving me a wink.

“You’re not leaving me with him, are you?” I whine, giving my foot a light stomp for effect.

“He’s gonna drive you,” Deanna says. “You’ll be fine. Just don’t puke.”

Of course, none of them are worried about Hawk. He’s a good guy. He’ll get me home safe, that’s not the point. I don’t want to be alone with him and

his judgy eyes.

They pile into a cab, and I wave them off.

“Such good people...” I say, leaning back against his chest again. “Mmm, you feel good, *Hawkie*.”

“And you're drunk.”

When I look up, he's staring down at me. “How long were you following me for?”

“All night.”

“Asshole.”

“Told you. When you understand who you belong to, it'll make life a whole lot easier for the two of us.”

“Tarzan.”

He grunts.

“Better you takin' me home than some other guy, I guess,” I mutter.

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“Sex.” Duh.

“We're not having sex.”

My eyebrows lift at that. “But I'm horny.”

“Exactly why I pulled you off that guy. You'll only do something you'll regret in the morning.”

“You can't tell me what to do.”

“Watch me.”

A few moments later, Pipes pulls up in Hawks's truck and they exchange words and keys.

Then, I'm being stuffed into the passenger side, and I lay my head on the window, enjoying the coolness against my skin.

“I'm not your reponshibility, *Hawkie*.”

It could just be me, but when he grabs the steering wheel, he does it with brute force.

“Sit back and be quiet.”

“Like I said... You can't...” I yawn. “You can't tell me what to do.”

He grunts.

“And I was planning on getting dick tonight,” I go on. “So are you offering?”

He glances at me. “You're not takin' dick from a random stranger, Jas. Other guys will take advantage of you in this state.”

I snort. “And you won't?”

“No. I won’t. You’re safer with me than anyone.”

I yawn again. “Where are you taking me? To your lair?” I laugh at my own joke.

He doesn’t answer.

I must doze off, because before I know it, Hawk is lifting me in his arms and I’m flush against his body as he carries me.

“I can walk!” I protest.

“Not in those heels and in this state.”

I glance around, but all I see is sky, and Hawk looking angry. *What’s up his ass?* I didn’t tell him to come rescue me. He did that all on his own.

He has no right to judge me.

He jiggles around with his keys in his hand and then unlocks a door. I know we’re not at church.

Are we at his place?

Once inside, he uses his elbow to switch the lights on, and then we walk into the den and he places me on the couch.

“I’ll get you some Tylenol and water,” he says.

I lie down and close my eyes. The soft, cool leather of the couch feels nice.

A few moments later, I feel the couch dip beside me, and I open one eye.

“Hold out your hand,” he says.

I sit up and give him a salute. “Yes, sir.”

Giving me a look of displeasure, he drops two Tylenol into my hand and hands me the glass.

“Drink.”

I stare at it. “This water is a funny color, *Hawkie*. Should check the plumbing.”

“It’s lime electrolytes,” he grumbles. “It’ll make you feel better.”

“But I already feel good.”

“You won’t tomorrow.”

I roll my eyes, dropping one tablet into my mouth and chugging the water. “Mmm, it tastes good.”

“And the other one,” he says.

“Yes, Daaaaad.” I salute him again, almost slopping the water all over myself.

He runs a hand over his face. “You’re so drunk.”

I take the other tablet and shake my head. “Am not.”

“I’ll put you to bed.”

“Ooh, is that a promise?”

He pinches the bridge of his nose. “What were you thinkin’, Jas?”

I look at him as he narrows his eyes on me. “What do you mean?”

He shakes his head, clenching his fist. “There were guys eyeing you up all over the bar.”

“So you came to my rescue?”

“I know you. I know you don’t want that.”

“Want what?”

“Some creep to feel you up and fuck you in a bathroom stall, who won’t even remember your name in the morning.”

I frown. “I wasn’t going to let him do that.”

“You’re wasted. Some guys don’t need you to let them.”

I stare at him for a few moments. *He was worried.*

“I...” I trail off, unsure what I’m even going to say. “You worried about me.”

He stares straight ahead but doesn't say anything.

“I have a secret,” I whisper.

His eyes flick to mine. He’s resting his elbows on his knees, looking exasperated. Like he doesn’t know what to do with me.

“Yeah?”

“Uh huh.” I nod playfully.

“Spit it out then.”

I roam my gaze down his body. “You were the hottest guy in that club. Including the strippers.”

He snorts. “Now I really know you’re drunk.”

“Am not.” I sit up, and before I know what I’m doing, I straddle across his lap, using his arms as leverage.

“Jas...” he starts, but I cut him off.

My dress rides up my thighs, but I don’t care. He’s seen it all before anyway.

“You.” I poke him in the chest. He looks down at the offending finger, and then back up at me. “You’ve got some explaining to do, mister.”

He cocks a brow. “Jas, you need to rest...”

I poke him again. “You shush.” One brow quirks in surprise, and I laugh. “Aww, *Hawkie*. What’s the matter, you don’t like me pressed up against you, baby?”

“Jas, you’re drunk. You won’t even remember this in the morning.”

I put a finger over his lips. “No talking. I’m in control now.”

His lips twitch like he finds me amusing. “Is that right?”

“Yes, and you know what?”

“What?”

“This dress feels so damn heavy...”

His eyes go wide as I lift the hem and pull the damn thing off over my head, except it gets snagged in my earring, and I end up yelping.

Hawk comes to the rescue, of course, and pulls my hair and my earring out from my dress and then I’m free. I toss the stupid dress behind me and giggle.

“That’s better.”

He glances down my body and takes an obvious inhale. “Jas. This is not a good idea.”

My tits are barely contained in my strapless bra, and my G-string is buried in my crack. I laugh again.

“You should get naked too.”

“No.”

“Ooh,” I say, waving my fingers at him. “Playing hard to get, are we? I like that.” When I give him a sloppy wink, he just shakes his head.

“This ain’t happenin’. Nope. Not like this.”

I flick my hair back, purposely sticking my breasts in his face. His hands rest on my hips, so light that I barely feel his fingers. His touch, no matter how soft, sends warmth right through me.

I’m petulant when I say, “Make up your mind already. You do. You don’t. Then you do it again. Then you back me up in my office and say those things...”

“You were sober then.”

“Put your hands on me.” I grab his hands and place them on my breasts.

He groans as I hold his hands there. He doesn’t move them or go to grope me, he just stares at me with a pained look on his face.

I rub myself against his wood. Oh yeah, his dick’s hard. I smile to myself.

“Jas, stop it,” he basically growls.

“No. You want this as much as I do.”

“Not like this... This isn’t right.”

“It feels pretty right.” I smile, rubbing against him again. “I know what you want...” I waggle a finger in his face, then I hook it into my bra and pull

it down so my tits pop out in all their glory. “This, right?”

His eyes flick down, and he swallows hard, muttering swear words under his breath.

I smile even wider. Oh, he loves my tits about as much as my pussy.

“What’s the matter, *Hawkie*? Cat got your tongue.”

Our eyes meet, and I don’t know what I see there.

Torment?

Annoyance?

Lust?

It all rolls into one as I wait. The ball’s in his court now.

HAWK

I STARE INTO HER PRETTY EYES, MY HEART RACING IN MY CHEST.

The woman of my dreams is in my arms. Naked. Beautiful.

But she's so drunk.

There is no way we're doing anything tonight. I don't do inebriated chicks, and I definitely won't do an inebriated Jas.

"No, look... I'm tryin' to do the right thing here," I say, my throat so dry it feels like the Sahara Desert.

Her tits, her beautiful fuckin' tits, that I love more than anything in this world, are right there in my face. Big. Round. Perky. Her nipples hard as she rubs her sweet pussy against my wood. Fuck yeah. *Fuck no!*

Not like this.

I grab her bra and attempt to yank it up.

"This bra's two sizes too small," I say, manhandling her as I fail at pulling her bra up all the way.

She doesn't help me, just giggles and runs her hands through my hair. "I can feel how hard you are, *Hawkie*. You want my pussy, don't you?"

"No, I want you to climb down off me and go to bed."

Her ass on my thighs and her body pressing against me almost sends me over the edge.

I groan softly when she shifts again, since every time she moves, she brushes my dick. I try to distract myself, but it's a little hard with her sprawled in my lap, intent on making me just as horny as she apparently is.

"Like it here."

"You hate me. You won't want this memory tomorrow. That I

guarantee.”

She frowns. She looks so fuckin’ cute.

Her eyes... they're so blue... So fuckin’ pretty. I can see them so much clearer without her glasses on.

“I will want it.” The way she’s looking at me right now, I wish I could believe her.

“You drank too much.”

“Were you counting?” she sasses, grinding down on me again.

I’ve never seen her like this. This drunk. I mean, she’s a goddamn temptress, but we’re not having sex. Plus, she’s surely gonna pass out soon.

“I was counting,” she goes on. “One, two, three... You know, maybe I just don’t know how many. I think I lost count.” She giggles again.

“I’ll put you to bed.” I go to move, but she pushes me back.

“No,” she says, but I remove her arms from around my neck anyway. She wiggles her pussy against me again, like payback, and I groan. “See, you like it.”

“Course I fuckin’ like it,” I growl. “But, baby, not like this...”

Half her bra is hanging off her tits and they’re so damn beautiful. It would be so easy for me to lean forward and have a feel or a taste. But I’m not that guy. I’m never gonna be that guy. As much as she says she wants it, if she were sober, she’d be like a hellcat scratching my eyes out to get away from me.

She’s turning me on so fuckin’ bad, though.

“I need to get off,” she sighs. “Jesus, Hawk. *I need it.*” She purrs those last words and I almost come like a clumsy schoolboy who can’t control himself.

“Not happenin’.”

She rips her bra down farther. “You like these, though, don’t you?”

I do not look down.

“Is that a trick question?”

She laughs out loud. Then she grabs her tits and pushes them together.

“I’m so wet, *Hawkie*... Make me come, pleaseeee.”

I’m tormented.

She is here to set my soul on fire.

She’s my weakness.

This has to stop. She’s drunk and it’s not gonna happen.

“No, Jas.” I say it loudly, sternly, but she doesn’t seem to care.

“Your cock says otherwise.” And to prove her point, she makes me hiss by rolling her hips over me.

“You’re rubbin’ it. Can’t help physics.”

“You’re hilarious.” She does it again as I grip her hips to stop her. Not that it helps any. “God, I’m almost there, baby.”

The way she says baby...

We may have sexual tension and I know she does want me, but I need her to be completely sober.

“Jasmyne, no, not like this. You don’t want this.”

“Yes,” she cries. “Oh, yes, I do...” She throws her head back, and I watch as she comes hard. Her cheeks flushed, her throat exposed, her tits right in my face as she rides my cock through my jeans. “*Oh god, oh god, oh my god...Hawk...*”

It’s too late. She’s screaming my name for the entire town to hear, her body shuddering over mine.

When she’s spent, she sags against me... pressing her tits into my chest as she groans. “Oh, fuck. I’m ruined.”

My chest heaves at what I just witnessed. My dick is so hard it’s leaking in my pants.

Her hot little pussy still presses against me as I strain against my jeans.

I’ve never wanted anyone so much in my life.

Sighing, I run a hand through my hair. “Let’s get you into bed now.”

She mumbles incoherently as I lift her, grabbing her under the thighs as she wraps her legs around my waist and murmurs into my neck.

“You feel so good,” she whispers. “I love how you feel... *Hawkie.*”

I chuckle at her nonsense as I carry her to my bed. Fuck it. She’s not sleeping on the couch and my spare room is full of junk.

Pulling back the duvet, I lay her down on the mattress. She lets go of me and flops onto her back, a big smile on her face.

She spreads her arms wide and says, “Come to mama.”

I laugh. I can’t fuckin’ help it.

She sits up and frowns. “Why are you laughing at me?”

“I’m not.” I shake my head, rubbing a hand down my face.

She has the good grace to try to cover her tits with her arm, but fails miserably.

She pats the mattress next to her. “Comin’ to bed, *Hawkie?*”

For Christ’s sake.

I hate that goddamn nickname. She's saying it differently, though. Normally, she's slinging it at me with a boatload of sarcasm thrown in, but tonight, she's sultry. Like warm caramel.

I move away, like the bed may burn me.

I have my principles. No matter what she says or what she thinks she wants.

When I fuck her, she's not only gonna be coherent. She's gonna be completely sober and ready for me.

With a woman like her, there is no quick bang. Not even a mercy fuck would be enough, though I'll take what I can get... when she's back to her normal self, that is.

I snort as I shake my head.

Right.

Her normal self.

I suddenly wonder if she'd be as much of a wildcat in bed as she is when we fight. That turns me on.

"You don't want me?" she whispers. And she looks almost sad, even with her tired eyes.

I turn to look at her over my shoulder. Sighing, I move back to the bed.

I'm towering over her, so I sit for just a moment.

"It's not that, Jas, you know it's not that."

"Am I really so bad?"

Holy fuck. I've met sexy Jas. Beautiful. Smart. Angry. Flirty. Horny. But I wasn't ready for vulnerable Jas.

I shake my head. "No, you're not."

"But you don't want me?" Her voice shakes as she stares up at me.

I swallow hard.

I want to tell her I do, more than anything. That when I wake up, she's the first thought in my head and the last when I go to sleep. I may leave out the parts about my unhealthy obsession with her—she doesn't need to know *all* the details. But her sad face has me questioning what the fuck I'm doing here like this... She's making me weak.

"Not like this, no."

"No?"

She pulls the duvet up to cover her exposed breasts and tucks it under her armpits.

I run a hand through my hair. If I tell her those things, she'll just climb

me like a tree again.

And I can't have that on my conscience.

I need to know she really wants this. I'd never forgive myself if she woke up regretful tomorrow.

I won't do it. No matter how much she pleads.

"No, Jas."

Her face falls. "Am I not beautiful enough?"

I stammer, my words caught in my throat. I laugh without humor.

"Not beautiful enough?" *Oh, baby girl.*

"Y-Yes."

I shake my head. "Jasmyne. You're an incredibly beautiful, sexy, intelligent woman. So don't ever utter those words again."

"But you make me feel good, *Hawkie.*"

"You hate me in real life."

She frowns. "I don't hate you."

"Yep, I'm pretty sure you do."

"My body doesn't."

My lips part. Fuck. She's not kidding there. Her body definitely doesn't.

"Your body knows what it needs." *My touch.*

"Yes, it does. I remember..." She waggles a finger at me. "I remember your big, juicy cock."

My eyes go wide. *Juicy?*

"You do, huh?"

"Yep." She nods firmly. "I do. I wanted to suck it."

All the air leaves my chest.

Holy fuck.

"I'm good at head," she goes on, sounding oh so innocent. "So much better than Star ever could. That's if I still remember how to do it."

Now might be a great time to find out how long it's been for her... Not that I really want to know. but I'm curious.

"How long's it been?" I give her a chin lift.

She starts to count on her fingers as I try not to chuckle.

I can't help but realize how cute she is wrapped in my covers, in my bed. Her wild hair all over the place and her pouty lips suckable as I steer my thoughts elsewhere. It's a little hard, though. She's the whole damn package.

"Umm, I lost count, I only have ten fingers... Or thumbs... Or...."

"More than a year?" I stammer, my heart hopeful.

She nods. “Yep. My fat dick-faced ex-boyfriend fucked me over.”

“What happened?” I can already feel my lust morphing into irritation that someone could intentionally hurt her. I know he cheated, but I don’t know the whole story.

She laughs. “He was fucking around. The whole time. For two years. Telling me loved me and sticking his cock everywhere else, *anywhere* else.” She sniffs. *Holy fuck, please don’t cry.* “I really loved him.”

Now I want to kill him.

This son of a bitch, who cheated multiple times, got rewarded with her love? I had no idea.

I suddenly feel a force in my chest that knocks the wind right out of my sails.

If I had so much as a look back, I’d burn the world for her. Much less her fuckin’ love.

Disgusted, I shake my head. “Obviously, he wasn’t meant to be. You were meant to be with someone more deserving.”

“Men are dicks.”

I clear my throat. “Not all of us are.”

“Most,” she mutters.

She sags back down into my pillows, and I think story time is over.

Her eyes flutter closed, and I stare at her for a few moments more. The soft lull of her breathing tells me that she’s asleep. And fuck me if she doesn’t look like a goddamn angel.

Her hair spun like gold, cascades across my gray sheets. She is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.

I stand, knowing that she needs to rest.

I’ve learned a lot about my little spitfire tonight, shit that I had no clue about.

She has been neglected, I realize.

I shake my head as I stand, leaving the room to go take care of some shit.

Jasmyne has been starved of love.

She hasn’t had any hookups because she’s had a broken heart.

Her heart is so big. So fuckin’ big that it startles me.

Suddenly, I need to know everything.

I mean, I already know he’s a royal ass for cheating on her, and if I find out who he is, I might even pay him a visit, but I’m intrigued to know what kind of man she fell in love with.

Heading into the kitchen, I boil the kettle and make myself a coffee.

Not good to go to bed on, but I need my wits about me if I'm gonna survive the night with this little fox in my bed. We both know I did the right thing. She'll thank me in the morning, or maybe she won't. Maybe she'll wake in my bed and wonder how the fuck she got there and be even more mad. Hey, it's not like I took her clothes off; she did that on her own. If anything, I tried to put them back on.

I run a hand through my hair and make my coffee, dumping two sugars in and a shitload of milk.

Rustling through the paperwork I have on my desk for the garage I need to check over with Tag, I'm not even concentrating. I can't.

All I can think about is Jas.

I need to go to her. Make sure she's okay.

I close my eyes and will away the memory of that guy's hands on her hips, rubbing his cock into her ass. It boils my blood. It always will.

She is *mine*. And she's gonna realize it soon.



When I get to bed, sleep evades me.

I kept my t-shirt on and my boxer briefs. Normally, I sleep naked, but I didn't think Jas would appreciate that.

She doesn't move much, and she's very quiet. I can barely hear her breathing.

I turn over and watch her for a while. She's facing me now, on her side.

Her face is so angelic as she murmurs every now and again.

I can't stop this feeling... this thud in my chest that tells me that she's the one. She is the fuckin' only woman I want, and she only wants me when she's drunk.

I don't know when I fall asleep, but when I wake, I feel her arm around me.

I turn and look over my shoulder. Jas is up against my back, her tits pressing into me, and her leg draped over mine. My little starfish.

I chuckle, turning all the way around as I admire her.

It's still early, the room still dark, and when I brush her hair off her shoulder, she mutters under her breath. "Feels so good, *Hawkie*."

I stare down at this perfect woman who hates me.

I'll never forgive myself for hurting her. Being stoned was no excuse. I didn't want Star, I never did. I don't want any other woman except her. Why can't she see that?

Why can't she just forgive me? I'll never do anything like that ever again, not if she's mine. I just don't know how to tell her that... I'm not good at this kind of thing.

I groan out loud.

I cup her face, unable to refrain from touching her.

I want her so fuckin' bad.

Suddenly, her eyes flutter open, and I'm caught staring.

She smiles, snuggling down into the pillows as her hand reaches out to stroke my bicep, her eyes closing again. Two seconds later, her eyes fly open.

"Hawk?!"

I swallow hard, removing my hand from her face. "Uh, yeah."

Her eyes go wide as she takes in the scene like she's in a horror movie.

"Oh my god."

"It's not what you think," I say quickly.

She jerks back, her hands leaving my body like I've burned her. "I'm naked... And you're... Oh my god." She sits up, covering her tits with her arms as she looks around, panicked. "What happened? Tell me fast..."

"We didn't fuck."

"We didn't?" Her eyes narrow on me.

"Nope."

"Then how am I naked?" she asks in disbelief.

I lean up onto my elbow, I give her a smirk. "*You* took your clothes off."

Her eyes go wide. "Wait... You came to the club..."

"You were really drunk."

"You drove me... to your house?"

"Yep."

"And then what?"

"You really don't remember?"

She shakes her head, biting on her thumbnail.

I sigh. "You straddled my lap, then took your clothes off as I tried to put them back on."

Her brows furrow, then like a lightbulb goes off in her head, she gasps. "Oh my god. Did I..."

“Did you?”

She bites down on her lip. “Oh no.”

I grin.

Oh, this is worth smiling for.

Realization dawns on her, and I revel in being the smug son of a bitch I am.

Hawk 1. Jas 0.

JASMYNE

I PUT BOTH OF MY HANDS OVER MY MOUTH, THEN GASP AS MY TITS SPILL OUT and quickly cup them instead. “Hawk!”

“What?”

“Look away,” I cry, looking around for something to cover myself up with.

Then, as if he’s honorable all the time, he sits up and tugs his t-shirt off, passing it to me.

“Here, wear this.”

I shake my head, but my traitorous legs don't run. I stay put.

I could, and I should. I’m sober now. And naked in Hawk’s bed, which I’m sure he’s enjoying all too much.

“Thanks, that’s so gallant of you.”

His lips twitch in response.

I’m not mad with him, I’m mad with myself. I should never have gotten that drunk.

“Say it,” he encourages.

“What?” I snap, tugging his shirt over my head.

His eyes drop to my tits as I unceremoniously try to cover myself and get dressed.

He stares at me.

“What you did in my lap.”

“No.”

“I can remind you...”

I hold up a hand. “Don’t you dare.”

“Come on now. You begged for my dick, and I shot you down. Surely, you remember that?”

I groan. I don’t remember any of that, but I do remember... “Please tell me you’re making that up?”

He shakes his head. “Afraid not. I think I like drunk Jas, though. She’s fun.”

I lift my eyes and glare at him. “I’m surprised you’re acting so nice. I must have made a fool of myself, though you could just be saying we didn’t fuck.”

He snorts, and I’m not expecting what comes out of his mouth next. “Trust me, baby, you’d be feelin’ it if we did.”

My eyes go wide, and I inadvertently cup my pussy. He’s right. I’m not sore. With a monster cock like his, I know I’d be feeling it too. “Asshole.”

He grins. “That’s not what you were saying last night.”

Oh shit, what did I tell him? I try to scamper my thoughts back that far, but all I can remember is me on his lap, dry humping him with my tits out.

“Clearly, I was very drunk.”

“You were, which is why you shouldn’t drink like that again. Guys had their eyes and hands all over your ass.”

“My friends were there.”

“Even so, gotta take better care of yourself, Jas. Don’t wanna be gettin’ into trouble like that. Some men don’t care if you’re drunk or not.”

I suppose he wants a medal now. The second I think it, I regret it.

I’m being a bitch.

He is a nice guy. If he was really an asshole, he wouldn’t have taken me home drunk, and put me to bed while I tried to ride him... And probably begged at one point... Not to mention, peeling all my clothes off in the process.

He didn’t lay a hand on me.

And here we are.

“Thanks for the concern.”

He sighs heavily.

“What?” I snap.

He shakes his head. “At least you pretended to like me last night.”

My chest tightens.

Jesus, why am I like this?

Because he can hurt you. He did already.

Yet as much as I want to run away I don't.

I've really sunk to new lows on this, and I need to think of a way to backpedal out of it.

"I wasn't pretending," I say in a small voice.

He frowns. "Uh, so you're admitting you do like me? You must still be a little drunk. Or, let me check your temperature."

I slap his hand away when he reaches for my forehead.

"Very funny. Be a dick, whatever." I admit, I like it when Hawk smiles. So much so, it makes me say, "I'm sorry for...doing what I did."

He blinks once, twice, then cups his ear. "Come again? That almost sounded like an apology."

"Don't be an ass."

He watches me carefully. "What are you sorry about?"

I huff. "You're going to humiliate me even more, aren't you?"

He shakes his head. "Nope."

I huff again. "For getting so drunk, I stripped naked."

"And rubbed yourself on me until you came."

I swallow hard. "I'm not sorry for that."

His eyes flick to my lips. "You're not?"

I fold my arms over my chest. "No."

"You know you're still naked in my bed, right?"

"Half naked," I point out. "I have your shirt on and my panties."

He snorts. "You consider that scrap of material fuckin' panties?"

I glare at him once more. "Sounds like you were looking."

"Trust me, you were wavin' your pussy at me, and every other guy in that club."

Suddenly, the anger boils again. "Who the fuck are you to judge me?"

"I'm not judgin' you..."

"No? It sure as hell sounds like it."

"You do enough of that for yourself, Jas," he says, sounding tired. "I just didn't want you to do something you'd regret."

"Like sleep with you?"

"Like sleeping with some other guy."

"How dare you!" The breath I release is basically a growl, I'm so pissed.

He frowns. "Now what have I done?"

I don't actually know, and keeping up with this charade is getting harder and harder. But he is judging me, no matter what he says.

If I want to go out, get drunk and sleep with a stranger, that's my right.
Am I happy I didn't? Hell yeah. But he doesn't need to know that.

"Make it out to be like I'm some kind of slut."

"I don't like that word."

"Neither do I."

"Sluts have feelin's too." I glare at him once more. "Not sayin' you're one, but if you wanna explore bein' sexually liberated, baby, you know where you can come."

I roll my eyes. "Uh huh. I'm sure."

He rolls toward me, and my eyes go wide. The covers are down low by his waist, and I don't miss the missile in his boxer briefs.

I bite down on my lip.

"Jas?"

"Mmm?" I lift my eyes.

"My eyes are up here, baby."

"Stop calling me baby."

"Why? You called me *Hawkie* all night."

I snicker. "That suits you, though."

"You are pretty cute when you're drunk, though."

"Shut up."

He smirks. "I'm serious. You're clingy too. All hands."

"I am not."

"Wanna bet?"

"Blame the alcohol."

"Come here," he says, his voice dark and dangerous.

"Huh?"

"I said, come here."

"Where?" The look in his eyes makes me weak and I feel butterflies in my stomach.

He presses one finger to his mouth. "For old time's sake."

I shouldn't... I really shouldn't... But I don't have a chance to think, because Hawk grabs me by the hips and yanks me down the bed as I squeal.

He presses his lips to mine, and I waste no time melting into his touch, my arms wrapping around his neck. Our kiss becomes more urgent the second I'm against him, and that pull deep in my belly has me moaning.

"Jesus, Hawk..."

His tongue finds mine, and my clit throbs.

When he cups my breast, I squirm beneath him as he pushes me down onto my back.

Holy mother of God...

“Such a pretty mouth,” he mumbles.

“This is just sex,” I pant. “Nothing more.” I know I’m saying the words, but do I really mean them? I struggle at keeping a tight hold on my feelings.

“Fine by me,” he smirks, like he’s won a battle. And honestly, he has. Damn him.

“No fucking me slow or any shit like that.” I cannot believe I’m doing this.

“Mmmhmm.” He squeezes my breast and I pull the shirt up to my armpits so he can have full access to both of them. I need his touch.

“Fast and hard.”

“Gotcha.” He seems anything but fast at the moment.

His eyes drop to my tits as he caresses them with both hands, kneading and pulling, then he lowers his mouth to one nipple and begins to suck.

Yes!

Fuck yes, yes, yes.

I groan, gripping his hair in my hands.

He sucks hard and my body throbs beneath him as he presses his hard cock into my hip.

Jesus, he’s so fucking big.

I need him like I need oxygen. I pull his t-shirt over my head and my breasts spill free.

When he moves between my legs, I wrap my legs around his waist and he moves his mouth to my other nipple. I sit up with my hands pressing into the mattress and stick my tits out as he grunts.

I watch him sucking me, nibbling, licking, pulling, and his eyes never leave mine. Only now and again does he groan and close his eyes when I shift my hips so his cock brushes against me.

“Hawk,” I cry out. “I’m close.”

He mumbles into my skin, “Not even touched your pussy yet.”

Then he shifts, so his cock sits right there. We both still have our underwear on, but I can feel every goddamn ridge on his cock.

“That better?”

“Yes, thank you.”

I take what I need, rubbing myself against his steel cock, loving how he

feels as he keeps sucking my tits.

I bite down on my lip at the sight of his body rippling above me. His cock so big and hard. His mouth sucking me, torturing me as I see stars... I never stood a chance.

"I'm gonna come," I moan. "Hawk!"

I shift my hips, rubbing harder, faster, as he slowly, infuriatingly moves his hips.

"Open your eyes. Wanna see you come."

"*Hawk...*"

"That's it, baby..."

I come undone as his blue eyes bore into mine, and he continues to suck my nipple, pulling the other one hard as I scream.

"I need your cock," I demand. "Now."

I unhook my legs and he shoves my knees to the side. Moving off the bed, I watch as he pulls his boxers down and his huge cock springs free. He reaches into the drawer, pulling out a rubber he makes light work of. He sheaths himself as I watch.

"Need a taste of your pussy first," he says, crawling back onto the bed.

His body... It's perfect. He's so big, with wide shoulders and muscles... The Hawk tattoo on his chest is so sexy, and it's then I realize... his legs are covered in tattoos. Holy shit, he's so hot.

"No time, need your dick, hurry."

He ignores me, spreading my legs he rips the G-string from my body, and I gasp.

He then lowers his head between my legs and pulls me farther down the bed. Folding my legs over his shoulders, he licks my slick folds as I cry out.

"Hawk, no time..."

He glances up. "Want me to stop?"

I answer him by shoving his head back down, and he grunts a laugh.

Man, oh, man, this man can give great oral.

He eats me out like I'm his favorite dessert. Licking. Sucking. Nipping. When he sucks on my pussy lips, I reach my hands into his hair and hold on tight. I don't care if I'm suffocating him, it's a good way to die.

Latching onto my clit, he inserts a finger inside me, then two, and starts to pump me harder and harder.

I throw my head back and come so hard, my whole body shudders.

When I'm done, he licks me through my folds all the way down to my

ass, and then looks up at me. “Could eat this sweet pussy for the rest of my life.”

I pull him by the shoulders and say, “Get your dick inside me now.”

He snickers, going onto his knees as I pull him down to kiss me.

We’re all tongues and I taste myself on his lips. When he lines up at my entrance, he pushes all the way to the hilt. He doesn’t wait for me to adjust, and I suck in a sharp breath. I said he needed to fuck me hard and fast, so I guess I’m getting what I asked for.

Lifting his body off me, he rests his hands either side of my head and moves onto his knees as my legs spread as far as they’ll go.

He grabs my ankles and holds them out so I can’t move. *Holy crap, he’s good.*

As he starts to pump in and out, I groan.

“Like that, baby?” he murmurs, looking down to where we’re joined.

“Just like that. Faster, Hawk.”

He moves his hips faster, fucking me into the mattress as I start to climb again.

I grip his biceps as he grabs my ass and lifts it slightly. Elevated like this, he’s even deeper inside me. It’s like a bomb goes off in my body. One second, I’m feeling amazing, the next, I’m flying into orbit. I’ve never been fucked like this before.

I scream as my orgasm takes hold of me and he keeps going, riding me through it.

“So good,” I mutter. “Fucking me like you hate me, huh?”

Then he pulls out, and I whimper.

Then, he flips me over, pushes my head down to the mattress, pulls my hips back, and enters me in one thrust.

“Fuckin’ hate? I’ll give you a hate fuck if that’s what you want,” he grunts.

He grips my hips harder, and I realize I might have said the wrong thing.

“Feel that, Jasmyne?”

Uh oh, there’s my full name again. “Yes,” I cry, because I’d shamelessly do anything for him not to stop right now.

“That’s my cock owning you. I own this pussy. It’s mine, got me?”

“Yes!” I cry when his hips meet my ass, pushing his dick to a place inside me I’ve never felt before. I just about come again.

“No other man gets this, just me. We can hate fuck all you want, I don’t

care, but this is mine.”

“And your dick’s mine,” I moan, barely able to breathe. “Only mine.”

“Deal.”

He pounds me like we may die tomorrow, and this is our last shot at survival.

It’s animalistic and so freaking hot.

His balls slap against my ass, and I grip the sheets, pressing my ass back into him.

“This fuckin’ body,” he grits out. “Waving this ass and those tits at me for this fuckin’ long. Had my dick hard since I met you...”

“Shut up and fuck me.”

He pounds me harder. In out. In out. Oh god, he’s good.

“Jas, baby...”

“Oh,” I cry as I feel his hand reach around to my swollen clit. “Yes, yes!”

I explode again, and he follows behind. Shouting my name once as he slows, I feel him spurt, wishing it was inside me with nothing between us.

I collapse, and he’s right beside me, squashing me against the bed.

“Heavy,” I mutter. A few moments later, he rolls off and onto the mattress.

“Fuck yeah,” he grunts.

“Yep.”

“Not even warmed up yet.”

I look sideways at him. “What?”

He chuckles. “I have a high sex drive.”

He did not just say that.

“And you’ve not had sex in several months?”

“Exactly.” He pats me on the thigh. “So we can make up for it now.”

“Don’t go thinking this makes us a thing,” I tell him, but for some reason those words taste bitter.

He turns to look at me, eyes narrowed. “What is it then?”

I shrug. “You have needs, so do I, and you obviously know what you’re doing.”

“Gee, thanks.”

“It’s a compliment. I’ve never done the friends with benefits thing before.”

“We’re not friends.”

“But we can hate fuck.”

“You’ve changed your tune, haven’t you? You said you didn’t hate me.”

I roll my eyes. “I don’t. It’s just a term, Hawk. We can do this. Nobody has to know.”

“So you want to keep it a secret?”

“Don’t you? There’s Cash to think about...”

He rubs his chin. This could work for the two of us, even though I feel like I’m running on an orgasm-induced high and might regret this in five more minutes.

“It’s a win-win.”

“Is it just?”

I nod. “You get what you want, I get what I want.”

“Right.” He doesn’t sound pleased.

I huff. “I thought this is what you wanted.”

He sits up, pulling the condom off as he ties it and chucks it on the side table.

“I do.” He pulls me to him, and I go willingly.

He may have just battered my vagina, but that doesn’t mean I want him to stop.

“I once said I wanna fuck you all over my house,” he drawls as he scoops me up. “Let’s start in the shower.”

I feel his cock against my leg as he carries me to the bathroom.

Setting me down, he slides a foil packet onto the bathroom sink, and leans into the shower to turn the water on.

I glance at myself in the mirror and groan. “I look like fright night.”

His chest rumbles, and I realize I like it more and more when he laughs.

It changes his whole face and makes me smile.

He climbs in after me, his hands at my hips as he starts to kiss my shoulders.

Suddenly, it feels a little more than just us getting down and dirty.

How am I supposed to do this and not grow feelings for him?

I’ve never done this before.

We need rules...

“Rules,” I blurt out.

I feel his cock against my ass crack, and I lean back into him as he soaps up his hands and starts to massage my breasts.

“What?”

“Rules,” I say again, but it’s said through a moan. “We need some.”

“Don’t follow rules,” he tells me, pinching my nipple. “Especially not yours.”

“You sure?” I stick my ass farther into his hips, and he hisses. “I was going to go down on my knees for you... But now, I just don’t know...”

He grunts, then grabbing my chin, he tilts my face to the side. “I marked you,” he says, thumbing my neck. “That means you’re mine. End of discussion.”

When his lips meet mine, I almost forget I have a soul.

I shake my head as he pulls back. “The rules are we fuck, without the clusterfuck of feelings which only complicate things, and we’re exclusive.” I’m out of breath and barely holding on to my sanity.

But he needs to hear this.

“Sounds like you want your cake and will be eatin’ it too.”

I turn in his arms and grip his cock in my hand. He hisses again.

“Oh, I’m gonna eat it, baby. I’m gonna remind you over and over again why this is a good idea.”

Reaching my hand lower, I cup his balls, and he groans. “Jas.”

I know I’m using sex as a weapon, as well as my body.

“So, you agree?”

His eyes close as I fondle him. I drop to my knees as his eyes flick open, and he stares down at me. Cupping my tits, I play with them as I hover my mouth dangerously close to his erect cock.

“Do you, Hawk?”

“Yes,” he grits out. “But let’s make one thing clear, Jasmyne. You’re mine. You’re mine to fuck. Mine to take. Mine to have when I want, how I want. You wanna play this dirty game, little girl? Fine, I can play dirty too.”

A thrill runs through me as I take in his words.

But I don’t want feelings. I just need his body. I just need him to make me feel good... To make me forget.

As long as we’re clear on that, this can work.

HAWK

SEEING MY GIRL ON HER KNEES, I'D AGREE TO ANYTHING.

I'm not agreeing to her stupid rules, though, but I'll make it seem like I am. If that's what it takes.

She fondles her tits, her mouth brushing close to my dick. I reach down and hold it out for her, gliding the tip across her lips. Her tongue darts out and licks my head, and I groan.

I paint her lips with my precum as she moans, pulling on her nipples. Her tits will be the end of me... Or maybe her mouth will. I line up again and she sucks on the tip, then she looks up at me, and our eyes meet.

"Fuck," I hiss. "Wish you could see how you look with my cock in your mouth."

She slides her mouth farther down, one hand reaching to grip me at the base.

She makes a guttural sound as I run a hand through her hair.

She wants everything rough, so I contemplate ramming my cock down her throat, spurting my hot cum inside... That'll shut her up.

She sucks me all the way to the base, and I hiss, my hand grips her hair harder. With her eyes still on mine, she drags her tongue down my cock and licks all the way to my balls, then slides it back up again.

I stand there, trying not to blow as I watch her.

She's teasing me. Her smirk. The way she still tugs on one nipple while she sucks me. I reach my other hand down as I slide against the wall to lower myself. Gripping her tit, I knead it and she cries out.

"Know what you need, Jas. You need this to come, don't you, baby?"

She groans as I shove my cock in, then pull it out. “Again,” she groans. I stutter. “Huh?”

“Fuck my mouth, Hawk.” She laps at my dick as I swallow the lump in my throat.

I almost tell her I don’t wanna hurt her, but since she’s not big on us “getting feelings,” I swallow my words.

I start to move my hips as she takes me without even gagging. “That’s it. You’re quiet now, aren’t you, baby?” I mutter. “Does someone like cock in their mouth?”

She nods as I twist her nipple.

“Tell me,” I demand. “Those are my rules. You tell me what you want me to do to you, or I won’t do it.”

Her eyes go wide as I hold my dick to her lips. She’s breathing heavily.

“I need you to fuck my mouth, Hawk.”

I grin. “Good. Touch yourself. Rub your pussy till I’m comin’ down your throat.”

She groans as I enter her mouth once more, and I start to thrust. In out. In out.

Fuck, she feels so good.

“That’s it,” I groan, watching her pretty little mouth swallow me. “Fuck, Jas, gonna come so hard.”

She starts to jack me, and I move my hand to hers, showing her the pace—it’s fast and it’s furious. Moaning, she fingers herself, and I pull her on her nipple, tugging it as she sucks harder.

“So close,” I mutter, my eyes closing as I grip her head and push down her throat. She moans again, and the hum has my balls tightening. “Fuck, Jas, I’m coming...” I spurt as she chokes, and I let up, coming in her mouth as she swallows me down, gasping at the same time.

Seeing my cum on her lips makes me turn into even more of an animal.

“Did you come?” I demand, pulling my dick out.

She nods.

“Good.” I pull her up to her feet, running my thumb over her cum-stained lips. “So fuckin’ hot.” I kiss her, tasting myself as she groans.

My fingers find her pussy as I slide them through her folds, rubbing her clit. She shudders and orgasms again as soon as I touch her, biting down onto my shoulder as she wraps her arms around my neck.

“Need to fuck you,” I say against her lips.

She stammers, “Again?”

I ignore her, opening the shower door to find the wrap I put there earlier. I rip it open and slide it on my dick. Yeah, it’s hard again even though I just emptied myself in her mouth. Turning back, I shut the shower door and grab her by the hips as I slap her ass.

“Never told me you had a mouth like that.”

“You never asked,” she gasps.

“Hands on the wall. Ass out.”

She does as she’s told, and I bend down, spreading her ass cheeks. “This is mine too, Jas. You gonna let me in there soon?”

She looks over her shoulder as she groans. “Your cock’s too big.”

I laugh. “Nah, baby. We’ll make it work.”

I lick her folds, and she pushes her ass back against my face.

“Hawk, please.”

“My baby is hungry for dick?” I mutter, moving my mouth up to her perfect ass. I bite each cheek as she gasps, then I trail kisses up her spine until I reach her shoulders.

“Answer me.”

“Yes,” she pants. “I’m hungry for it. Hurry, I need to feel you inside me.”

I kiss her shoulder, then without warning, I position my dick and shove into her all the way. She gasps as I start to fuck her, slow at first, moving my hips at a pace that’ll keep me on the edge.

“Tell me,” I groan. “Tell me what you need, Jas.”

“Your dick pounding me. Don’t go slow, don’t make this personal, Hawk. It’s just sex.”

And here I was, almost catching feelings. Trust Jas to throw cold water all over me.

“You got it.”

I pump her so hard, she jolts forward. I do it again, and she pushes against me.

I go all animal on her, just like she wants it. Not giving a fuck if she’s ready or if I’m being too rough. This is what she wants, then this is what she gets.

“Hawk... right there...” She starts to quiver, but I don’t let up. Even when she screams her orgasm, I keep pumping. She’s gotta be getting sore by now. She was dripping wet, but I’m big, and I haven’t gone light on her. Still, she begged me for it.

“Feel that cock, Jas?”

She groans. “Mmm.”

“This cock owns this pussy, got me? Tell me.”

“Your cock owns my pussy. I’m gonna come again... *Hawk...*”

I revel in how responsive she is and how well she takes orders. It’s not like her at all.

I start to come too, my orgasm fast and violent as I grunt my release.

Jesus fuck. I came three times.

She mutters something as I pull out.

“What?”

“You’re a machine,” she pants.

I grin behind her back.

That’s it, Jas. She’s gonna learn who owns her body. And the more she resists, the more I’m gonna remind her.

We’re good together.

Not just sex.

But together.

A couple.

She might be able to decide when she has feelings and when she doesn’t, but that won’t last.

I’ll make sure of it.



“You seem chipper,” Harlem says when I see him at the clubhouse later. He gives me a look.

I frown. “Yeah?”

He slaps me on the back. “You’ve been at it with Star again?”

I literally cringe. “Nope.”

Why is everyone so damn nosy around here?

I’ll be fuckin’ happier when Jas is in my bed, but it’s been two days since I saw her.

No message.

No call.

Nothing.

And as I’ve been so busy at work, I haven’t had time to come by her

office and see how she's doing.

I'm not exactly the world's greatest texter. In fact, I hate it.

The less time I spend on my phone, the better.

"You arguin' with Jas again?"

"Nope."

"Huh."

I don't offer anything more. He can speculate all he wants. In fact, it's better to try to turn the tables and take the heat off me, because Harlem is pretty damn perceptive.

"Heard you been hangin' at the bakery."

Ever since the owner, Indigo, sold a forty-nine percent share to the Rebels in order to save her business. Harlem's been hanging around there a whole lot more. And it ain't for the cupcakes, I'm sure.

"Who told you that?" he questions, not denying it.

"Word travels."

"Makin' sure our investment is tickin' along."

I snort. "Right."

It's not like I can blame the guy. Indigo is cute, but apparently her dad used to be a biker and she hates us. *All of us*. The only reason she sold shares to the club was because, at the time, the Devils were trying to get her out so they could take over the building. She hated them more than she hated us. But now they're out of the picture, we can rest easy.

"She's got a kid, right?"

He nods. "Daughter. She's a teenager."

"Speakin' of which, how are your kids doin'? Haven't seen either one of them lately."

His younger son Kai is only fourteen and Stella is eighteen.

"Kai is good. Stella's drivin' me up the wall."

"That happens when you have pretty daughters."

"Tell me about it. Gonna have to lock her up before long, even if she is eighteen."

"She still wanna be a mechanic?"

He groans. "Anythin' that points her in the MC's direction, then yep. I'd much rather a princess any day than a goddamn tomboy."

I snort.

Stella is a stunning girl, but she's a piece of work, and since Harlem has raised his kids pretty much by himself and with the help of his sister and

brother-in-law, it's been hard these last few years. He's done a great job, though. I admire the guy.

Harlem asked a few months back if Stella could come and do a day's work at the garage to see if she'd like it. I guess he was hoping it'd scare her off, and she'd prefer to go into another field, but so far, nothing has happened. Maybe she went off the idea.

I know the boys at work wouldn't get a thing done if she were around. So it's probably best she stays away.

"Sucks to be you."

"Damn straight."

A few moments later, the front door swings open, and Jas walks in.

Harlem gives me a chin lift. "She seems chipper too."

She beams at Harlem but barely looks at me. "Hi, Harlem, how's it hanging?" Then to me, she simply says, "Hawk."

I try not to let my smile creep across my face.

"It's hangin' fine," Harlem says.

"Well, I'd love to stay and chat, but I'm swamped."

"Boss needs to give you a pay rise," Harlem hollers after her as she walks down the hall.

"Tell me about it!" she hollers back.

"Gotta go myself," Harlem says with a grunt. "Gotta pick some shit up for Tag at the warehouse."

I give him a chin lift. "See you later."

He leaves, and I waste no time heading down toward Jas's office, grateful it's the middle of the day and nobody is around.

Her door is open, and I lean against the doorjamb.

She's wearing her usual pencil skirt. This one is gray, with a white blouse and a matching jacket. Her heels make her legs look longer, and I can't help but want them wrapped around me again.

"Knock, knock," I say as she turns to look up at me from a stack of papers.

"Hawk." She blinks, her face a little shocked at seeing me and I'm glad I ruffle her feathers.

"Jas."

She clears her throat. "Uh, how are you?"

"Better now I've seen you."

She licks her bottom lip, and her eyes graze down my body. "Busy

week.”

“You avoidin’ me, baby?”

“No,” she stammers. “Why would I have any reason to do that?”

“Because we fucked,” I say. “A lot. And you might be feelin’... I dunno, weird about it.”

“Well, I don’t.”

She puts her glasses on, and I’m toast.

I walk in, shutting and locking the door behind me.

She glances up at me, eyes widening. “Hawk, what are you doing?”

I rub my chin. “You kept me waitin’ for two days. I’m like a man dyin’ of thirst over here.”

“We’re not doing it in here,” she snaps. “This is my workplace.”

“Wastin’ time talkin’, sugar.”

“Stop calling me nicknames.”

“I thought I was *Hawkie*. What’s up, Jas? Don’t wanna play anymore?” I step toward her and put my hands on my hips.

“Not at work,” she whispers with a shake of her head, like I’m unbelievable.

I lean closer as she tries to pretend she’s not affected by me.

“Especially at work. We’ll have to be quick, and quiet.”

“My desk wasn’t part of the arrangement.”

I press my hands down on it to test the weight. “Seems sturdy enough.”

She rolls her eyes. “Anyone could walk in.”

“Locked the door.”

“And if Cash comes back and finds the door locked and you in here with me?”

“Instead of thinkin’ of excuses to why we shouldn’t, we could both be feelin’ good.”

I walk around to her side of the desk and cup one side of her face. She turns her head away.

Ah, that’s right. No feelings. Just fucking.

I move my hand to her breast, squeezing lightly, and she resists by pulling back. However, the flush on her cheeks tells a different story. We are at her workplace after all.

Reaching down, I yank up her skirt and groan when I see she has a garter on and stockings underneath. “How the fuck did I not know you wear these under here?”

I don't give her time to answer, as my lips crash to hers, and she gasps in surprise. She groans into my mouth as one hand gropes her breast and the other fists her hair.

She latches onto my biceps, and then I feel her hand at my buckle. She doesn't even wait to get my zip down, shoving her hand into the front as she grabs my dick.

"Fuck," I hiss when she soon discovers I'm not wearing underwear.

My hand trails down her waist, between her thighs, and then I spin her around. She sticks her ass out as I shove my jeans down and grip her hips.

"Don't move. Hands on the desk," I order.

She does as I say.

This is so fuckin' hot.

The number of times I've dreamt about this very thing, and now it's really happening.

"Hawk, you have to hurry," she whines.

I smack her ass, and she yelps as I fumble with the foil packet, rolling the wrap on my erect cock.

"Pull your tits out."

"There's no time."

"Do it," I demand.

She huffs, pulling up her blouse to bunch it under her arms. I reach around and I yank her bra down, and her breasts spill out for me. My fingers find her nipples nice and hard, giving them a tug that makes her cry out.

"Better be quiet, baby," I mutter as she starts to press her ass against me.

Lining up, I shove my cock inside her, and she gasps. I give her a second of reprieve to adjust to my size. She's slick, but I would have preferred to give her a couple of orgasms first.

But whatever.

Her rules. I'm just here to serve.

"Tell me how much you want it," I grit out as I start pounding her hard from behind.

God, her tits feel so good in my hands.

"I want it," she whisper-shouts.

"How bad?"

"So fucking bad."

"Talk dirty to me."

"Hawk!"

“You want this to be quick, so make me come. Use that dirty mouth.”

She pushes her ass back against me, moaning.

“Your cock’s filling me,” she breathes. *Oh yeah.* “It’s so big, it feels so good. Hard...”

“Yeah, baby?”

“Yes.”

She groans as I reach up and put one hand over her mouth as I tut. “Quiet, remember.”

We fuck like maniacs, her tits bouncing in my hands as I pound her relentlessly. Papers and files fly everywhere as the desk shakes.

My balls start to draw tight. “So close, Jas.”

Reaching one hand down between her legs, I pinch her clit hard, and that sets her off. She comes with a shudder, and not for the first time, I wish there was nothing between us.

I need to feel her. All of her. I want my cum inside her.

I grunt, stilling as I spill my seed and groan as my orgasm takes hold and I pulse for what feels like an eternity.

“Fuck,” I mutter.

“Pull out,” she says, gasping.

I do, taking the wrap off and tossing it in the trash. Pulling up my pants, I chuckle to myself as I watch her push her skirt down, tucking her tits back into her non-existent cups as she adjusts her blouse.

She’s so disheveled. Just how I like it.

“My place again,” I say. “Tonight.”

“I’m not jumping to your command, Hawk. I’m not some booty call you can just summon whenever you want.”

I shrug. “Fine. I was gonna offer to practice my oral skills one more time, but if you’re busy...”

She huffs, longing in her eyes.

“I’ll have to check my schedule.”

I smirk. “After hours? What, has Cash got you doin’ overtime now?”

“I’m a workaholic, haven’t you heard?”

I point at her. “My place. You have the address.”

I shake my head. I don’t know if this fuck buddy thing is going to work out, but then I think about what I just did to her and I keep my mouth shut.

“Anyway, we’re supposed to be keeping this a secret, remember?” She waves her hand between us as I do up my fly.

“Well, you’d better learn to keep that scream under control, baby.” I smirk, striding across the room.

Unlocking the door, I don’t even give her a look back.

If this is what she wants, fine.

I’ll play the game.

No strings.

No feelings.

Just how she wants it.

JASMYNE

TODAY DIDN'T GO AS PLANNED.

Not only did I break my number one cardinal rule: no fucking a biker. Added to that, we did it at work.

Over my desk. During daylight.

I facepalm myself.

What was I thinking?

Seriously, I don't know what's come over me.

He turns me into an animal, one that can't get enough of him.

I steel myself. *You can do this...*

But if that's the case, then why am I sitting outside his house, with all the doors locked, contemplating what the hell my life has become.

The sex is amazing. There is no disputing that.

But is that all it is?

Can we really do this?

This isn't me at all... I've never even had a one-night stand before. I've always been in a relationship. This feels... *different*. And not just because it's Hawk and we're doing what we shouldn't be doing.

But is it so bad? To give my body what it needs?

It's just sex.

And Hawk is very, very good at it.

I take a few deep breaths. *I shouldn't be here.*

Glancing in the passenger seat, I shake my head at the takeout I brought with me. Like I need an excuse to even be here. I am so stupid.

I jump with a shriek when there's a knock at my driver's window. But I

relax when I see it's Hawk, bending down and frowning at me.

He tries the door, but it's locked. He taps again, and I unlock the door.

"You lost, Jas?"

I roll my eyes. "No, I was just taking a call," I lie.

That's better than telling him I'm sitting here debating my life choices up to this point.

He nods at the food bag. "You got grub? I'm starving."

I sigh heavily. "Sure."

Reaching over me, he swipes the bag off the seat and looks inside. "Chick-fil-A, my favorite."

He dives in a hand and pulls out a handful of fries.

"Hey!"

Shoveling them into his mouth, he grins. "What?"

"They're mine."

"You didn't get me any?"

I grumble and get out of the car.

I don't notice how good his ass looks in those jeans.

I don't notice how the long-sleeved Henley sculpts his body perfectly. And I definitely don't notice the outline of his cock when he turns. *Does that thing ever go down?*

He closes my car door as I lock it and we walk to his front door.

His place is nice. Suburban, which is something I didn't expect. And it's tidy, for a man.

I hadn't taken it in the night I first came here, since I was so drunk, and the next morning, we were too busy fucking.

I clear my throat at the memory of me mounting him on the couch.

"Nice of you to come," he says, closing the door behind him.

"Well, I had nothing better to do," I reply nonchalantly.

"Huh," he grunts.

We're barely inside, and he's already downed a sandwich and a bunch of nuggets in record time. I forgot how much men eat, since I only have to feed myself once in a while.

Fuck knows why I brought food. Now I'll never escape him if he thinks I'll bring meals as well as my vagina.

I sigh.

"You okay?"

"Yep."

He frowns, setting the bag on the counter.

“Nice place,” I go on, before he starts asking more questions.

“Thanks. It cost me a mint, but I like this side of town.”

I nod. “Yeah, it’s... kinda families and stuff around here.”

He shrugs. “Yep.”

I frown until he elaborates. “Someday when I have kids, this’ll be their home, too. And my wife’s.”

He stares at me as my eyes go wide.

The way he says *wife* has my stomach doing somersaults.

I don’t hold back my surprise.

“You don’t strike me as the *husband and kids* type,” I say before I can stop myself.

His lips twitch as he leans one hand on the counter. Good God, he’s so damn sexy.

“Why not?”

Good question, dummy, why not?

“Uh.” I’m obviously a judgmental bitch. “I thought you liked playing the field.”

He snorts. “Not playin’ the field with you.” His eyes wander down my body hungrily. “Your enough woman for me to handle, baby. Keep me on the straight and narrow.”

Right. I’ve heard that before.

“Am I?” As if I’d believe that.

He nods. Then opens the bag and offers me a nugget. “Gonna need sustenance for what I have planned.”

I lick my lips involuntarily. My eyes glance down to the very obvious bulge in his jeans.

I take a nugget and chomp it down as he tells me to sit at the island. A few moments later, his phone rings.

Glancing at it, he looks up at me. “Gotta take this,” he says as I stuff a fry into my mouth.

“Go for it.”

“Hey, sweetie,” he says, as I instantly freeze with the fries headed to my mouth. *Sweetie?* His voice has changed an octave... Is he seriously going to have a conversation with another woman in front of me? After the bullshit he just fed me?

Anger boils my blood instantly.

“I’m good, pumpkin. How are you?”

Pumpkin?

Motherfucker!

His eyes flick to mine, and I quickly shove the fries in my gaping mouth and look away. I notice the smirk on his lips just as I do.

Damn asshole.

“You did? Oh, that’s great. How was it?”

Don’t mind me. Just have your not-so-private conversation and pretend I’m not here.

I’m all good.

Then he laughs.

I stare at him. His whole face... His demeanor has changed.

Jealousy floods every pore. I swim in it.

Who the fuck does he think he is?

I pretend not to listen, but my ears strain at what the chick is saying.

“Uh, nothin’, just eatin’ chick-fil-A and talkin’ to you.”

Steam practically comes out of my ears at his audacity.

He laughs again. “Well, we’ll see. If you’re a good girl.”

Oh, fuck no! He did not...

I slide off the stool. I’m done.

His eyes meet mine, and he has a defiant look on his face as I shake my head at him and mouth “*asshole.*”

Into the phone, he says, “Lexi, baby, I gotta run, okay? Call you later.”

Lexi?

Later?

What the hell?

“Jas,” he says, grabbing my elbow as he reaches me before I can escape.

I shrug out of his grasp, and he lets go. “Get your hands off me.”

“What the fuck?”

I turn on him, snapping. “You know what, you asshole!”

He rubs his chin and doesn’t even bother to hide his smile. “Problem?”

“Yes!” I point in his face. “If you’re going to schmooze with another woman, at least have the decency to do it when I’m not around.”

He chuckles.

My anger flairs. “This is exactly why I knew this wasn’t a good idea.” I turn, and he grabs me again, this time by the hips. Pulling me flush against his body, I feel how hard he is as holds me still.

“It’s not what you think.”

I laugh without humor. “I’m not going to be made a fool of,” I say. “Not again.”

“I’d never do that to you.”

I shake my head. “You already did, remember?”

He spins me around to face him. “Stop it,” he says, his face angry. “We got past that when you okayed this thing between us.” Now it’s his turn to wave his hand between us. “So you don’t get to keep rubbin’ that mistake in front of my face when it suits you.”

“Like you can tell me what to do,” I bite out, my hands pushing against his chest. “Now move or I’ll scream.”

He chuckles again.

“I don’t know why this is so funny.”

“You’re jealous,” he says. It’s not a question.

I push against him again, but his grip on my hips only tightens. “I am *not* jealous! Being jealous would mean I care, which I don’t.”

“Uh huh.”

“Smug son-of-a-bitch. Well, you’re not gettin’ any of this,” I say, motioning down my body. “Not now, not ever.”

“Oh, I think you’ll change your mind.”

He moves his hand up to grope my breast, and I gasp. His mouth at my ear, he whispers, “My dick’s hard because you’re jealous. Gonna ram it in your ass tonight. Need to own every fuckin’ part of you,” he growls. “Oh, and that was my twelve-year-old cousin.”

I open my mouth, then close it again. “What?” A red stain flushes my cheeks.

He continues to fondle me, and I let him.

“Lexi. I’m her favorite cousin.” I hear the smugness in his voice, and while my anger may have dissipated, my annoyance with him hasn’t, because now he knows I actually care.

I huff. “Next time, don’t lead me on like that.”

He kisses my neck, and I groan. “Fuck, your body feels so good,” he says, his other hand coming up to grip my other breast. “Skirt’s too short, though.”

“Shut up.”

My hands betray me as I run them into his hair and groan when he nips my neck.

“Cock’s been hard for you all day since I fucked you on your desk,” he

goes on. My pussy throbs at the memory. "Such a bad girl."

"Hawk," I cry when he tweaks my nipples.

"Have this fantasy of fuckin' you in my truck. Every time I climb in, I'm hard thinkin' about it."

"So do it," I murmur.

His mouth brushes past my lips, but he doesn't kiss me. "Maybe I will. But tonight, I want this ass." He moves a hand around to my rear and squeezes. "You okay with anal?"

I swallow hard. Usually, I'd say yes, but with a monster cock like his, I really don't know.

As if reading my mind, he says, "I've got lube. You'll like it, baby. I'll make it good for you. But first, you gotta eat."

"Your dick?" I gasp when he moves his hand around to cup my pussy.

He laughs, his lips nipping the other side of my neck. "While that sounds appealing, you need to keep your strength up. I like to fuck, Jas. And I like to fuck you. More than once a day, got me?"

My eyes go wide as he moves his mouth to my breast and sucks me through my blouse.

My pussy is literally pulsing for him.

I swallow hard. "More than once a day?"

"Makin' up for lost time," he mutters, moving his mouth to my other breast. Then he lets me go. "Eat."

He yanks me by the hand, back to the kitchen, sits me down, and shoves my sandwich back at me. I've never eaten so fast in all my life.

I had no idea that when I agreed to this, it would be a fuck fest every day, two or three times a day. Holy hell. My vagina is going to need a vacation before long.

But I'm not complaining.

My embarrassment over his conversation with his cousin is still humiliating enough.

He watches me eat as he goes to the fridge and then hands me a soda. I guzzle it down like I'm dying of thirst.

"Why are you here?" he questions.

"You know why."

His lips twitch. "Bringin' me food?"

"Don't expect that all the time."

He moves toward me. "Why else?"

Oh, he likes me talking dirty...

I shrug. "You have a big dick, and I like how it makes me feel."

One eyebrow raises in surprise. "Yeah?"

I cup his hard cock through his jeans, and he hisses. I waste no time unzipping him as I yank his jeans and boxer briefs to his thighs. His cock springs free, hard and thick as I press my legs together. Reaching over his head, he peels off his shirt and drops it to the ground.

God, I love his body.

So thick.

So broad.

His chest and torso rippled with muscles as I feast my eyes.

The thick smattering of hair below his navel makes me weak at the knees.

"Sit," I tell him as he surprisingly does as I say. I scoot off the stool and drop down to my knees, fisting his cock as he groans. One hand reaches into my hair, and he grips it hard.

I swirl my tongue over his tip and lick his precum, his eyes never leaving mine. A moan crawls up my throat as I slide my mouth down his cock. Enjoying his fullness, his girth. His other hand caresses my cheek like I'm the most precious thing he's ever seen.

"Tits," he says. "Get your tits out, Jas."

I fumble with one hand as I try to undo the buttons. Letting go of his cock, I keep it in my mouth, but use my other hand to quickly shrug my blouse off my shoulders.

My tits are begging for his touch. I yank my bra down, so they spill out.

"Fuckin' beautiful," he groans.

I grasp him at the base again and really go deep as he starts to thrust.

His face is one of pure ecstasy as I enjoy every damn inch of him. Wetness pools between my legs as I make a mess in my panties.

I cup one breast and flick my nipple with my thumb.

"Baby," he stutters. "Fuck yeah, Jas."

He shoves his jeans farther down and stands, both hands going into my hair as he starts to fuck my mouth. As he hits the back of my throat and beyond, I revel in how fucking hot he is.

I groan, needing him between my legs as he suddenly pulls out.

"Wanna come inside you," he groans, pulling me to my feet. He lifts me, sitting me on the kitchen bench as he shoves my skirt up to my thighs and

runs his hands up to feel my pussy.

“Rubber,” I pant.

“Right.” He fumbles behind him to locate his pocket, takes his wallet out, and deftly removes the foil packet, rolling it on.

Sliding my panties aside, his fingers glide through my wetness, making him groan.

I clutch onto his neck, bringing him closer as our mouths meet. At the feel of his tongue, I melt like butter. We’re hot and heavy and about to fuck on his kitchen counter.

This is so damn hot.

He moves his mouth down to my breast as he cups them and sucks one nipple into his mouth, moaning as he does. His cock sits dangerously close to my pussy as I try to wiggle forward toward it. I need him to fill me. Quickly moving to my other nipple, he sucks that too, kissing it hard like he’s a starving man.

Pulling back, he grabs his cock, and without warning, sinks into me. My skirt rides up farther as he starts fucking me, and I wrap my legs around his waist to keep him close.

I lean back on my hands as he grunts, thrusting harder every time he enters me. His hands grip my hips, and he holds on when I start to come, his pubic bone hitting my clit as I cry out “*Hawk, Hawk, Hawk.*”

“That’s it, baby,” he grunts. “My cock fillin’ your tight hole. You feel that, Jas?”

“Yes! It’s yours! I’m yours... Just don’t stop.”

“Never gonna stop,” he mutters. “Fuck, baby, this pussy is so tight.”

He reaches places inside me that I never thought possible. At this angle, my G-spot is in overdrive. Another orgasm hits me as I cry out incoherently.

“Hawk, oh god... *yes, baby... right there, oh god, yes...*”

He pumps me hard, fast, and then he stills and yells, “*Jasmyne!*” As I feel him shudder, he releases with one guttural groan.

His head buried in my neck, I hold on to him. We’re both panting heavy.

“Holy shit,” I say, my heart beating rapidly.

“Fuckin’ you is becomin’ an addiction,” he mutters. “You know that, baby?”

The way he says baby...

“You shouldn’t be so good at it,” I toss back at him.

He chuckles, pulling out as he cleans himself up, and I close my legs.

God. We're like animals.

He steps out of his jeans and boxers.

I watch as he crosses the kitchen, completely naked, to the fridge, and pulls out a bottle of water. Cracking the lid, he takes a guzzle, then passes it to me, and I do the same.

"Look at you," he says, a smirk on his lips. "Sittin' on my kitchen bench with your pussy drippin' and your tits out."

I'm unashamed. I have a great body, and I don't mind showing it off to him.

He cups my face with one hand and kisses me again.

This is feeling... way too intimate. Not that I mind kissing him, hell no.

But I'm not supposed to be developing feelings for him, and here I am doing just that.

Focus, I tell myself.

This is just sex. Nothing more.

Amazing. Mind-blowing. Orgasm-inducing sex.

He has a big dick, and he knows what to do with it. Sue me.

He kisses me with vigor, and we both glance down at his already hardening cock.

"I was right," I sigh. "That thing never goes down."

He grips my tits in both his hands. "Damn straight." "What else do you want?"

"A breather?"

He throws his head back and laughs.

Fuck me. It's such a pleasant sound. Maybe because I barely ever hear it.

His whole face changes when he laughs. All the tension and anger that usually radiate from him melt away. When he brings his face back to mine, his eyes dance, and I stare in awe at him.

He is by far the most attractive man I've ever seen.

He's beautiful.

"And after that?"

"I want you to fuck my ass, *Hawkie*."

The grin still plays on his lips. "How can I deny such a sweet request?"

HAWK

I SPREAD JASMYNE'S ASS CHEEKS AS SHE KNEELS ON ALL FOURS ON MY BED.

Jesus Christ.

She is the sexiest woman I've ever seen.

Completely naked—except I made her keep those heels on, because why the fuck not—and bared for me.

I tongue her pussy, licking her all the way to her clit, swirling my tongue as she cries out, fisting the pillows.

“So good,” she moans. “Fuck...”

I finger her hole, watching my fingers disappear inside her bare pussy as she sticks her ass out. I give it a hard slap. I can't fuckin' wait to be inside her ass.

Moving my head back down again, I tongue her hole, then I start to fuck her, my fingers swirling over her clit until she's begging me... literally begging.

Hawk. Hawk. Hawk.

Fuck, I love hearing my name on her lips when she's coming.

I move my mouth farther down, swirling my tongue over her tight hole as she squirms and starts to pant. My baby likes ass play. I'll fuckin' make her beg me for that, too.

I spread her slickness all around and insert the tip of my finger as she moans.

Grinning, I lean over for the lube and squirt some on my fingers, warming it up as I rub it all over her ass. I wanna fuck her pussy first, give her another orgasm before I get to what I really want.

I go up onto my knees, line up, and slowly sink into her as she moans. My balls draw tight every goddamn time she does that. Moving in and out slowly, I make sure I thrust hard when I enter. My finger slides into her ass again as she gasps. I go one knuckle. Then two. Soon, my finger is moving in and out of her ass as she pushes against it, riding me.

“Baby,” I groan. “Your pussy looks so good takin’ me.”

“Fuck me,” she pleads. “Oh God, Hawk, it feels so good.”

I move a little faster. “Touch your clit, baby,” I tell her, my mouth moving to her shoulder as I kiss her. “Doin’ so good.”

She groans as one hand moves between her legs and she rubs herself.

“Next time bring your vibrator,” I tell her.

“Ooooh, yes.”

I slide the tip of a second finger in her, trying to stretch her nice and gentle. Slowly, I keep fuckin’ her and fingering her ass. All the while, she presses against me like she can’t get enough.

When I feel her clench down on my cock, I grunt as she comes, and I don’t go faster... I want to draw this out for her, and with my fingers in her ass, I know this is gonna feel really, really good.

“Yes, oh god, Hawk... *Oh god!*” she cries out as she lets go, shuddering, and I come to a stop.

“Ready, baby?”

“Mmm.” She nods, looking over her shoulder at me.

I pull her toward me so she’s on her knees again, and I kiss her hard, my tongue in her mouth as we claim one another.

Pulling away, she moves back to her hands, and I spank her ass cheek as she yelps.

I smooth it, and then spank the other side.

“This ass is so sexy,” I tell her. “So fuckable.”

I reach down and kiss where I smacked her, then I grope her again and she pushes against me.

“Hawk, hurry.”

I chuckle. “So impatient.”

Rolling a rubber on, I lube my dick generously. I don’t want to hurt her.

I spread her cheeks, looking at her exposed, and my cock jumps. Lining up to her asshole, I nudge inside with my tip.

“Relax, baby. I won’t hurt you.”

She groans as I slide in a little deeper. I grip one ass cheek as my other

hand plays with her pussy, sliding my dick out and in again, only partially in until she's used to it.

"Baby," she groans. "Oh, Hawk."

I smile, knowing she's loving it. I slide in farther and she hisses. "You okay?"

She nods. "You're so big."

My dick is so damn hard. Watching my cock slide in and out of her ass just about sends me over the edge.

"All the way, Hawk," she tells me. "I need your cock all the way in."

Fuck me.

I pull out, and then slowly, I slide all the way in, until I'm at the hilt.

We both groan at the same time.

"Fuck," I mutter, my head spinning.

Her ass is so tight, gripping my cock like a vice.

I slide all the way out and then do it again.

Her guttural groans are everything. I live for it. And I want to make her scream.

I keep going until she's moving her ass against me, impaling me. Gripping her hips, I move my hips faster.

"Like this, baby?"

"Oh, yes."

I fuck her harder. Glancing down, I spread her ass cheeks, and I know I'm not gonna last. She grips my cock so fuckin' tight..

Moving my fingers back to her pussy, I slide them in.

"Harder, Hawk," she cries.

I grip her hips and spread her legs wider with my knees. "Gonna come," I grit between my teeth. "Fuck, baby."

She moans, and I close my eyes, stilling as I spill into her on an agonizing groan.

We're both panting as I pull out slowly, then I give her butt cheek a slap for good measure as she yelps. "Hawk!"

I grin, rolling over as I flop on my back. "I never thought I was a religious man until now."

She snorts, collapsing down onto her front. "I'm not sure fucking my ass is considered a religion."

I'm panting. "It is now."

"Glad that I'm able to give you a good workout," she says, her face still

planted into the pillow so her words are muffled.

My heart warms as I chuckle. Nobody makes me smile or laugh like she does.

Frankly, I haven't had a whole lot to smile about these last few months, but it seems we're making up for it. I'm glad about that.

We're quiet for a few minutes, both coming down from our high. Reaching over, I push her hair over her shoulder and press a kiss to head. I know it's not part of our deal or whatnot, but I can't help it.

Then she surprises me, her quiet voice sounding as she adjusts herself, rolling onto her side to face me. "I want to hear something about you."

"Not much to tell." There probably is, but not too much that'd make her like me more. I don't know where she's going with this.

"Have you had your heart broken?"

I contemplate how I'm gonna answer that, so I just go with the truth. "No. I've never been in love." *Then there's you.*

I stare at her.

She presses her lips together. "Take it from me, it's overrated."

"Sounds like it."

"People are never who they say they are."

"That's kinda cynical, isn't it? I'm who I say I am."

She rolls her eyes, and I know she's thinking about her ex. Cheating bastard. "Everyone has skeletons in their closets."

I scratch my chin and roll onto my side, resting my head in my hand. "Is this why you were weird to me, after Star?"

She looks away. "Yeah, I guess."

"Jas, I'm sorry about that," I say, before I can stop myself. I don't want her comparing me to her jerk of an ex-boyfriend. "I never meant to hurt you."

She looks back at me and must see the sincerity in my voice. "I believe you."

"I'm a jerk," I go on. "I swear to fuckin' God, I don't want her."

She shrugs. "It doesn't matter. We're not a thing."

"Yeah, babe, we are."

"Hawk, we're screwing." Even though she's correcting me, it's that damn look in her eyes again that tells me different.

"Screwing exclusively."

"It's still not a thing."

"Yep. It is."

She sighs. "Are you always so stubborn?"

I chuckle. "You haven't met my sister."

"Or your cousin."

I smile thinking of little Lexi. "She is. She's still got that little kid innocence, you know, that in-between stage from kid to teenager. I'm sure it won't last, but for now she still thinks I'm her cool cousin so that's enough for me."

She looks at me with a small smile playing on her lips. "That's really sweet, Hawk."

"I'm a sweet kinda guy."

She snorts, then sobers. "What's your real name?"

I roll my eyes. "Don't."

"Go on, tell me," she presses, her face brightening with playfulness.

"Raymond."

"Is it?"

I shake my head.

She whacks me on the arm, making me chuckle again.

"Tell!" she whines.

"Reginald."

"Hawk!"

I sigh. "It's Chad."

She gives me a look, and I nod. "Chad?"

"That's my birth name, yes. But clearly nobody calls me that."

She looks at me with new eyes. "I like Chad. It suits you."

"Well, nobody calls me it except my mom and grandma. Oh, and my sister when she wants to annoy me, which is often."

"Sisters are like that."

I give her a chin lift. "You got any?"

She shakes her head. "Only child. But I'm close to my cousin Lyndall and her kid Ella. I'm her godmother. I wish I got to see them more than I do. She's the same age as Lexi, except she's twelve going on twenty-two."

I snort. "Are you good with kids?"

She shrugs. "Not really. I'm not around them enough."

"I'm great with kids."

"No, you're great with grown-up kids. Babies are different."

"I showed Ryder how to hold his baby properly for the first time."

She looks at me again, eyes widening. "Get out."

“Yup. I’m not kiddin’. Goddamn idiot nearly dropped the poor dude on his head.”

“So you’re multi-skilled.”

“Nah, but there’s a sixteen-year age-gap between my Sistine and me. I learned early on how to change diapers and feed her and shit. And then I baby-sat Lexi for most of her childhood.”

“I can’t believe this.”

“What?” I say gruffly as she sits up farther. “Is it so hard to believe I’m not a total asshole all the time?”

She stares at me with something conflicting in her eyes, then she settles back down as if she’s just worked out what it is. “Of course it’s not,” she says after a moment. “I just never knew that you had this side to you.”

I grunt. “It’s like most people. We don’t show all of our cards to just anyone. Some stuff is... private.”

“Even from the club?”

“Yeah. I mean, they know about Lexi and how close we are, but I don’t want any of my family directly involved with the club. It’s just easier that way.”

“I get that.”

“Especially with all the shit lately with the Devils.”

“So glad that’s over,” she sighs.

“Me too. Fuckers got what was coming to them.”

“Cash is a lot less stressed.”

“We all are.”

I reach out, touching the ends of her hair as she looks down at my hand.

“What?” I say, my tone a bit softer than normal. I’m trying not to spook her. “Not allowed to touch you after what we just did?”

She bites down on her bottom lip. “It’s not that.”

“What then?”

“It’s... intimate, Hawk. We’re supposed to be just... buddies.”

“I like how you can’t even say it.”

“I can say it.”

“Go on then.”

She huffs. Stubborn little bitch. “Fuck buddies.”

I give her a level stare. “That isn’t what you really want.”

“Yes, it is.”

I shake my head. “No, Jas. It’s not. I know what you want.”

She stares at me in disbelief. “Just because you fucked me more than once doesn’t mean you know me.”

“Never said I did, and you don’t have to be such a bitch.”

Her lips open, then she closes them again. I expect her to sit up, and then chuck a fit and grab her shit and leave. She’s a hothead and she doesn’t like being told what to do.

Instead, she just looks at me.

I almost can’t believe it when she says, “You’re right, that was bitchy.”

I blink, my mind freezing. “Say what?”

She rolls her eyes. “You heard me, I’m not saying it again.”

I don’t make a big deal out of it, but that must have been hard for Miss-Control-Freak herself. I’m glad she didn’t storm off. The last thing I wanted was to fight with her again.

I know we had angry sex the first time, but tonight was different. Tonight, she let me get a little closer. She might not realize it, but I do. Those walls are slowly cracking. She’s letting me see more of her.

I want to take away her insecurities. Something I’ve never even thought about with another woman before. I didn’t care. But I want to fuckin’ kill her ex for doing that to her. Fuck. If I had her heart, damn straight I’d do everything to keep it.

My lips twitch. “You’re beautiful when you’re not yellin’ at me.”

Her lips part again, and once more, no sound comes out. “Thank you. I think?”

“No thinkin’ about it. You’re the whole package, baby. And I’m not just sayin’ that to get back in your pants. It’s the truth. I’m not gonna stand here and tell you that I’m not glad another guy didn’t come along. We both know I’m shootin’ above my average. You deserve better, but I’m gonna be honest, we got a good thing goin’.”

Her eyes soften. There’s no longer desire there, but something else. I can’t place it, but she’s not mad, that’s the main thing.

As I stare at her, my chest constricts.

I know that I’m falling for her, that I have been for some time, and the more time I spend with her, the harder I fall. I can’t describe how it feels when she’s in my arms.

What does this mean?

She has the potential to rip my heart out.

I always thought being with a woman on a permanent basis was a trap.

But I feel nothing of the sort.

She might think this isn't a thing, but I've got news for her.

It's so much more than that.

She can't deny we have chemistry. She can't deny she doesn't feel it. I know she does.

I want a chance. A chance to prove myself, something I never imagined would ever cross my thoughts.

The past be fuckin' damned. I don't care about anything BJ: Before Jas.

"We can't tell anyone," she says, interrupting my wayward thoughts.

"Why not?" It angers me that she doesn't want anyone to know. Am I that bad?

"You know why not. It complicates things."

"So, you're ashamed of me?" I don't know why that blurts out of my mouth. Maybe a part of me needs to know.

She narrows her eyes. "Ashamed of you?"

I shake my head, angered now. "Let me guess, your last boyfriend was a suit, wasn't he?"

She opens those pretty lips again and closes them. Then swallows hard. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"What did he do?"

She huffs. "He was an accountant too."

"Gotcha." I give her a wink and roll off the bed.

"Hawk."

"Havin' a shower. It's gettin' late."

I want her to stay more than anything, but I can't do this. I don't know how to do this.

This feeling... it's shit.

I normally fuck without any need for drama. But now my heart hammers in my chest at the idea that she thinks I'm not good enough for her. Which, of course, we both know I'm not.

I can't give her flashy dinners and vacations and all the shit he probably did. Her ex.

"Hawk, I didn't mean..."

I slam the bathroom door behind me and turn the shower on.

She can find another guy tomorrow, someone better than me. Someone who can keep her in the lifestyle she's accustomed to. She's made it clear that she doesn't want to be with a biker, not publicly.

Five minutes ago, I was a pussy boy being led around by my balls, and happy to do so.

Now all I can think about is how someone else will come along and sweep her off her feet. And there ain't a damn thing I can do about it.

JASMYNE

I DRIVE HOME FEELING SHAKEN.

Hawk had no right to go off like that, but as much as I tell myself those very words, a part of me understands where he's coming from.

This isn't like me at all.

I don't do this.

But that's what he agreed to.

No feelings. No attachments. No lovey-dovey stuff.

The less we feel, the better. Or do we?

How can we be anything more when we both know that this is doomed.

We work well together in bed, that's all.

Okay, I concede, he may have surprised me a little with what he said about Lexi and raising his sister. I've never seen Hawk as anything more than a big, grumpy brute who never smiles. Certainly not a man who changes diapers and baby-sits, and what's more, he enjoys spending time with his cousin. Now my mind is persuading me to think that I misjudged him. And I don't like it.

I had all my defenses up. Ready and armed.

There was no way anyone was getting through my armor. I've built that wall so high that nobody could get over it. But Hawk is making me crumble. Making me weak.

I told him things I've never told anyone.

I mentioned my ex, and now he has something to use against me, which is a stupid thing to think. Hawk isn't Jeremy. I almost laugh. They're so different.

And I'm not ashamed of Hawk. How could I be? He's amazing.

He surprises me in so many ways that I don't even know what's real anymore and what isn't. I can't trust my head, and I definitely can't trust my heart. So I'm screwed either way.

I wasn't supposed to be catching feelings for him.

I slap my forehead, wondering why I do this to myself.

He was hurt. I saw it in his eyes.

Now he thinks that I think he's not good enough, and all I want to do is tell him that it isn't true. But when Hawk is mad, he's more stubborn than I am.

When I get home, my fingers hover over my phone, anxious to send him a text.

I don't know what good it will do aside from ease my own conscience, but I do it anyway. Guilt flooding me for not correcting him.

Me

You are good enough. Please don't put words in my mouth.
Don't be mad. J x

I don't get a text back, and after I hop into the shower and wash him away, my mind drifts.

To us in bed. How tentative he was. His soft kisses. His hard bites. His cock pounding me. His words... His dirty, dirty words.

I'm feeling things, I can't deny it. And I'm stupid to believe that I could do it without feeling *something*.

I'm playing a game that I'm no longer in control of, and that's what worries me the most.



I don't see Hawk the next day, and he never replied to my text, which makes me mad.

He's the one who said those words, not me. He's the one who put words into my mouth that I never uttered, much less thought, and here I am apologizing to him for it?

He doesn't even have the courtesy to damn well reply to a text message.
Asshat.

I surge through my morning's work like a woman possessed. The one thing I can rely on to distract me from my current predicament is my workload.

It never ends with this club. There is never a day where there is nothing to do, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

The fact that I haven't heard from Hawk, though, is unsettling.

I shouldn't be worried about him or what he's doing. That's what being fuck buddies means.

They don't sit around, conjuring things up that may or may not have happened. Such as, all of Hawk's fingers being broken so he couldn't reply to my damn text.

Deanna invited me for dinner at the Grill because she's craving all the food she shouldn't be.

I like Deanna, and we get along great. When I meet her at the table, she gives me a big hug.

"I haven't seen you since that night at Solo," she says, pursing her lips. "And I want to hear all about Hawk and what happened afterward."

I roll my eyes. "You and your libido."

She gives me a look. "Don't pretend like nothing happened, Jas. He was all growly and chest pounding, so don't give me those innocent eyes. I'm surprised he didn't throw you over his shoulder and drag you out by your hair."

"He practically did, remember?"

"So did you guys do it?" Her eyes are eager for details as she leans in. "Don't tell me he didn't try anything."

I sigh. "I was drunk, so no. Even though I kept trying to take my clothes off and he kept trying to put them back on." I cringe at the vague memory of him trying to pull my top back up.

"Aww. That's kinda sweet."

"I don't know if I'd call Hawk sweet, but he put me to bed."

"And?"

I sigh again. "And we didn't fuck until the next morning."

She claps her hands with glee. "I knew it! I knew you would end up with Hawk!"

I look at her levelly. "We're screwing." Glancing around, I lower my tone. "And let's keep it between us. Nobody is allowed to know, so zip it."

She pretends to button her lips. "Your secret is safe with me." She pauses,

and then says, “Can I tell Summer?”

“No! The less people who know, the better. Until we work it out.”

What is there to work out? I mean, Hawk thinks we’re a thing, and I don’t know what we are.

“So it’s not just a one-night thing?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Have you fucked him again, since the other morning?”

I make a face.

“Oh my god!” she cries. “You hound! *Tell me everything!*”

I shush her, not that she’ll take notice.

“Don’t you dare tell Cash.”

She rolls her eyes.

“I mean it, D,” I warn her. “I need time to figure this out.”

She nods. “Okay, I won’t say anything.”

“Pinkie swear.”

She gives me a look. “Manny?”

I laugh. “If you pinkie swear it, then it’s set in stone.”

“Fine.” She wiggles her pinkie at me, then says. “But I want details first.”

“D!”

“He’s hung, right?”

I sigh. “Yes.”

She grins. “And he’s good?”

“He’s better than good; he’s a fucking stud.”

She squeals, happy for me as her eyes light up. “It’s about time. I mean, that man has been walking around like sad Sam for the last few months. I hope you made him grovel.”

I grin. “Would you expect anything less?”

She shakes her head. “Good. You know what the boys are like, thinking we’re the only ones who have to follow the rules. Make sure he’s not fucking anyone else.”

“I’ve made it clear he doesn’t put his dick anywhere else,” I say, then I laugh. “Remember that time you had it out with Brandi for hitting on Cash for the millionth time? That was after the cat fight with Trinity.”

She grins. “She had it coming. I mean, have some self-respect, he’d told her no. So I got two sweet butts fired... No wonder everyone around here hated me for a while.”

I shrug. “They made their choices. Trinity sold her soul to the Devils, and

that was her undoing.”

“I never liked her,” she says. “But, like most things, I guess it all worked out in the end.”

I give her a chin lift. “How’s the baby bump?”

She smooths her hands over her very swollen belly.

“Less than four weeks to go. I’m so done with being pregnant. I need this baby out of me.”

It’s true what they say about pregnant women having a glow. She looks radiant.

I smirk. “Cash doesn’t seem to mind it.” He loves her newly found curves.

She rolls her eyes. “Tell me about it. He’s already talking about baby number two. The man is insane.”

After so many years alone, I’m so glad my boss and friend has finally found the woman of his dreams, and they’re starting a family. Nothing makes me happier.

Cash has been good to me, and I won’t hear a bad word about him.

“It’s so good to see him settled down,” I say. “He’s gonna be a great dad.”

“He’s worried about it, about being a good father.”

“He needn’t worry. He has that knack, you know. Kids love him, and he doesn’t even have to try.”

Deanna almost swoons when she says, “You should see him with little Ade, he’s a natural.”

Ade is Crystal and Ryder’s little boy, and he’s a cutie. And she’s right; Cash is so good with him. He jokes about being almost fifty and too old to be a dad, but I know for a fact that isn’t true. Cash will love and protect his child and do everything possible to give him or her the best life.

“Oh, he is. Crystal often hands Ade over to Cash when she can’t get him to stop crying.” She smiles softly and that prompts me to add, “How are you feeling? About being a first-time mom?”

For the first time since I’ve known her, she actually looks a little worried. “I’m feeling good about most parts, but also scared shitless about others. I don’t know what to do with a baby. What if I drop it on its head or something?”

I laugh. “You won’t do that. Plus, you’ve got the entire clubhouse and the ol’ ladies to help.”

I think about Hawk and how cute he sounded raising his kid sister and his cousin and my heart swells imagining him as a dad. *What, what?* I brush that thought aside quickly.

“You’re right. And my mom is going to be here a lot. My parents are already making plans to extend their stay after the baby is born.”

“It’ll be fantastic having your mom here. She’ll help so much.” I smile.

I’d want my mom around when the time comes. Again, I don’t know why my mind flicks to Hawk. I barely like the guy. I can’t be thinking about our unborn children. Wouldn’t that be crazy.

“Tell me about it. She’s beside herself. My parents have always wanted a bunch of grandkids running around. They kinda realized that they weren’t gonna get anywhere with my brother and his ol’ lady Amelia anytime soon, so they’re off the hook for a while.”

I squeeze her hand across the table. “You’re gonna be fine, D. You’ll be a great mom. The most important thing is that the kid is loved, and with you two for parents, it’s not going to want for anything.”

She smiles warmly, and I can see the love in her eyes as she rubs her hands over her belly. “I keep telling Cash I need a really hot gumbo so I can get this kid out early,” she laughs.

“Well, we can always ask Manny? He’s famous for it,” I suggest.

“Oh, he’s just as bad as Cash.” Deanna rolls her eyes. “He won’t do anything to speed up labor because he doesn’t want to be responsible for it.”

“That’s hilarious.”

“Tell me about it!” she whines. “I had to beg him for hot sauce for my sandwich the other day. The damn traitor would only give me ketchup.”

I can’t help but laugh. “He’s looking out for you.”

“He can look out for me by inducing labor.”

“You know, pretty soon, you’re not gonna have any time on your hands after the baby is born,” I say. “I’d be making the most of it.”

“You’re right,” she sighs. “But I’ve completely remodeled the nursery, and if I rearrange the kitchen cabinets one more time, Cash is gonna go insane. It’s safe to say the nesting stage is complete.”

“And you’re glad you guys waited to find out the sex of the baby?”

She nods. “It’s more of a surprise that way. We honestly don’t care if it’s a boy or girl, and Cash doesn’t either. Just as long as he or she is healthy.”

“At least you decorated in neutrals,” I say. “Very smart. Anyone would think you’re a designer.”

She laughs just as my phone goes off. I don't recognize the number, so I don't answer.

A few moments later, my phone beeps with a voice message. I'll check it when we leave.

I drop Deanna back home after dinner and listen to my message on Bluetooth as I begin to pull out.

"Ms. Russo, it's Officer O'Brien from the Lafayette police station. Please call me back urgently on this number," says the caller.

I frown, grabbing my phone from the holder as I put the car in park, my hands starting to shake. I dial the number and wait.

Lyndall and Ella live in Lafayette... I don't like the way my heart races and blood starts to pound in my ears.

It'll be okay.

Everything is all right.

The Lafayette police station reception answers, and I ask for Officer O'Brien. I wait a few moments until O'Brien answers.

"Ms. Russo? Thank you for calling me back," he says. "You were listed as Lyndall Snowden's next of kin..."

"Oh my god, is she okay?"

He pauses. "We're going to need you to come down to the Lafayette police department, ma'am."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. Something isn't right. "I live in New Orleans... Tell me what's going on, is Lyndall okay?"

Another pause, then, "I'm sorry to have to inform you of this, Ms. Russo, but Lyndall passed away a few hours ago in a car accident..."

My eyes blink, and I sit there in shock, my stomach dropping to my feet. "What? No! No, that can't be... Lyndall I just talked to her yesterday..." I try to swallow the lump in my throat as tears spill down my cheeks. "Is she... was anyone with her? Her daughter?"

"The child suffered minor, non-life-threatening injuries but is still being monitored. She's receiving treatment at Lafayette Medical." I can't see through the tears blurring my eyes. Relief and devastation now mixing within me.

"Does she know... About her mom?" My voice shakes. I feel like I'm going to be sick.

"Not yet, the doctors would prefer for a family member to be present."

Tears roll down my face. "I'll be there in a few hours."

“Again, I’m sorry for your loss, Ms. Russo. I know this must be a very difficult time for you.”

I don’t have any words. I hang up the phone, drop it, and sob into my hands. I don’t know how long I sit there for, but I jump when there’s a tap at the window.

Cash stands there, frowning at me, then he opens the door. “Jas? What’s wrong?”

I shake my head, unable to speak as he reaches in and turns the engine off and unclips my seat belt. I hear Deanna behind him in a panic.

“My cousin... I need to... Lafayette,” I sob, but I don’t even think I’m speaking coherently.

Cash pulls me out of the car and tells Deanna to grab my phone. I’m too weak to stand, my head feeling light as I sag into his arms. He carries me into the house.

“Jas,” Cash says, his voice full of concern. “You need to tell me what happened.”

I clutch his shirt and try to give him the news, in between sobs, until he looks over at Deanna. “Go pour a shot of whiskey, baby.”

She waddles off to the kitchen as Cash holds his hands on my shoulders as I try not to collapse.

“Need to breathe,” he tells me. “You might be having a panic attack.”

I nod, knowing that he’s right. I try to slow my breathing as he encourages me to take slow breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. My head starts to feel better as I focus on him.

Deanna brings me the whiskey, and Cash takes it from her. “Just a small sip, sweetheart,” he says, then to Deanna, “Need to get her to Lafayette.”

I shake my head. “I can go. I just need a second.”

Cash shakes his head. “I’d drive you, but with Deanna being so close to her due date...”

“I’ll be fine, Cash. It’s two hours away,” Deanna says.

“My cousin...” I start. “Lyndall. She’s like a sister to me... We’re... we’re best friends.”

“Call Hawk,” Cash says out the side of his mouth. “He can drive her. He’ll make sure she gets there safely.”

“No—” I start, my heart starting to race again.

“Yes. He’s the most responsible and he cares about you. You can’t drive in this state.”

“Manny. Or Luna.” *Anyone but Hawk.* He can’t see me like this.

“Stop being stubborn. Hawk will kill me if I give anyone else the job,” Cash says.

“I’m so sorry, Jas,” Deanna says, sitting on the sofa next to me. “I know you were close to her.”

“My niece,” I choke out. “I’m her legal guardian, If anything were to happen...”

“We’ll deal with all of that,” Deanna says. “Cash, I think we need to be there.”

“I can call your parents,” Cash says as I nod slowly. “I think that’s best.”

“Thank you,” I say gratefully.

My mind is reeling. I don’t know what to do... For the first time in my life, I’m at a loss.

Lyndall ... She can’t be... She can’t be dead.

I close my eyes.

I need to breathe.

I need to try to wrap my head around this and think about Ella and what the next steps are for her.

She doesn’t even know yet.

Pain grips my heart, and Deanna holds my hand as I sag into Cash’s chest and sob like I never have before.

HAWK

WHEN I GET THE CALL, I DROP EVERYTHING. CASH EXPLAINED BRIEFLY WHAT happened, and I throw together a duffel bag before jumping in my truck.

Jas needs me.

I can't even get my head around how she must be feeling right now. I speed across town to get to her. I might not be the person she really wants to see right now, but she needs to get to Lafayette, and she'll be in no condition to drive.

I try not to speed through every red light I come to, but I have to get to her.

When I arrive at Cash's place, he meets me out front.

"How is she?" I ask, hopping out of my truck as he gives me a one-armed hug.

"Devastated."

I nod. "Probably gotta swing by her place and grab some stuff. I'd say it'll be a few days until she gets things sorted out."

"Just stay with her. She's not herself right now," Cash says. "I called her parents, and they're making their way to Lafayette on the first flight out. Funerals take planning, and there's a kid to think about, one she now has custody of."

"Holy fuck," I mutter.

I close my eyes, knowing how hard this'll hit Jas. "Poor fuckin' Jas," Cash says. "She's a wreck. She had a panic attack earlier. I'd offer to come, but Deanna has been back and forth to the hospital this week. We've only a few weeks to go."

I nod. “Understandable. I’ll take care of it.”

He slaps me on the back as we make our way inside.

Jas is on the couch, looking paler than I’ve ever seen her before. She’s been crying a lot, her face pink and eyes bloodshot. She doesn’t even look up when I enter the room.

Deanna gives me a weak smile, holding Jas’s hand.

“Hey,” I say softly.

“Hi, Hawk,” Deanna replies. “Jas, Hawk is going to take you home to pack a bag, okay?”

Jas’s eyes finally meet mine, and she nods once.

I don’t want to crowd her, but I don’t want to seem like I don’t care. I crouch down in front of her.

“Whatever you need, Jas, I’m here,” I say, taking her hand in mine.

Her eyes are vacant, and it breaks my heart for her.

“I need to go,” she whispers.

I nod, my eyes flicking to Deanna’s. I keep my hand in hers as I help her to stand. It feels so small, so soft within my grasp. Like she might break.

I hate seeing her like this.

I wrap an arm around her shoulders, pressing a kiss to her head.

Cash hovers as he helps Deanna front the couch. “Call me the minute you get there,” he says.

Deanna wipes her eyes as Cash pulls her into a hug.

“I will,” I say over my shoulder.

They walk us to the truck as Jas slumps against me. I move toward the passenger side and open the door, lifting her up into the seat, and taking her phone from her as I slide it into the middle console. Once I secure her seatbelt and shut the door, I jog around to the driver's side, hop in, and start the engine as I pull out.

She leans her head against the window as I glance at her every now and again.

“I’m sorry, Jas,” I say, like that’s going to help.

She doesn’t say anything, and I don’t need her to. I just need her to know that I’m here for her. No matter what happens. I’m here.

“We’ll stop at your place, grab some stuff, and then make our way to Lafayette, okay?”

“I don’t know what I need.” Her voice is small. “I just... I just don’t know.”

“We’ll figure it out. Together.”

I’ve never packed for a chick before, but I’m sure it can’t be that hard.

While we’re driving, her parents call her. She cries a lot, and I try to swallow down the lump in my throat. My poor baby.

I want to take it all away, the pain, all the heartbreak. But I know I can’t.

All I can do is be here for her now.

In whatever way she needs me.

She talks to them for a few minutes, and then hangs up.

Stupidly, I ask, “How are they?”

She shrugs. “Pretty distressed. They’re flying out as soon as they can.”

I want to hold her to me. Comfort her. Make everything better, but it’s going to be a long road ahead.

As long as she knows she can rely on me, that’s all that matters.

She’s lifeless when we pull up, and I retrieve her from the passenger seat. She leans into my body as I wrap my arm around her.

“Where’s your key, baby?” I ask.

She motions to her purse slung over her shoulder.

I unzip the bag, rummaging around for a moment before I locate them.

Once we’re in her apartment, I sit her down on the couch.

I was expecting her to come around a little once we got inside, but she just sits there in shock, hugging her knees.

“Jas? Where’s your bedroom?”

“First left,” she says as I frown.

I shove her door keys in my pocket and make for the hallway. The apartment is small and neat. There’s a huge, flowery mural right above the couch that I know Deanna created, as she redecorated Jas’s apartment a few months back.

It’s girly here. Soft furnishings, plush furniture, and modern artwork.

When I get to her bedroom, it’s nothing I didn’t expect.

A large, four-poster bed, with a white duvet and soft pink comforter. The wallpaper matches the flowery mural in the living room. The carpet is a soft gray, and there’s a dresser with about a hundred perfumes lined up.

I’ve no idea where to start looking for a suitcase... Switching the light on, I head to the walk-in closet and locate a large bag that I could use.

I’ve no idea what to shove in there... Underwear. Pajamas. Sweats. Comfy shit. Jeans and t-shirts. We’re gonna be traveling and she needs to be comfortable. It’s not hot at the moment, nor is it cold, kinda in between as we

make our way to fall.

I found jeans. Sweatpants. A sweater. A couple of tops. A nice dress for the funeral. Some sneakers. Then I head to the drawers near her dresser. Rummaging around, I find her underwear drawer. Trying not to be a creep, I grab a couple of pairs of lacy panties, my fingers dancing over a thong that I just shake my head at. The next drawer down holds her bras, so I swipe a couple of those.

The bottom drawer I open, close, then open again.

Vibrators. A fuckin' drawer of them. I swallow hard... Now isn't the time or the place, but fuck me.

It takes a couple more open drawers before I find her pajamas. I throw in the first pair I can find, along with some socks.

What else do chicks need?

I don't want to forget anything.

I pull my phone out and quickly ring Deanna.

She answers on the first ring. "Hawk? Are you okay?"

"Hey, D. I'm fine. We're at Jas's place. I need your help. She's a zombie, and I've packed her clothes as best I can. What about other shit?"

"Okay, head to the bathroom. You're going to need my help."

I walk into the large, tidy en-suite and glance around. There're a million bottles in here too.

"Holy fuck," I say. "I don't know where the fuck to even start."

"Just take a breath," she says. "Go under the counter and try to find a cosmetics bag to put everything in."

I do as she says, pulling out a large and a small Victoria's Secret purse with pink and black stripes.

"Now what?"

"Makeup wipes, or cleanser. Moisturizer. Shampoo and conditioner. Some tampons..."

"Holy shit."

"It'll be fine. Just grab the basics. She won't be thinking about it now, but she has a full face of makeup on. She's gonna want that shit off tonight."

I pick up the bottles and read them. One says foaming face cleaner, so I shove that in, along with some cotton pads. A tube of moisturizer and the other tube sitting next to it labeled *night serum*.

"Don't forget her toothbrush and toothpaste."

I don't see it anywhere, then realize the mirror opens and behind it are a

million other bottles and potions. I grab her toothbrush and paste and find a box of tampons. Shaking a few loose ones into the bag, I say, “I think I got it all.”

“Good job.”

“Thanks, D.”

“Anytime. Be safe.”

I hang up, then taking the smaller bag, I shove it into the bigger one and make my way out of the bedroom and back to Jas.

She’s sitting in the same position. “I should help,” she says as she stands.

I shake my head, waving the bag at her. “I got it.”

She frowns. “What’s in there?”

“Stuff.”

She nods. “Okay. Sorry, Hawk. I just...”

“It’s okay,” I reassure her. “Anythin’ else you need? Didn’t find a phone charger.”

“I’ll get the one from the bedroom.”

“I can do that.”

Our eyes meet, and I can see hers tearing up again. “You’re being very sweet.”

“I just wanna help.” I drop the bag and go back to the bedroom, locate the charger, and shove it in with the other stuff.

She shakes her head, even though she has no idea what I just threw in the bag.

“We should head out, it’s late.”

“Okay.”

I walk behind her as she turns the lights off. We get to the front door, and I lock it behind us.

She looks up at me as I turn.

“You good?”

She nods, her face weary and her eyes guarded. I’ve never seen her look so small and fragile.

“Come here.” I pull her into a hug, and she sags against me. Holding her for a moment, I kiss the top of her head.

She starts to cry, fisting my shirt as she sobs quietly into my chest.

I soothe her, telling her it’s going to be okay. That I’m here. I’ll do anything I can to help.

I never knew what real heartbreak felt like, not until this moment. But I

feel it radiating off her. And I let her cry until she has no more tears left and we turn to leave.



Jasmyne rests for most of the trip. I can't tell if she's sleeping or not, but her eyes are closed and she's facing away from me.

I cover her in the blanket I always keep in the back of the car. She looks so fragile. Like a fallen angel. Not the feisty, strong woman that I know that can handle anything. This is Jas raw.

But this is her time to grieve, and she's still in shock. I can't even imagine getting a phone call like that.

I've made men bleed, but this? Seeing her in pain, it's slow torture.

I punched the address to the Lafayette hospital into my GPS, so I head straight there.

I know how hard things are going to be for her over the coming days. And I want to be there, even if it's in the shadows. She needs support right now, and she'll have her family, but at night... At night, she'll have me. No questions asked.

While she's at the hospital, I'll book us a hotel room, unless Jas wants to stay with family... I hadn't considered that.

When I pull up into the lot, I turn the engine off and Jas stirs.

"Hey, baby," I say softly. "We're here."

She turns to look at me. "Already?"

I nod. I see the worry and hesitation on her face; she has to give this terrible news to her niece now.

I reach over and cup one side of her face. She doesn't pull back.

"I'm here, Jas. If you need me to do anythin', call someone, get you somethin', you just gotta ask, got me?"

She nods. Her eyes are wide. "Okay."

I run my thumb over her cheekbone and stroke her soft skin. "Ready?"

She shakes her head. "No."

I smile softly, my heart thudding in my chest. "You can take your time. You don't need to rush..."

"I have to," she whispers, her voice breaking. "I have to tell her. I can't keep it from her."

“Jas, I’m so sorry,” I say. “I wish I could make it better.”

“I know, but you can’t, Hawk. Nobody can. Lyndall is gone. I’ll never see her again.”

I watch as she blinks away the tears and I wipe them away. “You’re a strong, beautiful, amazing woman, Jas. You can get through this. I know it doesn’t seem like it now, but you will. The entire club is behind you, baby. Whatever you need.”

“Don’t leave me,” she whispers.

I shake my head. “I won’t.”

“I... I don’t want to be alone tonight.”

I tilt her chin slightly. “I’m here.”

“Kiss me,” she says suddenly. “I need to feel you.”

I don’t know if that’s a good idea, but I don’t want to deny her.

Jas is a craving I’ll never tire of.

I move forward, cupping the other side of her face as I kiss her gently. Softly. Like I never have before. She barely brushes her lips over mine, but it’s the connection that gets me. How she feels against me.

I don’t take the kiss further, and as I pull back, I press my forehead against hers.

“You’re gonna get through this.”

Her lips part, but no sound comes out.

I pull back to look down at her. I know she doesn’t want to, and I get that. But once it’s over with, it won’t feel like such a burden.

“Come on,” I say. “Ella needs you.”

I push her seat belt button, then mine, and jump out of my truck. I jog around to meet her as I help her down. Grabbing her jacket, I throw it over my arm as I shut the door and we walk toward the entrance.

I wrap an arm around her shoulders as she hugs herself.

Don’t leave me... I don’t want to be alone tonight.

If only she knew, I’d never do that. Never again.

I want to be here for her and so much more.

I’ll be her rock. The one she can turn to and depend on. I want to see her get through this, and the only way I know how is to be here.

“I’ll wait in the waiting room,” I say as we approach. “Do you have other family here?”

Jas shakes her head. “My Aunt and Uncle live in Portland, and her brother, Ryan, was deployed but is back from duty. My grandma lives with

my parents. She'll be coming tomorrow."

"Is there anyone you'd like me to call?"

She shakes her head. "Everyone in the family knows, and Lyndall's friends. Her ex isn't part of the picture."

"Okay." I tighten my arm around her shoulders.

I feel fiercely protective over her, now more than ever.

But I meant what I said. Jasmyne is one of the strongest people I know. Her cousin left her in charge because she knows it too.

I just hate seeing her fall apart.

The entrance is brightly lit as we walk in and up to the reception desk. I do all the talking, aside from telling the nurse her cousin's last name.

She tells us that she's on the 4th floor, and gives us directions to the elevator.

Man. I always hated the smell of hospitals. They're too fuckin' clinical.

I rub her shoulder as we ascend in the elevator.

The ride seems like the longest of my life. In the reflection of the doors, I see how different we are.

She's so petite, I'm a giant in comparison. We shouldn't work, but we do.

We fit.

I'm glad Cash called me. And while he doesn't know about us, I'm sure he suspects something. I'll call him when Jas is in with Ella. I know he and Deanna will be worried.

We're a family and look out for one another. Jasmyne is part of that family.

We're there for one another, and Jasmyne is a big part of this club.

She keeps everything running like clockwork and everyone respects her.

Everyone will be concerned.

But I'm the one who gets to be here.

JASMYNE

I HOLD ELLA WHILE SHE CRIES. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'VE EVER DONE THAT was more important than this moment, and it's breaking me in two.

I try to hold it together and hide my grief to be there for Ella.

She cries and cries and cries.

She's battered and bruised... It was a hit and run, and the other driver, who they suspect was drunk, fled the scene and is still at large.

My beautiful, amazing, gorgeous Lyndall... gone in an instant. Just like that.

Life has irrevocably changed.

Life will never be the same again, not for any of us, and certainly not for Ella.

I don't know how to do this. There are things to discuss and get sorted out, but I can't do any of that tonight.

I'm drained and so very sad.

"Ella, if you want to talk about what happened," I say gently, "before the accident, the police will need to hear so they can try to understand everything."

She shakes her head. That won't be today. "I want my mom." Her bottom lip trembles as realization dawns.

"I'm so sorry, baby girl. I want her too, so very much."

I hold her until she falls asleep in my arms from exhaustion. I need to stay with her tonight. If she wakes up and she's alone, she won't know where she is or who is here for her. I don't want her to be scared.

I tell the nurse I'll need a bed made up, and she nods, though she advises

me they will be giving her pain medication for her fracture, and she'll be out of it for most of the night.

I don't know how long I sit there for. It could be hours.

So many things are going through my mind. So many memories. So much I never got to say. I never even got to tell Lyndall about Hawk. And now she'll never know.

I stare at Ella sleeping. I don't know what Lyndall was thinking, when she picked me to be Ella's guardian. I mean, I love her. She's a great kid. But I never imagined that I'd be taking the place of a parent someday. My mind and my heart fill with worry. I can't stop it. I can't help it.

What kind of life am I going to offer her?

Will she even want to come with me? I live in New Orleans.

I run a hand over my face. I'm not gonna solve anything tonight. I can't.

Right now, I can't even breathe. I can't even find the will to go on for another five minutes, let alone thinking about the future.

I go to stand. I need a break from these four walls.

Outside the room, I look down the hallway and see Hawk sitting on one of the plastic chairs. He doesn't really fit. In fact, I've never seen a person look so out of place.

As soon as he sees me, he stands.

One thing is for certain, I've never been so sure of anything in my life having him here with me. I don't know why. Maybe it's because he offers me the security that I so desperately long for. And selfishly, I need him to stay strong. Because if he isn't, I don't know if I can get through this.

He comes toward me, and I fold into his arms as he hugs me to his chest. I just want him to hold me. I want him to make it all better. I want this nightmare to go away.

"How is she?" he asks in a small voice.

"She's as good as can be expected," I say, my hands fisting in his shirt.

"Is there anything she needs?"

I shake my head. "She's resting at the moment. The nurses said she has a small fracture, and she's on some pretty strong pain meds, but I think I should stay the night."

He nods. "Whatever you need."

"I hate to leave you at the hotel, by yourself..."

"I'm a big boy. I'll be fine."

"Are you sure?"

“I’m sure, baby. I’m only a phone call away if you need anything.”

I nod again. “Thank you, Hawk,” I start. “For being here. I don’t know if Cash knows about us. I don’t think that’s the reason he called you, but I’m glad he did.”

He strokes my back as he talks. “Cash doesn’t know. At least, I haven’t told him. He may have figured it out on his own, because he knows how I feel about you.”

I warm at his words.

My phone has been buzzing all night, and after answering a call from my parents, I don’t have the strength to talk to anybody else.

“I’ve booked a room at the Hollyoak,” Hawk says. “So if you need anything, or if you want to come and have a few hours rest or to have a shower, just call me. Anytime. Got me?”

“Okay,” I whisper.

He pulls back and rubs my shoulders as I look up at him.

His eyes are intense as he stares down at me.

The concern that I see, it’s almost knocking me off my feet. If I had any doubt about whether Hawk has feelings for me, then all those questions just got answered. That look. That’s how I want him to look at me forever.

Not with sympathy or like he doesn’t know what to do.

He looks at me like I’m his everything.

I can’t believe it. I mean, I’ve been fighting my feelings, I admit that. But I’m scared of opening up and being cheated on again. After Jeremy, I can’t go through something like that. It broke me. But now I’m looking at him and the way he’s looking at me, I know I’m catching feelings. I promised myself I wouldn’t... but I can’t deny that I have. I feel it deep inside me.

What do we do with that now? Or am I reading too much into it?

Is Hawk just here for me now because of what’s happened?

So many damn questions.

I have better things to be worrying about, but all of a sudden, my mind is trying to compartmentalize every damn thing that I can’t control.

I shake it off. This isn’t the time to be analyzing that.

I need to just take a breath.

“Are you gonna be okay? I can stay.”

I shake my head. “I’ll be okay.”

He doesn’t look like he’s convinced. “You need some sleep.”

He’s right, I do.

“The nurse is making up a bed for me.” Even though I won’t sleep, I make it sound like I am. “That way, I’ll be right there when Ella wakes up.”

Maybe when I wake up in the morning, this nightmare will be just that and not the reality I’m now faced with.

“If that’s what you want.” He looks like he wants to argue, tell me to come back with him and get some rest, but he bites his tongue.

“It is, Hawk. She needs me.”

He nods. “All right.”

I smile softly, a wave of exhaustion coming over me. “Thank you for being here.”

“Of course.”

“I’ll text you in the morning.”

I let go of him, albeit reluctantly.

He towers over me as I wrap my arms around myself.

I give him a small smile as I turn around and head back to Ella’s room. With one look back, he gives me a chin lift.

As I close the door behind me, the quiet engulfs me. I lean against the door as I look over at Ella. Sleeping in her hospital bed, with monitors attached to her and her leg up in a sling.

I sink down to the ground, hugging my knees and crying.

I can’t hold it in anymore.

The floodgates open.

How can life be so cruel?

How can life change in an instant, and now a little girl has no mom?

I want to scream this hospital down that it isn’t fair. Lyndall was a good person. She didn’t deserve this.

Instead, I bury my head into my hands and pray for the morning to come.



I don’t sleep.

I lie awake on the cot, my head spinning.

Every time I hear a noise, I bolt upright, making sure Ella is okay.

The nurses come in and out all night, and I pretend to be asleep. I don’t think I’m really supposed to be here, but they must’ve felt sorry for us.

I can’t even imagine Ella waking up in the night and having nobody here.

I rub my eyes as I sit up, making my way to the small bathroom to use the toilet and then splash water on my face. I look like a mess. I feel a mess.

Oh my god. Ella.

Here I am thinking about myself when my poor little niece lies in a hospital bed, her whole entire life now changed. I didn't think it was possible to run out of tears, but last night that's exactly what happened.

When I think about how full of life Lyndall was, it just makes no sense why she's been so tragically taken.

I'm so fucking angry.

When the family arrives, it's a blessing and a curse. There's nothing like a tragedy to bring everybody together. Lyndall's parents; my Aunt Jane and Uncle Tom, and her brother Ryan, all arrive mid-morning. Everybody is sad and somber. And we're all in disbelief.

I sent a text to Hawk when I woke up to say that I was fine. I feel bad that he has to hang around and wait for me. He said he'd come by and take me to breakfast.

Not that I'll be able to eat anything, but still the gesture was nice.

"You need some rest," my mom says, her arm around my shoulder.

I didn't even think about how I would explain Hawk or what he's doing here. He's not my boyfriend.

My parents know I work for the MC. They've never held any judgments against what I do because what I do is legit. I'm a damn fine accountant and Cash pays me well.

"I know," I say. "But I just don't think I can."

Mom rubs my back with one hand as I rest my head on her shoulder. There's so much to arrange. The funeral, for one. Then we need to have a family meeting about Lyndall's will and what to do with Ella. Though, I know for the short-term, I can't just yank her out of her home and school.

Dad hands me a coffee. "There's a guy named Hawk out in the waiting room asking for you," he says, one eyebrow quirked.

Holy shit. Here we go.

"Oh," I say, my mind scrambling to think of a way to explain him. "He's, uh, a friend. Cash made him drive me last night."

Mom and Dad like Cash a lot. They know he's been good to me and lets me do my own thing.

"And he's still here?" Dad goes on.

Our eyes meet. "I have no way of getting back," I say. "I didn't want the

hassle of you guys having to drive me.”

Dad gives me a small smile. “You should go eat something.”

I nod, knowing his efforts to feed me will be futile. “Okay.”

I take my lukewarm coffee and leave the room, closing the door quietly behind me.

It’s not hard to spot Hawk. He’s the largest person in the waiting room. Standing there like a force to be reckoned with.

His face hard as steel, his jaw set, but his eyes soft.

“Jas,” he says. The way he says my name... “How are you?”

I wish I had an answer for him because I really don’t know. I’m too tired to think straight.

“About the same.”

He pulls me into a hug. “You look like hell.”

“Thanks.”

“Your dad looked like he wanted to fight me.”

I chuckle. “He’s cool. Though under normal circumstances, he would be giving you twenty questions on your intentions.”

“What did you tell him?”

I pull back. “That you’re a friend and Cash sent you to drive me.”

“A friend?” It is like he’s spitting poison out of his mouth.

“I can’t exactly tell him what I don’t know, Hawk.”

He stares at me. “But we do know.”

“That it’s complicated? Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“No. That you’re mine, and I’m yours.”

I swallow hard. Today isn’t the day for declarations that I don’t know what to do with.

What we have is complicated, no matter what he says. And the foundation is rocky, at best.

“Hawk, I can’t tell my parents shit that I’m still figuring out.”

He mutters something under his breath, and I sigh.

“You need to clean up.” He holds out a hand. “A shower, something to eat. You’ll feel better.”

My heart swells that he wants to take care of me. What’s more, I want to let him.

There are so many decisions to make, and I don’t know if I’m strong enough to make them. Lack of sleep doesn’t help.

I take his hand. It’s large and warm in mine. I don’t give a shit about the

look we get when we leave the waiting room. Hawk opens the door for me, and I scoot under his arm.

We take the few-minute drive to the hotel, and Hawk asks, “How is Ella this morning?”

I swallow the lump in my throat. “Upset. Confused. All of those things. God, Hawk, I don’t know what to do. I’m freaking the fuck out.”

Exhaustion doesn't help in decision making. I’m running on empty.

“You don’t have to figure all of that out in one day,” he says. “We can stay as long as we have to until you straighten things out.”

“And then what?” I say, my voice breaking. “Yank Ella out of her home, her school, away from her friends?”

“Baby, it will all figure itself out.”

“It won’t!” I know I sound snippy, but I’m so overwhelmed. “Lyndall’s brother, my cousin Ryan, is already talking about custody.”

“He can’t do that. She left Ella to you.”

I close my eyes. I know he’s right, but I don’t want a shit fight with Ryan. We’ve never really gotten along, and Lyndall never wanted him to have Ella if anything were to happen. He’s in the military and Lyndall doesn’t like the way he parents. Plus, he’d never be home, and his wife isn’t exactly the type of woman Lyndall warmed to. Nor did she relish the idea of her ever being a mother to Ella, should anything happen.

“I know,” I say, biting on my thumbnail. “But I don’t know how to raise a child... I don’t know the first thing about kids...”

“You don’t have to work it all out in a day.”

I shake my head. “But I do. She’ll be out of hospital soon, and then what?”

“Jas, you need some rest. Then you’ll think much clearer.”

I take a deep breath. I know he’s right, but I can’t seem to see the wood for the trees.

Everything is a blur.

Everything.

And Ella has already had to go through so much.

My heart breaks more at every turn.

We pull up, and I’m surprised when our room is on a higher level, a suite no less. Hawk really went all out. No cheap motel for us.

I drop my purse on the table. “Hawk, this room is insane.”

“I wanted you to be comfortable,” he says simply.

Where did this man come from?

I swallow down every mean word I've ever said to him. It only makes me feel ten times worse if I think about our rocky start.

I find my way to the bathroom, amazed at the size and how nice the furnishings are.

I didn't expect this at all.

Of course, I know the club does well, so Hawk can afford it. But I don't know how much money he makes. Out of all the guys aside from Jett, he seems to be one of the better ones when it comes to managing his finances.

"Did you want some food brought up to the room?" he asks as I hover in the doorway. "You must be hungry by now."

I shake my head. "Maybe we'll go out and get something after." What I really want is to get back to the hospital, but I also need to have a shower and then get some fresh air.

"Okay."

He hovers, looking at me. Like he doesn't know if I'm going to explode or something.

Everything inside me is numb. Dried up. Completely void. I don't even know what I feel anymore. Not today, not any day.

I just know I can't fall apart. That will get me nowhere. I have to be strong and do all my crying in private, when I'm alone. For Ella's sake.

"I'll take a shower, then," I say.

He nods. "I'll be right out here."

I'm tempted to say, *In case I need something?* But now isn't the time for jokes.

I try to hold it together until I strip and run the water. When it's scalding hot, I step underneath.

The boiling hot water feels so good.

I reach for the hotel shower gel and slather myself in it. I know I look like shit, and probably smell like it too, but I haven't even thought about it until this very moment.

I'll feel better after I've washed the last twenty-four hours away.

It won't fix anything, but it might just help clear my mind for what's to come.

HAWK

I PACE AS I TALK TO CASH. HE'S BEEN RINGING ME A LOT THESE LAST TWELVE or so hours.

He's concerned, like we all were.

"How is she?" Cash asks.

I run a hand through my hair. "Same as before. Not sayin' much."

"This is what she'll do, Hawk. She goes quiet when she's being challenged by somethin'."

"I'd say she's been fuckin' challenged," I mutter. "Hasn't eaten or slept. She's a mess. Prez, I'm not sure I'm the right person to be here." I mean, I want to be here. I *have* to be here. But maybe she needs one of the girls. Again, I'm reminded that Deanna is heavily pregnant, Summer is working in the emergency department, Manny isn't trustworthy enough to be driving, and Luna could be anywhere. Jas's other friends outside of the club seem to be non-existent.

"Stop your whinin' and do what I ask, Hawk. You are the one I'm trusting, so don't fuck this up. Just look after her, and when she's ready, we'll discuss what the club can do to help."

I glance over toward the bathroom door that's partially closed. She'll feel a hell of a lot better after a shower, but it still doesn't make up for missing sleep.

Everything is harder without sleep.

"If she needs anythin'..."

"I got it."

"You got it, or you *got* it? You and Jas a thing?"

“If she wants it, then yes.”

“Don’t fuck with her, Hawk. I mean it.”

I take a deep breath. He’s my Prez. I can’t answer back or argue with him, but I can tell him how it is.

“I would never do that.”

“Not purposely, but she’s gonna need the club’s support now more than ever. If you fuck with her, I’ll fuckin’ kill you.”

That’s something we can both agree on.

“Got it. That’s why I’m here. Not just under your orders, Prez. I want to be here. I know that things started off rocky for us, but we’ve been... Uh, kinda seein’ one another recently.”

“You don’t have to spell it out to me. Pretty fuckin’ obvious why you’ve had a spring in your step the last few weeks, and why Jas has even smiled a couple of times while talkin’ about taxes,” he grumbles. “So heed my warning, Hawk, it’ll be the first and the last, brother. That bein’ said, if you’re serious, then take care of her. I don’t wanna see her in more pain.”

I grind my teeth. I get he cares about her, *fuck*, so do I. And she has a lot of respect for Cash, but I’m here for the long haul.

“I’m here for her. I’m all in.”

“Good. I want updates when you have them. Any shit with the family, let me know. These things can get ugly when the dust has settled.”

“Got it.”

We hang up.

I sit on the edge of the bed waiting for Jas. Ten minutes go by, then another five... I go toward the door and listen. I can hear the shower running, but she’s been in there for way too long.

I knock. “Jas?”

Nothing.

I push the door open tentatively. It’s steaming in here. “Jas?” I say again, louder.

Then I hear her crying.

I stride into the room and make my way to the shower. It’s one of those fancy ones with a clear door, but it’s so steamed up, I can’t see her. I yank the door open and find her on the floor, in a flood of tears, crying hysterically.

Fuck.

I shouldn’t have left her. Not for this long.

I reach in and turn the taps off, then turn around and pull a towel off the

rail. Wrapping her in it, I pick her up off the ground, and she sags into my arms.

“Hawk,” she sniffs into my neck. “It’s not fair. It’s just not fair!”

“I know,” I whisper, carrying her out of the bathroom and over to the bed. “I know, baby.”

I sit her on the end of the bed, but she still clings to me.

“Why did this have to happen? What did Lyndall do to anyone? She was such a good person...” It takes her half a dozen tries to get all of the words out.

My chest aches, and I hold her tighter.

“I don’t know,” I admit. “I can’t answer that, Jas.” I have to say something. She’s hurting.

“She must have been amazing,” I say softly when she whimpers, trying to get her breathing steady. “To have someone like you in her life.”

She blinks through the tears. “She didn’t deserve this.”

I nod. “I know, baby.”

I start to dry her off, then head to the duffel bag where her clothes are stored. I fish out what I think she’ll wear and hand it to her.

She frowns when she looks at the underwear. Then she starts to laugh.

I’ve never seen someone cry and laugh at the same time.

I cock an eyebrow, unsure what to do.

Is this a hysterical reaction?

“You good?” I ask, when she falls back laughing even more, holding her sides.

Hysterical reactions can be a sign of severe stress... the fact she still has tears streaming down her face.

“Trust you,” she says, wiping her eyes. “To bring the sexiest damn underwear I own. You couldn’t pack the ‘I’m bloated, period pains panties.’ Nope, the lacy thongs and see-through sexy panties. You’re such a guy, Hawk.”

I cup my junk. “Pretty sure my dick’s still attached.”

“That it is.”

I frown. “I didn’t even look at what I was shovin’ in,” I say, trying to redeem myself. “Just grabbed whatever I saw first. Speaking of which, we need to talk about that bottom drawer.”

Her eyes go wide, and she stops laughing. “You didn’t.”

I pop a shoulder. “I didn’t know what was in there, in my defense. If

you've got needs, baby, I can fill them. Unless I'm workin' that dildo inside your pussy, you're not gonna need it anymore."

She sits up. "Is that so?"

"Yep."

"You seem confident."

"I am. I know what I do to you."

She stares at me. "I can't deny that," she says, her voice soft. Her eyes trail down my body, and I know what she's thinking.

While I'd love nothing more than to prove my point, I also don't want to do this while she's feeling this vulnerable.

"I should feed you," I say.

Her eyes widen. Okay. Wrong choice of words.

"Food," I clarify.

"Uh huh. What did you have in mind?"

"There's a diner around the corner. It looks like they're making pancakes."

She watches me silently. "How did you know I like pancakes?"

I stare back at her. "I'm observant." Her lips twitch, and I hold out my hand. "Get dressed, we can start with coffee."

She nods as I turn away to let her change. If she entices me with her body while she's undressing, I might just give in to temptation. And though I never thought I had a moral compass in my body, I'm starting to feel like I've just grown a conscience in the last twenty-four hours.

I go out to the balcony to check my messages.

Everyone is concerned about Jas. The sooner she figures out what's going on and what she needs to do, the better. But I know how draining it can be around families, especially if there is conflict on the horizon. I hope to God, there isn't, for Jas's sakes.

She's already been through enough.

I return Tag and Harlem's texts and then step back inside.

She's dressed in jeans, a long-sleeve top, and ties the hoodie around her waist.

She looks better after her shower, but her eyes are still sunken in and dark circles have appeared from nowhere.

I hold my hand out and she takes it.

We walk silently to the elevator and make our way downstairs.

The diner isn't overly crowded, and we settle into a booth.

We order coffee and as planned, Jas orders a stack of pancakes and bacon on the side.

I'm not sure if she'll eat what's placed in front of her, but if she has her appetite back, that has to be a good thing.

We sit across from each other in comfortable silence. I don't try to rush to fill the void with words. That's not who I am, and she wouldn't appreciate that.

Instead, I pour two sugars into my coffee, and she winces.

"What?" I say.

"Two sugars? Ew."

I arch an eyebrow. "You sayin' I'm not sweet enough?"

She smiles into her cup. "I know what you're doing."

"What am I doing?"

"Trying to distract me."

"If I wanted to do that, baby, I could've whipped my dick out when you were starin' at it."

She presses her tongue into her cheek, but doesn't argue. She looks down at her plate.

"Eat," I tell her.

She glances back up. "It's a lot."

I nod. "You need the energy."

"For later?" She smirks.

I give her a chin lift. "I guess we won't find out until you eat it all, will we?"

"You're very bossy."

"I know."

"Are you always like this, or just at meal times?"

"Got orders to look out for you." The minute the words leave my mouth, I could kick myself. It sounds all wrong and I didn't mean it that way.

She brings the fork to her mouth, and it hovers there. "Right, you've got orders."

I run a hand through my hair. "What I meant was, I've got an entire MC that'll be ready to kick my ass if they think you're not bein' looked after."

When she finally takes the bite, I breathe a little easier. I just need her to eat and keep up her strength.

"Maybe they sent the wrong person."

Here we go. Jas is very good at being catty and bitchy, but I didn't expect

it from her now.

“Yeah? Who should they have sent?”

She shrugs. “Nevada? Riot?”

I roll my eyes. “Uh huh. Like a hole in the head would they be comin’ down here.” I don’t know why she’s trying to purposely piss me off.

“I’m just kidding, Hawk. Take a joke.”

I take a sip of my hot coffee. Goddamn, it’s good. “I don’t joke when it comes to you, Jas. You should know that by now.”

She keeps eating small mouthfuls of food, and I fear she won’t finish it all.

“You’re back to your grumbly self, I see.”

“Never pretended to be anythin’ else.”

“I don’t know, you were pretty sweet when you were on your knees begging.”

I shake my head. “I’d hardly call it beggin’, sweetheart.”

She waves a finger at me. I think I like playful Jas, but then again, she’s cried, laughed, and now she’s a comedian, so I don’t really know what the fuck’s going on. I just gotta roll with the punches.

She’s not having it. “It was hot.”

I frown. “Me begging?”

“Yes.”

She gives me that look again. The look that tells me she’s horny.

My dick twitches. Fuck.

“Jas.”

“What?”

“Stop lookin’ at me like that.”

“Like what?” Those innocent eyes aren’t fooling anyone.

“Like you want to suck me off under the table.”

She glances around. “I could almost get away with it.”

I’m not an exhibitionist. I don’t like the idea of us doing anything in public, because I don’t want her drawing attention to herself and then having other men looking at her.

“No, you couldn’t. You moan too loud when you have my dick in your mouth.” I lean forward. My hand reaches toward her as I swipe maple syrup from the corner of her mouth and lick my thumb. “Don’t you, Jas?”

She leans forward too and whispers, “You shouldn’t have such a tasty cock then, should you, *Hawkie?*”

All thoughts of me being gallant and waiting until she's over her sadness quickly fly out the window.

"You know callin' me *Hawkie* makes my dick shrivel up?"

She snorts, then throws her head back and laughs.

I like it better when she laughs. And I like that I bring it out in her.

She sobers, then looks at me as she stabs her pancakes. "Am I a bad person?"

I frown. "For likin' dick?"

She rolls her eyes. "No. For laughing."

My mouth opens, but I close it again, trying to think of what to say to that. "No, Jas. It's not wrong to find things funny, even if you enjoy laughing at me or I'm the bearer of your bad jokes," I say. "I'm sure Lyndall wouldn't want you to feel like you can't be yourself."

She looks down at her plate. "She wouldn't want that."

"So you can laugh, even if it is at me."

She smiles, but her eyes are distant, like she's just remembered once more the gravity of the situation.

"It feels wrong."

"To laugh? I don't think it's wrong, Jas. You thought it was funny when I picked out all your sexy underwear."

Her eyes lift. "You really didn't do that on purpose?"

I shake my head. "I'm a man. I'm clueless, remember?"

"Oh, silly me. I forgot for a second."

I smile softly. "Eat."

"Yes, sir."

I narrow my eyes. "You're askin' for it, callin' me 'sir.'"

She makes big eyes at me, her sarcasm alive and well. "I'll hold you to that."

"Gotta be better than *Hawkie*." I shake my head. "Seriously, Jas."

"Is that how you got your name?" She nods to my chest. My tattoo is covered with my clothes, but I have a large eagle that spans across my chest.

"I wanted something that I thought would represent how far I've come," I say, my eye on hers as she listens intently. "The eagle represents strength, endurance, and courage. I had to have a lot of that to get this far in life."

She frowns. I didn't have a bad upbringing, but it wasn't what you'd consider normal. And I never had a father figure. Something I craved for a long time. When I started prospecting for the MC, I looked up to Cash then

like I still do now. He gave me opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise. And I'll always be grateful to him for that.

My mom, on the other hand, she's a tower of strength. She made me the man I am today. And I always want to make her proud.

"My mom struggled a lot after my dad ran out on us... with her best friend," I tell her. "She worked two, sometimes three jobs to keep food on the table. It wasn't easy, but I tried to be a good kid. I saw how broken she was for so many years, and I vowed I'd never break my mom's heart like that. Like my father did. I got a job doin' whatever I could after school to help out with the bills. We weren't well off. What we didn't have in material things, we made up for in other ways like doin' things together. She's a good mom. I never wanted for anythin'."

It's the most I've ever told anyone about my home life.

"God, your poor mom, though. Her best friend? That's so shitty."

I shrug. "At the time, yes. Mom was heartbroken for years. She never had a boyfriend or anythin' until I was about fifteen. She met Francis, my stepdad, and my sister was born when I was a teenager. He's good to her. She's happier now, and that makes me happy. I can't complain; she did everything to make sure that I had a good education, and more love than anything else." *I can't believe I'm telling her this.*

She looks at me with something new flickering in her gaze, and I'm not sure if I should be offended or not. I mean, am I that bad? It may not seem like it, but deep down I do have feelings.

"She sounds amazing. To raise you alone, it wouldn't have been easy. And you turned out pretty good."

I smirk. "Pretty good? I was a goddamn choirboy, until I hooked up with the MC. I can't say I was a saint, by any means. But my mom's cool with the club and what I do. She's the least judgmental person I've ever met. And she'd love you." The words are out of my mouth before I can even stop them. *What the fuck?*

Jas blinks a couple of times before taking a sip of her coffee.

I expect a witty comeback, or something sarcastic, but she doesn't do anything of the sort.

I clear my throat. "Bein' you're a girl and she'd enjoy spoilin' you shoppin' and shit," I add lamely. *God, I sound like an asshole.*

"I'm sure we'd get along," she says eventually. "She sounds cool."

I nod down to her plate, her barely touched food. "I know you've got

another mouthful in you. Eat, woman.”

“I don’t really have much of an appetite,” she admits, and slides the plate over toward me. “I’m sure you can finish it.”

I don’t like the fact that she has barely had three mouthfuls of food. I do have a bit of a thing about people going hungry, not that I ever did, but I saw how hard it was for my mom to afford groceries, and that’s something that’s always stuck with me.

I’m not much of a breakfast person, but the pancake still looks pretty good.

“Tonight, you’re going to sleep,” I tell her. When she looks over at me, I add, “In my bed.”

She doesn’t say anything, doesn’t argue for once. And I sit up a little straighter.

The fact she’s acting this way gives me hope that she might actually listen. She needs to rest. And I can’t think of anything better than holding her in my arms lulling her to sleep.

Maybe I need this more than she does. I don’t question it. I just go with it.

JASMYNE

“MOM, DAD, THIS IS MY FRIEND, HAWK,” I SAY AS MY PARENTS HUG ME when I get back from breakfast.

It’s not like I can hide him forever. He’s a giant. And I can’t exactly introduce him as the man I’ve been fucking.

Mom turns to him, and he looks a little affronted when she gives him a hug. I almost laugh. She’s small like me, and his sheer size almost makes her disappear in his arms.

“I’m Valerie,” she says, beaming. “And this is my husband, Chris.”

Hawk and my dad shake hands.

My mom gives me a slight side-eye when she notices the patches on his cut. It’s no secret that I work for the MC, and they know that Hawk drove me down here.

So I’m kinda hoping that Mom doesn’t start asking any questions, because she’s usually the most intuitive person I know.

“I’m so sorry for your loss,” Hawk says politely.

My mom nods sagely as my dad wraps an arm around her shoulders. “It’s all very much a shock to the family,” she says. “We were all very close. Lyndall was like another daughter to us. Her parents are devastated.”

Hawk nods. “I can only imagine.” Then he adds, “If there’s anything I can get you, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

My heart starts to beat faster in my chest, and the blood pounds in my ears at how sweet he’s being.

“Thank you, Hawk,” Dad says, giving him a firm nod. “And for bringin’ Jas down. We appreciate it.”

“It’s no trouble at all,” Hawk replies.

After what he told me at the diner, I’m seeing him in a whole different light. I’ve definitely misjudged him. I don’t know everything about him, just the little details he gave me about his childhood before his mom remarried. He respects his mom so much and now I feel guilty for assuming the worst.

I shouldn't tar all men with the same brush.

My trust issues were brought to the forefront with Hawk and Star, and that hurt too, but I can’t hold that against him. I can’t keep bringing that up all the time just because someone hurt me once.

“So,” my dad goes on. “What do you do in the club?”

My eyes go slightly wide, and my mom looks at me.

Here we go.

I thought they’d refrain from twenty questions, but it seems like Hawk is a welcome distraction from all the mess and chaos surrounding us.

“I’m a qualified motorcycle mechanic,” Hawk tells him. “But I haven’t been on the tools for a while. I’ve been helpin’ the club out with security in our new ventures and the shipping container yard.”

New ventures being the Vault.

“What kind of bike do you ride?”

Hawk clears his throat. “A two-thousand and eighteen Harley Street Glide special edition.”

My dad doesn't know the first thing about motorcycles, he’s just being polite.

Because Hawk’s talking about his baby and quite possibly the most expensive Harley on the market, he continues, “It’s the anniversary custom motorcycle with blue legend denim paint, 19-inch front wheel, 18-inch back wheel, and a smooth V-8 engine that purrs like a kitten.”

He doesn’t add that it has an Eagle holding the bar, and shield in its talons on the front. Very much made for him.

His bike is beautiful. Not that I’ve ever been taken on a ride, but you can’t miss the thing. His motorcycle is his most prized possession.

“Get good mileage out of it?”

Hawk shrugs. “Around forty to forty-five miles to the gallon, depending on conditions.”

“Impressive.”

“Hawk, Jas hasn’t mentioned you two were... *friends*,” Mom says.

Oh no. Here we go.

“Well, ma’am, we’ve known each other for...”

“Please call me Valerie,” Mom interrupts.

Hawk’s eyes flick to mine. You don’t have to be a mind reader to know what my mom’s doing.

You would think most parents would be dead-set against their daughter working for an MC and being around bikers every day. But my parents trust my decisions. They always have. I’ve always been a responsible person ever since I was in my mid-teens.

Hawk clears his throat again. I’ve never seen Hawk afraid of anything. He’s mighty, not just in stature, but his entire personality.

Gruff.

Mean.

Scary, if you don’t know him.

And yet, he looks down at my mom like she’s terrifying.

“Valerie,” he says. “We’ve known each other for a few years now. Jas is a very valuable asset to the club, and everyone knows it. She makes sure everything is running smoothly where the finances are concerned. We wouldn’t function without her.”

Not bad for a woman who supposedly can’t get her nose stuck in *club business*.

I stare at him.

Since when did Hawk become Mr. Smooth?

My mom practically swoons.

At least my dad keeps a level head when he says, “Well she’s a smart woman. I like to think she takes after her Father.”

My mom slaps him on the arm gently. “That’ll be enough out of you,” she says, rolling her eyes.

My poor parents. They’re trying desperately to hold things together. I’m just not sure dad’s humor is the best way around things right now, but who am I to judge?

I don’t know what I feel anymore.

The gravity of what’s taking place and the fact I’m now the adult responsible for Ella is weighing on me heavily.

When I meet Hawk’s eyes, he stares back at me without looking away.

“Thanks, Hawk,” I say awkwardly. “Half the battle is keeping the boys in line, but they’re all very respectful for the most part.” I think about what Hawk did to me on my desk... there isn’t anything respectful about that.

The doctor comes out and updates us on Ella's progress. She was lucky, as we know. She's got a small fracture and bruising with some swelling around her knee, but no internal injuries.

I can breathe a sigh of relief for that part at least. The rest we will have to try and figure out.

Hawk leaves before lunch, and I slip into the hospital room to see how Ella is doing.

She's awake. Her sad, sorry little eyes meet mine.

"How are you doing, angel?" I say, sitting down beside her as I take her hands in mine.

She nods. "Okay."

"Oh, Ella, I can't even tell you how much I want to make this all better. I'm so sorry."

Her bottom lip trembles. "When is... the funeral?"

I swallow hard. "We're working all of that out now with Uncle Ryan and Grandma and Grandad."

"I want to go with you."

Tears form in my eyes. "That's good, honey, because you don't know how much I want you and how grateful I am that your mom picked me. Because I love you, kiddo. You know that, right?"

She nods, tears forming in her eyes too. "I don't want to go back there," she whispers.

I frown. "Where?"

"Home."

"Okay." I don't know how any of this is going to work.

"I want to go with you."

"Well, it's early days, honey. We can work all of that out later, all right? The most important thing is making sure you get better and that you rest."

"Don't make me go back there, not without my mom." She sounds so broken.

She's twelve years old. She doesn't have her mom anymore.

She won't get to see her grow up. Go to prom. Get married. Have kids.

Everything hits me all at once.

And I had no idea it would come to this. That she wouldn't even want to go home. I thought I'd have a hell of a job convincing her to come with me to New Orleans.

"I won't make you do anything you don't want to do," I say shakily.

“Ever.”

“I don’t want to go with Uncle Ryan.”

“Okay.”

“I heard Grandma and Grandad talking out in the hall. I’m not going with him.”

“Okay, honey. Like I said, that’s all grown up stuff we have to work out. But your Mom wanted me to look after you, so that won’t be changing.” I can’t promise that, of course. I know that Ryan will have a lot to say about it and the fact I don’t have kids, work for a motorcycle club, and live on my own will be all he focuses on.

I just hope this doesn’t get ugly, but I know what Ryan’s like.

I squeeze her hands, and she blinks back her tears.

“Okay.”

I think about what needs to be done and I don’t even know where to begin. I need my girls, and Manny. I need to know where to start and if someone, other than my family members, can be there if I need them. I know it’s a lot to ask, but I can’t do this by myself. I don’t know the first thing about raising a child or what to do with school, or emptying a house... she had a lease... What happens then?

My head swarms with questions.

“I miss her already,” she says as I cast my eyes over her face.

She’s exactly like her mom in every way. It breaks my heart, because every time I look at her, I see Lyndall.

“I do too,” I reply, stroking my thumb over her hand.

“Did they find the other driver?” She barely gets the words out.

I haven’t even heard from the police, but I don’t want to upset her even more.

I shake my head. “They’re still working on it.”

“When can I go h-” She stops herself. *Home?* I don’t even know how she’s dealing with this and not breaking down like she was yesterday. I fear she is keeping things in internally and that worries me. Maybe she can talk to someone? A counselor, or something? “To your place?”

I smile gently. “They’re talking about releasing you in the morning once they’re happy with your scans,” I reply. “So we would need to go and get some of your stuff... sort school out... that kind of thing.”

She nods. “Okay.”

I close my eyes for a moment. “Ella, I know this is incredibly hard for

you. I can't even imagine what you're going through. Just know that I'm here, okay? You can say anything to me. Cry. Breakdown. Talk about it..."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"I know, honey. But sometimes it helps. Whenever you're ready, I'm here. I'll always be here."

She stares across the room out the window.

When her eyes meet mine again, she asks, "Who's the dude?"

I frown. "Which dude?"

"The one who kept hovering by the door yesterday, looking in at you."

I had no idea Hawk had done that. I didn't even see him.

"Oh, that's my friend, Hawk. He drove me here."

"Is he your boyfriend?"

Normally, I'd tell her the truth... that we're seeing each other, but it's early days.

"No, just a friend. He rides with the motorcycle club I work for."

"Cool."

"And he might look a little... scary, but he's a nice guy."

"He's big."

"Yeah." I smile. "He is, but he's a good guy, okay. I promise."

She nods. "If he's a friend of yours, then he must be okay."

My chest warms. "Have you had anything to eat?"

She shakes her head. "I'm not hungry."

I try not to frown. I know I'm not hungry myself, but it's been almost forty-eight hours. She has to eat something.

"I know, Ella. But you have to keep your strength up."

"Hospital food is disgusting, Aunt Jas."

Aunt Jas. She's always called me that.

"I can get you something from chick-fil-A or a burger or something?"

She screws her nose up. "I'm a vegetarian."

Ah. I forgot that.

"Well, I can find something veggie for you."

She shakes her head. "No thanks, Aunt Jas."

I stroke her hair as she settles back into the pillows.

Good God, Ella. What am I going to do with you?

I have to be strong to get through this.

It's imperative that Ella is as happy as she can be and comfortable in her surroundings.

My head spins at the severity, but I don't let it show.



Hawk ran the tub, something I didn't know that I needed until I'm sinking into the warm suds, groaning at how good it feels.

He's been super sweet, but also acting like I'm about to break any second.

Maybe I am. I have so many emotions that it's hard to distinguish between them all.

I think about Ella's face in the hospital, how sad she is. Her being adamant that she wants to come with me and not even go home. I shake my head. We'll have to stay here for a little longer because there's a lot to work out. Hawk will return to New Orleans tomorrow. I know he'll say he doesn't have to, but he can't just hang around here while I work out the family dynamics.

I sink deeper into the water. It soothes my soul like nothing else.

When I'm at home, I soak a lot because it's one of the few things that destresses me.

Most of the time, I'll read a book, or play on my phone, or have a glass of wine and just unwind.

But I can't unwind here. Not now.

My mind spins with everything I need to do. And Ryan is being difficult.

I'm trying to look at it as an outsider, but I don't see why he'd be better off with her just because he has kids. Ella barely knows her cousins. Ryan and Lyndall weren't close, and his wife is painful.

I want what's best for her. That's all. If they were the better choice, then I'd break it to her gently. But that isn't going to happen.

Ryan can say what he wants, but it's in Lyndall's will. And I love Ella. I want her.

We'll make the best of it; I know we will.

I hear Hawk moving around in the room next door. He's been like a cat on a hot tin roof these last few days. I know he's worried. I never thought in a million years he'd be this supportive or the kind of man I could rely on in a crisis. Granted, he hasn't said much, but sometimes you don't need someone to say anything... Just be there.

"Hawk," I call out.

A few moments later, I hear him at the door, but he doesn't come in. "Are you okay?"

"Come in," I say. "Please."

He pushes the door open and walks in.

The bubbles cover my body, and he barely looks at me. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just want to talk to you about tomorrow."

He moves into the room, puts the toilet seat lid down, and sits on it. "So talk."

"I probably have to spend at least a week here, getting Ella sorted out. The house. The legal stuff. Then there's Lyndall's funeral." I swallow the lump in my throat.

"I'm not leavin'."

"But, Hawk, you can't just live in the hotel. It makes sense to go and then you could even come back and collect us. One of the girls could come up, or Manny."

"Not happenin'. Cash put me in charge."

"Uh huh, and I'm telling you that I'm going to be fine."

His face doesn't change when he says, "You don't look fine. And I know how families can be."

"Mine are fine."

"What about Ryan?"

"What about him?"

"Jas, I was out in the waiting room for a while. I heard what he was saying on the phone."

My eyes go wide. "You did?"

He nods. "Didn't want to say anythin' to upset you... but I've no choice. Baby, I think he's going to fight for custody."

I stare at him, stomach sinking. "What?"

"That's the gist of the conversation I overheard. He was talkin' to his wife, then a lawyer."

"Oh shit."

"Not sure what the fuck his problem is or why he thinks he can do that, but I can only tell you what I heard."

"This is bad, Hawk, really fucking bad." I sit up, my nerves suddenly rushing through me. His eyes drop to my chest, and then he looks away.

Running a hand through his hair, he says, "Might be an idea to get some legal advice. I can talk to Cash."

I nod. "Okay."

"Better that we're forearmed, then if he pulls some shady shit, we'll be ready for it."

As if there isn't enough to deal with, now this?

Why is he being such an asshole?

"Why is he doing this?"

He shakes his head. "Maybe he's just thinkin' about Ella, I don't know."

I sigh. My head is swimming once more. "This isn't what I need. Ella told me she wanted to come with me today. She didn't even want to go home. She won't understand if she has to go with Ryan."

"That won't happen," he assures me. "You want her, right?"

"Yes!" I say without hesitation. "Of course I do. I don't know the first thing about parenting her or what she needs, but we'll figure it out."

"The club will be behind you, and so will I."

I turn to look at him. "Thank you, Hawk. You've been amazing these last few days. I don't know what I would have done without you." The way this man has been a rock has me feeling all the feels. His words. His strength. How much he's proving he cares. I question if I'm even worthy because I've been hard on him. I'm falling for him in a big way and I'm desperately trying to hold on. The way I was hurt before with my ex... I can't go through that again.

"It's nothin'."

"But it is something," I say. "It's a lot."

"You're worth it."

My god. This man.

I've definitely been a dumbass where Hawk is concerned.

"I need to get out now."

"You only just got in."

"Yes, but I need you to fuck me."

One eyebrow piques, and then he frowns. "Jas, I don't know if that's such a good idea."

I stand, the bubbles sliding off my skin as his eyes trail down my body. I reach for a towel, and he stands, grabbing it for me when it's just out of my grasp.

"Why not?"

"Because... you're sufferin' and it wouldn't be right to take advantage."

"You're not taking advantage. I need to feel you." I wrap the towel

around my body and step out of the tub.

He looks unsure, and I'm baffled by this admission.

My heart swells even more. He surprises me in ways I never even imagined.

"Baby. You're hurtin'..."

"So, make me forget. In the best ways."

He palms the back of his head. "We should get dinner."

"The only thing I'm hungry for is your cock."

His eyes go wide, and he mutters "*fuck*" under his breath.

I stand and face him, wrapped in my towel. "So? Are you going to let me have my dinner?"

He swallows hard, his eyes fierce as he stares down at me. "You sure you know what you're doin', baby?"

I force a smile. "If I don't by now, I never will."

HAWK

I HISS THROUGH MY TEETH AS JAS SUCKS ME OFF. I'M STANDING, AND SHE'S naked on her hands and knees on the bed. My cock slides in and out of her hot little mouth as she takes it all.

Fuuuuuuck.

I close my eyes, one hand sliding into her hair at the back of her head, and the other I keep in a fist at my side. If I don't, I'll ram down her throat and choke her.

I meant what I said; I didn't think it was a good idea, but at least it's taking her mind off things.

She sucks my cock like a lollipop, rolling her tongue over my tip as her tits bounce together every time she moves her head. I don't thrust, even though I want to. If I thrust, it'll all be over. And I want this to last.

Watching her take me... watching her hot little mouth as my cock slides in and out is the most perfect sight I've ever seen. And she takes it all.

"Fuck, baby," I mutter when she cups my balls.

She hallows her cheeks and sucks like a woman possessed.

I can't take much more or I'm gonna blow and I wanna blow inside her.

She swirls her tongue once more over my head, and I push her hair back so I can see her face.

I cup her with both hands and start to move my hips... *fuck yeah.*

She grips my cock and sucks as I thrust into her mouth, hitting the back of her throat.

"Got a hot little mouth," I tell her. "So fuckin' sweet."

She garbles something and I pull out.

“What, baby?”

“Fuck me,” she breathes.

She sits up on her knees, and I cast my eyes down to her tits. They’re full and beautiful. I cup one with my hand and the other cups her face. “What are you doin’ to me?”

She stares back at me, eyes full of lust. “I need you inside me.”

I nod, turning to reach for my jeans.

“No,” she says quickly. “No wrap.”

I frown. “Jas.”

“You’re okay, right? Do you always wear one?”

“Two sometimes,” I mutter.

“Then take me bareback, please. I need to feel you. *All of you.*”

I blink a few times, trying to take in what she's saying.

She wants me to come inside her?

I stand there, my dick hard, and her big eyes waiting for me to respond.

“Are you sure?”

She nods. “I’m sure. I had tests after my ex... I was all clear and I’ve not... Well, you know the rest.”

I reach down and kiss her lips. Immediately, she moans, her tongue meeting mine. She deepens the kiss, running one hand up my torso, feeling my muscles, as the other reaches for my dick.

My body is on fire for her as I roll her onto the bed, and she scoots back. Reaching for me, she pulls me down on top of her, and I nuzzle my face into her neck.

She smells so good.

Like vanilla.

I kiss her neck, biting down gently as I move my mouth to one breast and suck on her nipple.

She moans as she wraps her arms around my neck and encourages me. I move my mouth to the other side and suck that one too, trying to get as much of her as I can in my mouth. She holds my head as I suckle, enjoying her as my dick hangs heavily between us.

I grab it, running my tip through her folds as she whispers my name.

Doing it again, I circle her clit. I move my mouth to her other breast, biting down on her gently as she yelps. I spread her legs as my mouth moves south to my final destination.

She opens wide for me, and I kiss the inside of her thighs, teasing her,

taunting her until she begs me for it. I suck her skin, knowing I'll leave a mark, and she buries her hands in my hair, trying to maneuver my head.

Chuckling, I blow on her pussy as she cries out. She's so sensitive.

Bare before me, she's perfect. I hold her knees apart as I lick the tip of my tongue through her folds, and she bucks off the bed when I swirl around her clit. She needs relief, just like I do. But I can hold on a little longer.

Sucking on her pussy lips, and then her clit, I flick my tongue rapidly over and over, and she starts to rub herself against my face.

She comes quickly, crying out, yelling my name in a blaze of agonizing moans. It makes my cock grow harder. I can't wait to be inside her, feeling her pussy strangling my cock.

I lap up her release, swirling my tongue all over her, including her ass as she groans. I'm sure I hear her whisper "*Chad.*"

Holy fuck.

Maybe I need to hear her scream my real name when she's got my fat cock inside her.

"Oh god," she groans. "Hawk... right there... *yes!*"

I insert a finger, then two as I slowly fuck her with my fingers and her hands tighten in my hair. I love it. I love the pain of her pulling my hair or scraping her nails down my back and my ass. I fuckin' live for it.

I curl my fingers and rub her G-spot, then I suck her clit into my mouth hard, and she convulses around me as I stare up at her. Her eyes closed, she cries out, jolting as she orgasms, and I feel a rush of wetness as I finger-fuck her into oblivion.

My cock weeps as I pull back and fist myself.

"Need to fuck your pussy," I say, my voice husky.

"Yes," she whispers. "Hurry, Hawk, get inside me."

I lift off, pinning her hands above her head and holding them with one hand. I move my free hand to my cock, spreading her slickness around, then push into her slowly as I ease my cock inside her tight hole and she whispers, "*Hawk...*"

I slide out, then in again, looking down at where we're joined. My cock easing in and out of her as she swallows me, and it looks so fuckin' hot.

"That's it, baby," I grunt. "Takin' my cock so sweet. Should see how you look."

"Fuck me harder, Hawk."

I don't listen. I move my hips to the steady rhythm. It's not frantic, or

even hard, but it feels right.

“Jas,” I warn.

“You’re being too damn nice. Harder. Just make me forget... *please.*”

She’s wanting to get off. Not to connect or feel anything.

I can’t help but feel a tiny bit of disappointment as I stare down at her.

I don’t want to fuck her like that. It’s not the time or the place.

Fast and hard is for when we’ve gotta be quick. But not here. In a huge bed, where I can take my time exploring her body. Making it good for her.

But she wants to be banged hard and fast.

She doesn’t want anything else except my body.

So, I’ll give her that.

I shove back in, and she grunts as I pull out and do it again. “Like this, Jas?”

She blinks up at me, but I ignore her. She wanted it harder and faster, not slow with feeling or meaning. She wants to fuck and fuck only.

“Answer me?” I do it again.

She nods. “Yes, like that.”

I grip the sheets beneath my fists and pound into her, relentlessly, over and over again.

I don’t ask her if she’s okay, or if I’m too rough, I just keep going.

She tips over the edge, crying out her release. But it isn’t enough. I pull out, pull her down the bed, and flip her over.

“On your knees.”

She does as I say, and I shove into her from behind, holding her at the nape of her neck.

I spread her legs wider apart with my knees.

“You wanna be fucked, Jas?” I ram in, then pull out. “No feelin’. No emotions. Nothin’. You got it, I can do that.”

“That isn’t what I meant...” she gasps, but I’m past the point of caring.

I ram in and out of her as she grips the bed and sticks her ass out farther. I grab one cheek and squeeze it. “Harder, baby?” I grunt.

“Oh, Hawk.”

“Chad,” I correct her.

“W-what?”

“Call me Chad when you come next.” I punish her even more, driving into her like a man possessed. On every thrust, she groans, and I push even harder.

She starts to unravel, and I feel myself letting go. My first time inside her with no wrap and I don't even get to take it slow and enjoy it.

"Hawk," she moans.

"I said call me Chad."

"Fuck... *Chad*, oh god, Chad... *Please...*"

I don't know if I like her saying my real name like that, but now I've heard it, I can't do fuck all about it. I spurt inside her, stilling as I grip her hips and unload my cum.

Pulling out, I glance down at the sight of seeing my release running out of her.

She slumps down on the bed, and I rise to my feet.

She turns over. "Hawk." Her tone pleading.

"Gonna take a shower."

"Hawk, I'm sorry... I just... I... I'm scared."

"About?"

"Us."

"You don't have to be scared. I told you that."

"It doesn't make it okay. I have struggles... I don't know how to do this."

I can't do this right now. She's so hot and cold and I need a minute. "Got it."

I stroll over to the bathroom and shut myself inside, running the water really hot as I step under the spray.

I can't seem to do anything right in her eyes.

Be this. Do that. Act this way.

I can only be myself. Like how I've been the last few days. I have a nurturing side to me that nobody ever sees.

But just as I'm starting to feel those feelings toward her, she shuts me down.

I get that she's going through this horrible thing, and she isn't thinking straight.

But I didn't want her like this.

I want her to know she's special. Important. I care about her.

She's not just some quick fuck who I want to get off with and then go about my business and leave.

Maybe I'm overthinking it.

I run a hand through my hair. I'm tired. I haven't slept much because I've been worried about Jas.

I run the water over my face and let the hot water soothe me.

“Hawk?” I hear Jas say softly.

I didn’t even hear her come into the room, much less open the shower door.

I turn to look at her with one eye open. “Showerin’,” I mutter, turning back to the water.

“I’m sorry,” she says, a shakiness in her voice. “I didn’t mean to sound cold... or that I didn’t want you to... to...”

“Spit it out, Jas,” I grunt.

“Make love to me,” she rushes out.

I still in my tracks.

Was that what I was doing?

I never really thought about it like that. I just didn’t want it to feel like banging and nothing else.

“I got scared. I just... everything is so up in the air right now. I don’t want to have to think of something else and what it might mean.”

“Right,” I mutter, hating this. “Because bein’ with me is scary.”

She stands there, brow furrowed, and I realize I’m being an ass. And now she knows my weak point. *It’s her.*

Still, I move so she can join me under the water.

When I hold out my hand, she takes it. I pull her toward me, but don’t touch her anywhere else, letting her hand go as soon as she’s close.

“That isn’t what I meant either. I’m sorry. I’m not meaning to be like this. There’s a lot going on. I don’t know what’s up from down at the moment. My head isn’t right.”

“No, but you know right from wrong. And I’m right for you, Jas. We’re right together. I don’t wanna just fuck you like that. I want to feel you lose it and beg me for more. The times I bang you hard and fast, I still want you to feel that thrill you get like the first time. Like you can’t get enough. It’s not just about gettin’ off for me anymore. It never was.”

“Holy shit,” she whispers, and yeah... Holy shit, I just said all that.

“I know you’re goin’ through shit, and it sucks. But don’t run from me. I’m here.” I pound my chest with my fist. “This in here, and it beats only for you, Jas.”

She stares at me, mouth parted in awe. “You’re in love with me.” It’s not a question.

I blink.

Huh. I guess I am.

“It happened fast,” I say, swallowing roughly. “Didn’t know what it was until I had to drive you down here. Hell, maybe even before that. I can’t stop thinkin’ about you. I hate it when you’re not close to me. And when you push me away, fuck yeah, I take it personally.” She bites her lip, and I cup one side of her face. “Jas, do you feel somethin’ for me? I need to know if you’re in or out.”

“Y-yes,” she stammers, her pretty eyes searching mine. “Hawk, I’m in. But I’m scared of being hurt again. Jeremy... I really loved him, and he took my heart and smashed it.”

“And you think I would do the same?” I shake my head. “What happened with Star was a mistake. I fucked up. I will never do that again. If we’re together for real, I swear I’m never gonna even look at another woman.”

She nods. “I know, Hawk. I think I fell hard back then, and that’s why I was so upset about it.”

At least she doesn’t hate my guts.

I pause. “You’re not just sayin’ that because of what I just said, right?”

Her lips twitch and she smiles. “No. I have my own free will. I’m sure you remember when I threw my shoe at your head and called you an asshole.”

I chuckle as I move closer and cup her face. “That’s the spitfire I like in the bedroom. I’ll do anythin’ you want, baby, but don’t shut me out. I can’t go back to bein’ on the outside lookin’ in. You got me?”

She nods. “I didn’t know I was going to feel like this, Hawk. You’ve been so sweet and kind, so... *loving*. And I’ve not known that in a long time. I tend to run when things get too hard or if I’m not sure what to do.”

“You don’t have to know what to do,” I say. “Just that you want to be with me. The rest we can figure out.”

She nods again as I brush a thumb over her cheekbone. She’s so pretty.

“I do. I think... I think I’m in love with you too, Hawk. Seriously. And it scares the fucking shit out of me.”

My heart stutters with relief, I pull her into me. “You don’t have to be scared, baby. I’m in this for the first time. I’ve never felt this way before about anyone.” I know I’m giving her the power to ruin me if she wants to. Hell, I’m diving headfirst off a cliff with no safety net. But I know that I don’t want anyone else. She’s the missing piece I didn’t know was missing from my life.

“But in the club... men like variety.”

I tilt up her chin so she’s looking at me. “I think we both know you’re more than enough to keep me occupied.”

She smiles softly. “Everything’s about to change... I’ve got Ella now.”

I brush her hair back and lean down to peck her on the lips. “So we will figure it out. You’re not alone, so don’t go thinkin’ you are. Okay?”

She nods. “I’m used to making decisions by myself. I’ve had to for so long.”

She’s exhausted. I can see it in her face. Her eyes. How her shoulders slump. “That’s because you don’t let anyone help you. You think you have to struggle, and you don’t.” I watch her closely. “You haven’t been with anyone since your ex, two years ago, right?”

She nods. “I just wasn’t ready.”

“Do you know how fuckin’ hot that is, baby?” I say. “How turned on that makes me? It’s every man’s dream.”

She shrugs. “It’s who I am. I can’t just sleep with anyone, Hawk. I have to feel something.”

That makes me feel on top of the mountain. I don’t wanna picture her with another man ever. Her ex was a dumb fuck for doing what he did, but I won’t be making that same mistake.

She tips her head back into the water, smoothing her hair back as I hold her in my arms.

“I know that. I own what I did, and those few months of you hatin’ me were the hardest of my life,” I say, running my hand down her arm. “It killed me.”

“Hawk. I never want to make you feel that way. And I don’t like being mad at you. It killed me too because I thought we were connecting so well. Then when... *that* happened, I just flipped my lid.”

“Because you care about me, about *us*. Jas, I’ve never felt this way. But if you take a chance on me, I promise I’ll do everything that I can to communicate with you better and be the kind of man you want. If you’ll let me.”

“Why now? I don’t want you just feeling sorry for me because of everything that’s happened...”

I reach up to cup her face. “I would never, ever tell you these things, just because I felt sorry for you. I felt them for you a long time ago. I just didn’t know what it was, or what to do with it. Now I do.”

“What if I’m not the kind of woman you think I am?”

I chuckle. “I think I’ll take my chances on that. But right now, we don’t need to worry about any of that. We’ll learn as we go. What matters is that you and Ella work things out and we get you back to New Orleans and get her settled in. That’s all you need to focus on. My loyalties are with you.”

A single tear rolls from her eye, down her cheek. I catch it with my thumb and brush it away. “Jas, don’t cry.”

My heart constricts at how much she’s going through, and I don’t want to add to her load. That’s the last thing I want.

“You don’t know how good it feels to hear you say that,” she says, a small smile playing on her lips. “I know I have to work on my trust issues.”

I lean down, brushing her lips with mine softly. “Not tonight you don’t. You need to rest. Everything feels better on a good night's sleep. That’s what my mama used to say.”

Her lips part. “Okay. Sleep does sound pretty good. But, Hawk?”

“Yeah, baby?”

“Will you make love to me first?”

I smile against her lips. “Thought you’d never ask.”

JASMYNE

THIS MAN MAKES ME FEEL THINGS I NEVER THOUGHT I COULD AGAIN. I KNOW I'm feeling that tingle that you only get when you're falling in love, just like I told him. I know I love him.

That's the scary part. It's freaking me the fuck out because now I have a weakness. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but the last man who hurt me took a lot of recovering from. I'm still not fully over it.

Do I have fear that Hawk could hurt me emotionally? Yes. That he could want out if I get in too deep? Of course. But how can I not give this man a chance when he's literally giving me all the things I need without even asking him to?

The way we made love.

The way he rolled his hips into mine and drew out my pleasure. His dark, stormy eyes watching my every move... making sure that he was making it good for me.

I was wrong to just treat him like a piece of meat, even though I know he really doesn't mind. He's been so open and honest with me.

Now that I'm lying in his arms, I don't want to ruin the moment, but I don't think I've been totally upfront and honest with him.

"I'm sorry, Hawk," I mutter sleepily.

He stirs in my arms. "What for?"

I sigh. "I don't want to harp on about Jeremy. I've wasted enough breath on him, but I think he kinda scarred me for life. I have trust issues... that's blatantly obvious. And for so long, it was easy for me just to switch off and just not care. I swore I'd never let myself be hurt again, but then I also don't

want to be this bitter, twisted person either.”

“You’re not that, Jas,” he says. “Maybe twisted, but not bitter.”

I nudge him in the ribs, and he chuckles.

“I meant what I said in the shower, all of it. But I guess I’m a bit of a rookie at this.”

He leans over and kisses the top of my head. “I’ve never been in love before, so I’m a rookie too, if it makes you feel any better.”

I yawn sleepily. “Actually, it does. I just don’t want to be dicked around, Hawk. I’m not looking for a fuck buddy, even though I know that I said it was okay to hate fuck when I was mad at you and horny at the same time, but that’s not what I’m looking for.”

He chuckles again. “You fuckin’ talk a lot, you know that?”

I nudge him again. “That’s all you have to say to that?”

“No. But I think you overthink and overanalyze shit, and you don’t need to do that. I’m not goin’ anywhere... only to jail if any other motherfucker touches you.”

I snuggle into him. “That’s so sweet, in a stalkery kind of way,” I say, then steel myself. “I just always want it to be like this.” I know a storm is coming with the family and I’m scared. If Ryan is going to appeal Lyndall’s will, it’s all going to get messy. But I made a promise and I’m going to stick to it.

“I also meant what I said too, about the club bein’ behind you all the way. Cash won’t stand for this, and neither will I. Whatever it takes.”

I breathe in his masculine scent. Wondering how I ever lived without him or could doubt anything he said. I just don’t want things to change from this moment.

I want to be all that he needs in return.

“Tomorrow is going to be horrible,” I say after a few moments of silence. “With Ryan.”

“You’re strong, baby. You know there’s nothin’ he can do. If he wants a fight, we’ll give him one.”

“It’s not that easy. I don’t want Ella dragged through the courts. And Ryan will look more favorable than me, being Ella’s Uncle and he’s in the military, his wife has a good job, too. They’re married and have kids. I work for an MC, I’m single, and I don’t even have a cat.”

“A cat?”

“Yeah, like a sad old spinster.”

“So, let’s get married.”

I just about stop breathing. “W-what?” I stammer.

“You heard me, Jas. Claimin’ you anyway, so may as well do it legally.”

I sit up, my heart racing in my chest. “You can’t be serious.”

“Don’t look so horrified.”

“I’m not... I just... I didn’t even think...”

He rolls onto his back, one arm propping up his head, his hair all messed up. God, he looks so goddamn sexy.

“What? Like I’m ever gonna let you go now I’ve found you. Not happenin’.”

I don’t even know what to say. I never expected anything like that to come out of Hawk’s mouth.

Married?

And he just blurts it out like we’re talking about the weather.

“Married?” I repeat.

He pops a shoulder. “Uh huh.”

“Like with a priest and everything?”

“Priest does have his marriage license.”

My eyes go round. “You’re joking?”

“Wish I was.”

“I mean... It won’t come to that, I’m sure.”

He stares at me. “You’re mine, Jas.”

I stare back at him, feeling that claim right down to my bones. It makes me shiver.

“Say it,” he commands.

I take a deep breath, swallowing down the lump in my throat. “I’m yours, Hawk.”

“You’re gonna be my ol’ lady, baby. So I don’t see any issue with puttin’ it on paper.”

Is he freaking for real?

My mind swims with what the hell he’s saying.

“Hawk, that’s insane.”

“Why? I think it’s genius. I hold a steady day job, I have good income. Believe it or not, I don’t have a criminal record. Okay, I’m in an MC, that might not go down well in a court of law, but we’re not one percent. And don’t forget we have BADV.”

BADV is the organization Cash set up after he was one of the men who

helped Summer and her brother out of a horrible child abuse situation when they were kids in Bracken Ridge. It stands for Bikers Against Domestic Violence. Cash and some of the guys often go to court and protect women and children when they have to testify. It's something that Cash has done for years and fully funds the organization, and it's also one of the reasons I have so much respect for him as club president.

"I did forget," I admit. "With everything going on at the moment... But back up, are you actually being serious, about the *married* thing?"

"Deadly serious."

"Hawk, aren't we jumping the gun a little?"

He purses his lips, like he's thinking, then he says, "No."

"What about Ella? We'd all have to live together."

"So, we'd live together. Once she gets to know me, I'm sure I'm not that much of an ogre. We could just take that part slow, let her get used to the idea of having a man around the house."

I stare at him with new eyes, my mouth hanging open.

Eventually, he says, "You seem a little shocked."

"I am, Hawk. I just didn't think you were the marrying kind."

"I wasn't until I met you."

My heart skips a beat. "But you'd be doing this so I could try and keep Ella?"

"No, not just because of that. But legally you'd be mine, so that's win-win. I also bought my house because it was a white fuckin' picket fence with a yard... for my future family. And that's gonna be with you, and with Ella."

I shake my head. "I don't even have words for you right now. You... you really did that?"

He cups the side of my face and leans toward me, pecking my lips. "Yes. Baby, I've never been more serious about anythin' in my life. I told you that. I don't say shit and then take it back. I'm in it for the long haul. We just wanna make sure Ella is comfortable, and see how she feels about it all."

Tears well in my eyes. "Oh, *Hawkie*."

He frowns as I move toward him and sag into his arms. "What's wrong?" He wipes a stray tear with his thumb as I bury my face in his neck.

"I just..." I sniffle and try not to start sobbing. "I didn't expect that you'd care this much, that you'd even consider marrying me. I mean, that isn't something we have to do, or probably need to do..."

"But now you've got the idea in your head, you want to, don't you?" I

can't help but notice the pride in his voice, and that makes me even more teary.

"You don't just have to say and do these things, Hawk. I know that you care, but marrying someone because of this fucked-up situation isn't smart."

"For who?" he argues. "It's smart for me because I would get to call you my wife."

My heart skips a beat. "Oh my god."

His arm around my shoulders squeezes a little tighter. "You okay?"

I turn to him, wrapping my arms around his neck as I slide into his lap. "Say it again."

He frowns, then his lips twitch. "*Wife.*" His voice is gruff and sexy.

I grind down into his hard cock. "Hawk," I murmur, just about losing my mind.

Grabbing my hips, he sits up, pressing his forehead to mine as I still. "You like that?"

I nod. "Yes."

"Could call you that while you ride me, baby."

"Fuck."

"I wanna scream it from the rooftops that you're mine. I swear to God, if anyone even looks at you, club brother or not, they're dead."

"You always go that one step too far."

Smiling, he kisses me. "Nope. It's just the truth. I want you to be mine. I've always wanted it from the first moment I saw you. I want you to be my wife, baby."

My chest tightens. I press my lips to his and kiss him softly. "I can't believe we're at this point. It's such a big step, we're not even dating."

"Well, we can hold off for now. But I'm just sayin', it's an option and somethin' I'll do in a heartbeat, especially if it helps with gettin' custody."

I rub my nose against his. "This isn't the badass grump I know."

"Grump?"

"Yes. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you're known as being as difficult to deal with as Tag."

"That's takin' things a little too far, isn't it?"

It's my turn to laugh. "I love you, Hawk."

Holy crap.

I love him?

Yes... I love him. I've known for a while if I'm being honest.

“And I’m not just saying that because you’re saying the things I want to hear,” I go on. “I really do fucking love you, you big grumpy asshole.”

He blinks once, twice, then starts to laugh. “You’re a fuckin’ pistol,” he says, cupping my face as he kisses me. “I love you too, when you’re not bein’ a spitfire little bitch who I want to murder half the time.”

“So romantic. Oh, and don’t expect that to change, I’m pretty set in my ways.”

“Is that so?”

I nod. “Yep. Like leaving the toilet seat up. Just don’t do it.”

“Gettin’ bossy already, and I don’t even have a goddamn ring on your finger yet.”

I love how he says *yet*.

Maybe it’s the adrenaline. The shock. The fear. All the emotions of losing Lyndall, but I just gravitate toward him. I never want to let him go.

“There are some things that are sacred... like drinking out of the milk carton and putting it back.”

“You really are goin’ to make my life hell, aren’t you?” he chuckles.

I snuggle into him, pressing my pussy against his rock-hard dick.

“Not if I can help it. But those two things are a no-go zone.”

“You know what my no-go zone is?”

“I dread to ask.”

He moves his hands down my body to cup my ass. “You wearin’ clothes to bed.”

“Uh huh. Is that it?”

He shakes his head slowly, sucking my bottom lip in his mouth. “I get to eat your pussy whenever I want.”

I giggle. “That doesn’t sound like a no-go zone to me.”

“Whenever I want. Even if it’s the middle of the day and I’m starving.”

My insides start to burn for him. “That all?”

He licks my bottom lip, then the top one. “You only have me in your bed. Forever.”

“That’s a given.”

“Not even flirtin’ with Nevada or Riot. I’ve seen how they look at you.”

“So, tell them I’m yours.”

I reach between us and fondle his cock.

He hisses between his teeth. “Need your pussy, baby.”

I pull my camisole off and let it fall to the bed, then I lift up and

unceremoniously pull off my pj pants. Sitting fully naked, I straddle him again, my pussy pressing into him once more.

“I want you so bad, Hawk,” I say. “You make everything better.”

“No more hate sex then?”

“No, I think I like what you did to me earlier much better.”

He grins against my lips. “What about a quick fuck every now and again. You know I won’t be able to keep my dick in my pants when you wear those little skirts to work.”

I grip his cock, rubbing the tip through my folds as we both groan. Then I sit up higher, line him up, and sink down onto his thick cock.

“Fuck, Jas.”

I whimper as he slides in till full tilt. Stilling, he links our hands together.

“You’re mine,” he mutters. “All mine.”

“I’m yours, Chad. I love you.” I start to move back and forth as he grunts.

“Say it again.”

“I love you.”

“Fuck, baby.” He leans back against the headboard, his hands holding his head as his biceps flex. He’s so goddamn sexy.

I rest one hand on his chest as I cup my breast with the other.

“Hawk, you’re so big,” I groan. “Filling me so full, baby.”

His eyes shine while he watches me ride him as I fondle my nipple, pulling on it as he snarls.

Reaching forward, he takes the taut rosy bud into his mouth and sucks. I cling to him, gripping his hair as he sucks hard, and I groan his name: *Chad*.

“Fuck,” he mutters. “Not gonna last.”

I cry out when he bites down, and then licks my nipple, moving to the other side and repeating the process. All the while, I rock back and forth. His big cock fills me to the hilt, making me feel so full and alive. I move my fingers to my clit and rub it in circles. Then in seconds, I’m spiraling in the most amazing orgasm I’ve ever had, adding *fuck, fuck, fuck* as I milk my pleasure from him.

He shifts, grabbing my ass as he starts to bounce me up and down, slowly at first, going so deep inside me, I squeeze my eyes shut.

“Feel that, *wife*?” he mutters.

I cry out. “Yes, Hawk. Oh god, just there....”

“This cock is for you and only you, baby, you got me?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me.”

“Your cock is only for me. I love it. I love how you make me feel, *husband.*”

He jolts, his hands gripping me tighter.

I know we’re not married yet, or even close to it, but something about saying it feels right. And he had a physical reaction, which makes it even hotter.

“Fuck, Jas... Oh, baby, not gonna last.”

He bounces me harder, meeting my thrusts as we go faster and faster... “*Husband...*” I groan. “Give it to me, Chad. I love you so much...”

“Fuck... I’m comin’, Jas, *fuuuuuuuck.*”

I spiral too, another orgasm taking over me. I tumble and cry out his name as we both fall under the same spell.

When I’m spent and he’s quit spurting his cum inside me, I sag against his shoulder.

“Holy fuck, that was hot,” I pant.

“Jesus,” he says, his breathing labored as I smile to myself. I love making him come undone.

“Think I like hearin’ you say those words, especially when I’m balls deep in that sweet cunt.”

Good god.

I groan. “You’re making me wet again.”

He chuckles. “I think I outdid you there.”

I don’t slide off him. I want his cum dripping out of me. Claiming me. Marking me as his.

I never knew that was a thing until now, either.

I don’t want this just to be about emotions running high. I know what I feel is real, and I hope that what he feels is too.

I mean, he seemed sincere, but I can’t let him marry me just because it may help me in court.

The idea, however... isn’t horrible. I never imagined being anyone’s wife, not after Jeremy fucked with my heart. But now it’s all I can think about.

And he loves me back... he actually said it. I’m lost for words.

I hold him tight. “This isn’t just about Ella, or about what I’m going through,” I whisper. “I love you. I need you to know that.”

He pulls back so I have to look at him. “I love you, too, Jasmyne,” he

says. "And I'm sorry, there's not a goddamn thing we can do about it now."

I grin. "Such a way with words."

"Uh huh." I go to pull off him.

"No." He holds my hips.

"No, what?"

"Wanna sleep inside you."

My eyes go wide. "Hawk, we can't..."

He settles down a little deeper into the pillow. He's actually serious.

"Won't it go down, like... shouldn't you pull out now?"

He yawns. "It never goes down around you."

I snuggle into his shoulder. He's insane, that's all I know.

Before I can say what I'm thinking, he says, "Don't even think about pullin' out when I'm asleep. I'll know, then I'll wake up and fuck you like you're my naughty little wife, not my good wife."

Holy mother of God.

"Wouldn't dream of it," I lie, shivering at the delicious sound of it.

He grunts. "Good."

"Goodnight."

"Night, Jas."

I fall asleep happy.

HAWK

I'M NOT HAPPY ABOUT LEAVING JAS, ESPECIALLY WHEN SHE HAS A FAMILY meeting today. But it's not like I can just barge my way into her family life right away, as much as I want to.

Now that we're a couple, I want to be involved, but I know that she won't want to be crowded, especially where family is concerned.

We established that Ryan is talking about contesting the will, and that's exactly what I tell Cash before I head back to New Orleans.

"What in the fuck?" he says.

"Tell me about it."

"That's all Jas needs."

"I don't wanna leave her to deal with it, but I've got no choice. I can stay and help organize shit, but I'll probably choke the asshole if we're in the same room together," I say, sighing. "Or I can come back and grab the moving truck and drive it back."

"Grabbin' the truck sounds like a better idea, and in the meantime, I'll send Manny," Cash replies. "He's good at coordinating shit and he cares about Jas. He'll have everyone whipped by the end of the week."

I run a hand through my hair. After last night's confessions, the last thing I want to do is leave.

It'd be two or three days maximum.

"I guess that could work." I'd be away for twenty-four hours at the most. I could do that.

"Aside from killin' the brother, you'll just be waitin' around for more information," Cash goes on. "You'd be better off here. Plus, got some shit

goin' down."

"Like what?"

Cash sighs. "Shit with the bakery."

"Fuck, now what?"

"Remember that asshole from the Devils who was hangin' around Indigo for a while before we took over?"

"Yeah."

"Indigo said she thought she saw him again."

I frown. "I thought he was dead, along with the rest of the club." This is all we fuckin' need to top everything else off.

The entire club was taken care of by the bayous, and the rest who were left were arrested so the cops could get on the television. The MC was kept firmly out of it.

It helps to have crooked cops when you need them. We scratch their backs, they scratch ours.

"Well, she seems to think he's back, with a vendetta. He knew her pops."

It's well known in our circles that Indigo's old man used to run with a notorious one-percent club back in the day and he was shot and killed when she was a teenager. It's likely the reason she hates bikers.

She doesn't speak to any of us, only Cash and Jas when she has to.

Of course, Harlem will be all over it. Despite what he says, he's got more than baked goods on his mind when it comes to her. Taking on a protective role is kind of his thing, even though he won't admit that, either.

"So, what's his deal?"

"Fuck knows. Indigo won't talk. Harlem is the only one she lets in the shop."

I frown. "Lets in the shop? Don't we own half of it?"

"Doesn't mean she'll let any of us anywhere near it. Luna might be gettin' a job there, if Indigo doesn't find out she works in the bar. Then we'll have someone on the inside."

I shake my head. "Sure you can't just barge in there and find out what the fuck's goin' on?"

"Trust me, I have. She's a closed book. Keep on tellin' Harlem that she's gonna poison those goddamn cupcakes he keeps bringin' to church."

"That's for damn sure."

"Got the prospects checkin' on the shop, and I'm fittin' new locks, cameras, and security, whether she likes it or not."

“Probably a good start. Did this fucker have somethin’ to do with her pops gettin’ shot?”

“Don’t know the details, but that’s the gist of it. Maybe Luna or Harlem can get more intel out of her. The woman looks sweet as pie, but she’s got a goddamn mouth on her.”

“Don’t hold your breath on intel. I think it’s safe to say that Indigo has a mind of her own. Ain’t nobody gettin’ through that forcefield.”

“Damn straight.”

“If you need to stay for Jas, then that’s what has to happen. All that matters is that she is supported.”

“Got it.” I’m tossing up what the fuck to do. I don’t like the idea of leaving her here in a city she isn’t familiar with. It’s not like Manny will be able to protect her like I can.

“Hawk?”

“Yeah, Prez?”

“Don’t overthink it. I can practically hear the cogs turnin’ in your head.”

I swallow the lump in my throat. “Little hard not to.”

“So, D told me about you.”

Of course she did. Fuckin’ women can’t keep shit to themselves.

“Why am I not surprised?”

“You claimin’ her?”

“Thinkin’ about it.” My heart leaps at the idea.

“Know you already know this, but just so we’re clear; if you hurt her or do anythin’ that makes her cry, or worse, leave this club, then I’ll cut your fuckin’ balls off, got me?”

The man isn’t kidding around.

“Got it loud and clear.”

“You might think you won’t do anythin’ to hurt her now, but things change over time. You gotta be really sure, because Jas is a special woman. She deserves the best. And I also don’t wanna have to be the one to tell your mama I had to shoot you.”

“Glad to know I rank high in the pecking order around here,” I grumble.

“Hear what I said, and if you’re not serious, then walk the fuck away before she gets hurt. She’s been through enough, and now there’s a kid involved.”

I’m not gonna hurt her. I’m never going to do that. I’d rather cut my own throat than do anything that causes her pain.

“Can’t walk away, I... I fuckin’ love her.” I admit. I can’t tell him right now about my offer to marry her. He’ll probably drive up here and knock my teeth out. Little does anyone know, I meant every damn word. I haven’t changed my stance on anything.

He sighs. “Knew you were gonna say that.”

“She’s gonna need some time off to get everything in place for Ella when they return. She’ll need all the support she can get. She’s stressed out, which is understandable, and the stress is takin’ its toll already.”

“Know it, I’ll take care of everything. Deanna and the girls will be here to help.”

I run a hand through my hair. “I’ll come back if Jas thinks she’ll be okay, but not until Manny arrives.” I wish I could be the one who will be more helpful to her.

“He can be there in a few hours. The boys will have to fend for themselves for a few days, or as long as it takes.”

“Okay,” I say. “I’ll call you when I’m on the road.”

“I’ll text you when I’ve spoken to Manny.”

We hang up, and I pace the room once more. That’s all I seem to be doing lately.

I think about Jas and how strong she is, yet how fragile and small she seemed in my arms last night.

I feel better after our conversation. I may not be the most verbose man on the planet, but Jas deserved to know where she stands.

And I never want to give her a reason to doubt me ever again. Maybe I have turned over a new leaf. I’ve never told a woman that I love her, aside from my mom, Sistine and Lexi. And, frankly, I never thought I’d be in the situation where I do love a woman. I want to be with Jas. I know it more than I know anything. I feel it in my bones.

And leaving her, even for a day, feels like torture.

I never thought I’d be the type of man to settle down. It’s never even been on my radar. But after spending time with Jas, it all suddenly became so clear.

Maybe it is jumping the gun, but I almost let her go once, and I don’t plan on doing that again.

Every single word I said was the truth.

It doesn’t bother me about Ella, as she’s just a kid. She didn’t ask for this. And though I haven’t met her yet, I’m sure in time we will be able to make it

work. I'm willing to sit it out until Jas is ready and everything is settled back home.

There's nothing pressing in my job that will keep me from being where I need to be. I just need to get my girl home. She has her parents and they seem like great people, but Jas isn't that close to the other people in her family, and she has no friends here. Plus, her parents live in another state.

She's going to need all of her family in New Orleans. And I plan on being her rock.

It's the least I can do after all the fuckups I've made.



When I get to the hospital, I can't find Jas anywhere. And when I call her phone, it rings out.

Panicked, I start to search the hospital. I go up to the floor where Ella's room is and peek in through the doorway, but she's not in there either.

"Hawk?"

I stop in my tracks.

It's Ella.

Her small voice rings through the space as I curse myself for not being more discreet.

I turn back toward the door and step one foot inside. "I'm sorry to disturb... I was lookin' for Jas."

She looks so helpless in the bed, with her leg propped up in a sling, and she has bruises and cuts on her face. A lump forms in my throat. My god. She has the brightest blue eyes I've ever seen, aside from mine. People have always told me I have pretty eyes, sometimes they're bright blue, sometimes they're more like a dark ocean, depending on my mood. But either way, apparently they're striking. Just like Ella's.

"You're Aunt Jas's friend, right?"

I nod, trying to keep my expression neutral. "Yep."

"I'm Ella."

"I know," I say stupidly. I clear my throat. "I mean... I'm sorry... for what happened."

I know how to talk to kids, but I feel suddenly vulnerable and nervous. I don't want to upset her, and what happens if she starts to cry?

“You have really blue eyes,” she says out of nowhere.

I smirk. “So do you.”

“Yeah, even though my... um, other family all have brown or green eyes.”

I really thought she was going to lose it for a second there. Fuck this must be so hard for her. “So do mine, all of them have brown eyes.”

“Really?”

I nod. “Yup. Every single person in my family has brown or hazel colored eyes, except me. Kinda weird, right? Like why are mine blue? Even all my cousins.”

She smiles softly. “So weird.”

I give her a chin lift, ready to make my move when she asks, “Are you really Aunt Jas’s boyfriend?”

I clear my throat again. “Uh, kind of. We’ve just started seeing each other.”

“And you ride a motorcycle?”

Am I supposed to tell the truth here? “Uh, yeah. A Harley.”

“Does it go really fast?”

I smirk. “Oh yeah.”

She smiles softly. “Aunt Jas went outside to argue with Uncle Ryan. They think I don’t know, but I heard them earlier out in the hall.”

I stare at her, unsure if I’m supposed to keep my mouth shut or not. “What were they arguing about?”

She shrugs. “Me.”

I give her a sympathetic look. “Will you be okay if I go find her?”

She nods. “Sure.”

I give her a chin lift. “You gonna touch that food?”

She looks at the tray in front of her. “I’m a vegetarian, and I can’t eat that. It’s mush and looks like dirt.”

“I’ll smuggle some food in when I come back. Food you can eat.”

She looks hopeful. “Thanks, Hawk.”

“No problem.” I give her one last look, and then turn to leave.

I need to find Jas.

I realize they’ve probably gone somewhere more private to argue. I try the cafeteria, the waiting room, then I try outside. Sure enough, across the garden that juts out to the side, I see Jas and who must be Ryan, his back is to me. All I can hear is raised voices.

I stride over there.

“You don’t know what you’re asking me, Ryan. You can’t do this. Lyndall wouldn’t have wanted this.”

“You know this is the right thing to do, for Ella’s sake. Don’t make it harder than it already is.”

“I’m not,” Jas fires back. “I do want what’s best for Ella, and what’s best for her is if she’s with me.”

He snorts. “To go live in a motorcycle club with your biker friends? Jasmyne, no court in the world will allow that.”

She stands her ground. “I don’t *live* in a motorcycle club. I *work* in one. A legitimate one. And for your information, they’re good guys. And stop threatening me with court. I know this is an awful situation, and we’re all running on high emotions, but this isn’t the answer, Ry.”

“We’ll see about that.” He points in her face. “Taking care of a child is no easy feat. You don’t know the first thing about raising one. Frankly, it’s insanity that you’d even consider taking Ella away from what she knows.”

“But you’d be taking her out of state,” she throws back, and he takes another step closer. “So that’s completely ridiculous.”

“Get the fuck away from her!” I yell, shoving him back as I stand in front of Jas.

Ryan jumps back as I clench my fists, ready to swing. “Who the hell are you?”

“A friend of Jasmyne’s,” I snarl.

His eyes flick down to my cut, and he snickers. “Of course.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I point in his face, just like he did to Jas.

“Hawk, it’s all right,” she says, trying to move in front of me. I hold her back with one arm as I wait for dickface to answer. “*Please.*”

“You’re a biker,” he says, like I’m something he just scraped off the bottom of his shoe. “And you’re not family.”

“I’m family in a different kind of way. Where I come from, we don’t do shit like this. We don’t turn our backs on each other and make things harder than they already are.”

“I just lost my sister!” Ryan spits through gritted teeth. “Stay out of this!”

“Yeah? And Jas just lost her cousin and her best friend. You’re the one makin’ this complicated. You don’t want to do that, trust me, it won’t end well for you.”

“Hawk!” Jas tugs on my sleeve.

“Is that a threat?” He steps back as he says it, clearly a gutless fuck.

I get that he’s hurting, but I don’t give a fuck. He’s yelling at Jas, and I can’t let that happen.

I’ll fuckin’ end him and anyone else who steps out of line where she’s concerned.

From what Jas has told me, Lyndall didn’t even get along with her brother or like the guy.

But he’s blood so that’s supposed to mean something.

“Hawk, let me handle this.”

I turn to Jas. “No. He’s clearly upsettin’ you and tryin’ to throw his weight around. Not happenin’.”

Ryan shakes his head. “This isn’t over, Jasmyne. You’ll be hearing from my lawyer.”

I ball my fists and I so want to hit this motherfucker. The only thing that stops me is the fact that he’ll use it against me in court. And if Jas and I do get married, then he’ll paint me as being violent, wrecking any chance of keeping Ella.

Jasmyne is all that matters. I’m not going to jeopardize that, as much as I want to punch this fucker’s lights out.

“Think about what I said,” he says to Jas. “This doesn’t have to be a war.” He turns and leaves.

I breathe deeply. If I don’t, then I’ll jump him and choke the bastard to death.

I watch him leave, then turn to Jas.

“What the fuck?”

She shakes her head. “I was handling it.”

“Kinda looked like he was screaming at you from where I stood.”

“He’s just hurting, Hawk. It’s understandable.”

“I get that, but he’s being a fuckhead. This isn’t gonna end well for him if he keeps it up. You haven’t done anything wrong; you’re just following your cousin’s wishes. He needs to respect that.”

I glare at her.

She snorts, laughing without humor. “Ryan doesn’t respect anything. Especially women. He treats his own wife like dirt, which is why Lyndall was very adamant about what she wanted.”

“The courts won’t overrule it.”

“You don’t know that,” she says, looking worried. “He really isn’t kidding, you heard him. I’m hoping he’ll calm down, once the funeral is over...”

Tears well in her eyes, and I pull her to me. “I hate you’re goin’ through this.”

She snuffles into my chest. “I just miss her so much. We texted every day and talked three or four times a week... I just can’t believe she’s really gone.”

I kiss the top of her head. “Cash is sendin’ Manny up. Gonna go get one of Rock’s trucks and bring it back for all your shit. I’ll talk to Manny, and we can organize boxes and shit for Ella’s gear,” I say.

She looks up at me, her eyes glazing over. “I used to be capable of doing all those things, now I can’t even think straight.”

“You’re still in shock,” I say, rubbing my hands up and down her arms. “It’s natural, baby. I’ll be gone for less than twenty-four hours, and if that asshole comes back again, I want you to let me know.”

“I can handle Ryan.”

I give her a look. “The fact is, you don’t have to. That’s my job.”

She blinks. “Hawk. You can’t fight all my battles for me. I’m grateful that you’re here, but I’m not going to become your little woman just because we had that crazy idea last night. I’m still me. I can stand up for myself.”

I don’t doubt that she can, but I still ask, “*What* crazy idea?”

She frowns, and then shakes her head. “Seriously?”

“If you’re talkin’ about the ‘M’ word, then I wasn’t kiddin’. Far from it. You want Ella with you, and that’s all that matters. I’ll do whatever it takes. I’m not gonna stand here and have that piece of shit goin’ at it with you. Not happenin’, Jas.”

“I appreciate you standing up for me, but Ryan isn’t going to be backed into a corner.”

“Neither am I.”

“So what do we do?”

I stop suddenly. I wasn’t expecting her to relent so quickly. I mean, she’s a spitfire every goddamn day of her life, so it makes me feel better inside that she’s accepting help for once.

I know she’s strong, that’s what I love about her. But even the strongest of people can’t do everything by themselves.

“We go with the original plan. He can file whatever he wants to, but the

will says that you have custody of Ella. In the meantime, we pack her shit and get back to New Orleans,” I say. “You don’t need me to tell you that you have the entire club behind you, Jas. Whatever you want, just need to say.”

She reaches for me. “I couldn’t have done this without you.”

I snort. “Yes, you could have. That’s what I dig about you, baby. You’re a pistol. But you also need to learn when to let others have your back.”

She nods slowly. “I know. I’m just used to doing a lot of things by myself. It’ll take some time.”

I clear my throat. “I met Ella.”

Her eyes go wide. “You did?”

I palm the back of my neck. “Yeah, she saw me lookin’ for you, and we got talkin’. She seems kinda cool, older than her years.”

Jas laughs. “Oh, she is. Sometimes I think she’s twelve going on twenty-five.”

I plant a kiss on her forehead. “You know you’re not gettin’ rid of me, right?”

She smiles softly. I know what Ryan said got to her, as much as she puts on a brave face.

Me and him are gonna have to chat about this man to man. If he doesn’t like it, then he can go fuck himself.

“I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

JASMYNE

MANNY HUGS ME LIKE HE HASN'T SEEN ME IN WEEKS.

"How are you, baby girl?" He stands back to assess me.

"I can safely say I've seen better days," I reply.

He smiles, but it's a sad one.

Manny. I've missed him, even though it's only been a few days since I saw him at the club.

"You look terrible," he says.

"Oh, thank you." I stick my tongue out.

He pulls me in for another hug. "Hawk gave me the rundown, as well as told me to keep my eyes peeled and call him if Ryan shows up. What an asshole."

I shake my head. "You know what they say, families are always the worst."

"How is Ella?"

"Poor little thing is putting on a brave face. I think she's going to crack at some point soon."

"I can't even imagine," he says. "Now her whole life is turned upside down."

"I'm trying to pick up the pieces, Manny, but I just don't know how. I love Ella, so, so much, but what do I do with an almost teenager?"

He slings an arm around me, and we sit on the wall outside the hospital. Ella is being released soon and she's refusing to go home. I have a headache the size of Brazil.

"You do what anyone would do in this situation, princess, you be you."

You can't perform miracles, you can't wave a magic wand and make it all go away, but we can make a plan, and you have so many people back home to help," he says, warming my heart as the tears start again. "You're not alone, Jas. We're all here for you, that's what being a family is. We'll figure it out, and by the looks of things, it seems as if Hawk is pretty smitten with you. Gave me a big fat lecture about what I can and can't do and the usual threat that he'll slit my throat if I let anything bad happen."

I roll my eyes. Typical Hawk. "Trust me, Manny, nothing worse could happen right now. I'm just trying to piece together what life will look like having Ella at home."

"You have a spare room, right?"

"Yes, and a small office, so she can have her own bedroom. I'm just so worried she'll hate it and want to come back, and then what?"

He shakes his head. "From what you've told me, honey, Ella adores you. I think right now she's fragile like you said, and sometimes being around someone who is familiar in a new place can be a good thing. No memories there. Nothing to remind her of what she's lost. Sure, she'll have to face it, and that'll be hard on both of you, but we're all here to help any way we can."

"I really appreciate that," I say, wiping my eyes. "I don't know what I'd do without you guys. I wish I did have a magic wand, but life just isn't like that. I have to find a way through this."

"I know you can do it. And I'm here to help, so use me any which way you can." He gives me a wink. "Except, you know, *that*. Hawk would skin me alive."

I chuckle. "He's being overprotective, and I get it, but I'm not used to being smothered like that. He means well, and I don't want to be selfish. I'm thankful for all of you. But Hawk would literally dump Ryan out in the bayous if I asked him to."

Manny snorts. "Touche. That's Hawk. You put some kind of spell on him, and I think he likes it."

I can't tell Manny about what we discussed, as much as I want to blurt it out to someone, but Manny will accidentally blabber to Deanna or Summer or Luna, and then I'll have some explaining to do. It has to be just between us. I don't want to be answering any hard questions right now, and a wedding is the furthest thing from my mind.

Hawk might think he wants to marry me, but I worry he hasn't thought

this through. Admitting our feelings is one thing, but marriage is another. But *husband*... man that was pretty hot. Especially when he called me his wife. Holy shit, I could get used to that.

The way we were together last night, it was like nothing I've ever experienced.

I never imagined that Hawk could be tentative. Loving. Soft even. Because, really, there is nothing soft about him. Nothing at all. He's one of the toughest men I know. But now I've seen that vulnerable side to him, I like it more than I care to admit.

I'd be lying if I said I didn't.

"He has been very sweet ever since... all of this," I say. "But we're really just getting to know one another. I... I think we're more than fuck buddies." That part is completely true.

When I first met him, he barely grunted two words at me. Now I know a little bit about his life and what makes him tick, there is more to him than meets the eye.

"Figured."

"Manny, swear you won't tell." I need to get it off my chest.

His eyes go wide and he crosses his heart with his index finger as he leans in. "Spill."

I swallow hard. If I can't tell Manny, my best friend, then who can I damn well confide in?

"I'm falling for him."

He claps his hands together. "This is fabulous."

"It's not fabulous. It's confusing."

"You really haven't ever let yourself fall, Jas. Except for that loser Jeremy who didn't deserve one second of your time."

"You're right on that."

"So... what's gonna happen between you two?" he presses.

"There are so many layers to Hawk," I go on. "So many to contend with."

"More layers than there are to you?" He gives me a look.

"What's that look for?"

He pretends to think. "How do I put this? You're kinda known as the Ice Queen around the clubhouse."

I roll my eyes. "Those assholes."

"They love you, but the one reason they respect you is because you keep them all at arm's length and you don't take any of their crap. You've gotta

have balls of steel to boss bikers around. I just want to make sure that you know what you're doing, with Hawk."

This is Manny. Always worried about one of us.

He's a good guy, one of my best friends, and I love him to death.

"I do," I say. "Or at least, I'm figuring it out."

"I could have a man-to-man talk with him, if you'd like."

I laugh. "I'm fine, but thanks, Manny. That almost sounded macho."

He nudges me in the ribs when I laugh.

He smiles, and then I sober quickly. "God," I say. "Every time I laugh or feel happy for a second, I remember Lyndall..."

He smiles softly.

"You don't have to feel guilty, Jas, and you can cry if you want to."

I rest my head on his shoulder. "I'm scared, Manny. I don't want to screw this up."

He kisses me on the top of my head. "You won't screw it up, babe, I promise. I won't let you."

I hope he's right. I'm putting all of my energy into being there for Ella. That's all that matters now. Ryan can do whatever he wants to me, but he better be damn sure that he stays in his lane when it comes to Ella.

Maybe things will settle down in time. When we've all gotten used to the idea. I don't like him, I never have, but I will always do what's best for Ella.



One week later

"I hope she likes it," I say, looking hopefully at Deanna.

We've spent the last few hours decorating Ella's new room with a brand-new bed, desk, rug, and cute decor I thought she might like.

We brought down all the things she wanted, and left the rest. I still have to go back and help Lyndall's parents sort the rental out.

My parents came down to New Orleans and they took Ella out for ice cream so we could get started.

Deanna waddles over to the bed and perches down. "Of course she will. It's amazing, Jas. She loves lilac and pretty stuff. I know she'll love it."

Ella hasn't been doing so well. She all but refuses to eat and hasn't been sleeping.

The funeral is tomorrow, and I don't know how she's going to handle it. I'm keeping it together, but barely. To say I'm worried is an understatement.

She also won't talk about it, even though the police had to interview her before she got out of the hospital to take her statement about what happened.

They still haven't caught up with the guy who crashed into them. My heart breaks every second all over again thinking about how awful those moments would have been for Ella trying to wake her mom up.

I asked Deanna to come over, mainly because she said Cash is driving her nuts in the last weeks of her pregnancy, and secondly because she can't help herself where remodeling is concerned.

It still doesn't seem real. I keep thinking Lyndall is going to text me, and I'll hear her happy, laughing voice down the phone. I'll never hear her laugh again.

"Thanks, D. I'm glad I called you."

"So am I. I love my husband, but goddamn is he as stubborn as a mule."

I smile. "Just like someone else we know."

She rolls her eyes. "I don't think so. I am definitely way more flexible than he is."

I give her a look. "Please tell me we're still talking about stubbornness and not how *flexible* Cash is, because ew."

"Let's just say we've tried everything to get this baby out of me," she groans. "I'm wearing the poor man out, and he still won't let me eat really hot food. It's meant to make the baby come faster, and I'm more than ready at this point."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. "Any other options you could try?"

"Bouncing on a trampoline, but I don't think Cash will allow that either."

I shake my head. "Please tell me you're not going to jump up and down on Ella's new bed. I don't want to be responsible for inducing your labor."

"Trust me, when you have a baby, Jas, you'll understand. I just want this baby out of me."

When you have a baby.

"Not sure I'm having kids," I say. "It seems like a lot of hard work. I'd want to be ready for that kind of commitment."

She looks at me. "So what happened with you and Hawk?"

My eyes shift to hers. I sigh. I can't hide it, and Cash already knows. "We... well, we did a whole lot of soul searching. We realized this isn't just about screwing, although the sex is amazing."

A sly smile spreads across her face. “I knew when I first came here that Hawk was the one for you. You guys were denying it and fighting like little school kids. It was so stinking cute.”

“I don’t know about cute. I wanted to stab him in the face with my stiletto.”

“There’s nothing wrong with makeup sex.” She shrugs. “And it’s obvious Hawk has the hots for you big time. He already told Cash that he plans on claiming you at the table.”

I give her a bewildered look. “He did?”

I know we discussed it, but I didn’t expect him to tell Cash already.

Was I always destined to end up with Hawk? It’s not like I go anywhere else except the club. Maybe I set it up that way without even realizing it?

“Yup. Of course, Cash told him he’d cut his balls off if he hurts you. Which goes without saying, really.”

I love how protective Cash is, but he also forgets I’m a grown woman capable of making my own decisions and life choices. Even if some of them have been questionable in the past. I know he’s just coming from a boss / protective place, which is kind of sweet when he’s not pounding his chest.

“Of course he did,” I mutter.

“Let’s face it. I’ve never seen Hawk smile, and he’s practically had a grin split across his face for the last few weeks,” she goes on. “I know he’s never had a real steady girlfriend, though. How do you feel about that?”

“I’ve thought about it a lot,” I say. “And I don’t want to be his guinea pig, but he’s serious, or he says he is... I’d be lying if I said that I don’t have my doubts. But on the other hand, I want to jump in with both feet, because it feels right.”

She gives me a sympathetic smile. “Are you in love with him?”

I take a deep breath, nodding. “Yes. Maybe I was from the very beginning, which is why I was so mad about Star, not that I want to bring that all up again. We weren’t together officially, but it still hurt. I wanted to be it for him, and after being cheated on with my ex, it stung. What if Hawk means it now, but then over time, his feelings dwindle?”

She gives my forearm a squeeze. “You’re never gonna know that unless you give it a shot, babe. That’s the thing with love; you’re never really in control of it. It controls you. Every emotion, thought, action... sometimes it’s hard to not let your heart rule your head. And if you fall, you fall. But if you get it right, oh man, it’s so fantastic, Jas.”

I smile warmly. “I’m so glad that you came along. Cash deserves to be happy and have a family of his own. To see him settle down, it brings a tear to my eye.”

“Even if I am a little upstart from Arizona, who stole him out from under all the single ladies?”

I laugh. “Yeah, we’ll never hear the end of it. The best thing you ever did was put Brandi in her place. Now she knows who not to mess with.”

“You can say that again. Since we had that... *chat*, she hasn’t come near me or said a word since.”

Like she’d want to. Even Brandi knows when to quit.

“Sometimes you just need to put the sweet butts in their place,” I say. “Now you’ve got a kid on the way, they’ve moved on. They know you guys are serious.”

Personally, I think the whole sweet butt idea is very outdated. Women who hang around the club for sex to please the bikers, and ultimately themselves, it’s kinda... degrading. Not that I’m a judgmental person, but I’m sure someone like Brandi could put her talents to better use than just screwing anything that moves in the club. Then again, some girls just like to do that. More power to them.

“It was either that or I break her nose.” Deanna shrugs. “Because she was coming onto Cash pretty strongly there for a second. The fact she touched him is frankly gross.”

“Just a little,” I agree. “But her staying away is the smart thing to do. At least she realizes that.”

We hear the front door close, and I spring up from the bed.

I look at Deanna, and she gives me a reassuring smile as I help her stand.

“Jasmyne!” my mom calls. “We’re back!”

“In here!” I call back.

A few moments later, I hear footsteps coming this way.

When Ella enters, she stops and gasps. “Aunt Jas?” she says, clamping her hands over her mouth.

“Surprise!”

She glances at me and Deanna and then around the room, my parents walking in behind her.

“Oh, Jas,” Mom says. “So this is what the two of you were up to?”

“It’s so cool!” Ella says from behind her hands.

“Purple is your favorite color,” I say. “So it feels a little more homely for

you.”

She runs over and folds herself into my arms. “Thanks, Aunt Jas. It’s really nice.”

I kiss the top of her head. My heart heavy. I’ll do anything to make her happy.

“We set up a desk,” Deanna goes on. “So you can do all your homework there, and a new computer, too. And those cushions.... Oh my god, they are so soft!”

I know I had to do something to get her to want to do homework. We still have to talk about school next week.

Ella bounces down on the bed, and we all laugh.

Even if this distracts her for a little while, it’s a good thing.

Dad wraps an arm around my shoulders. “Proud of you,” he says.

“Thanks, Dad.”

“She’s going to be okay, honey,” he goes on. “You’ll see.”

I only hope he’s right.



“What’s that?” Ella asks, looking into Hawk’s bowl with interest.

He came over with takeout, and to check out Ella’s new room.

“Nachos,” Hawk replies.

She screws up her nose. “Don’t they have beef in them?”

He shakes his head. “These are vegetarian.” He takes a big forkful into his mouth and groans. So good too.”

I can see Ella’s mouth practically watering as she watches him eat.

“You know, I brought extra,” he says, thumbing behind him toward the bag on the counter. “In case you were hungry.”

My heart melts.

Hawk is a meat eater, a big one. But he bought vegetarian nachos just so Ella could eat them.

I’ve been trying and trying to get her to eat. Making her vegetable lasagna, Thai takeout - which she normally loves - hell, I even went so far to make a pasta bake... but she just hasn’t had any appetite.

Hawk gets up from the table and goes over to the bench, pulling out the carton from the bag and brings it back to the table. “Here you go.”

He sets it down in front of her, and she flips the lid... and she starts eating it like she's starving. Which she practically is, since she's been refusing anything I give her.

I don't know what it is, but she has a connection with Hawk. He seems to get her.

"I was thinkin'," he says, when I just sit and stare at him. "Friend of mine runs a dog shelter. I help out there sometimes because I like dogs more than I like most people."

Ella laughs as I glance at her, and Hawk continues. "You could come and help me if you wanted. Sometimes the kids from school come and read books to the dogs because they get lonely. And we clean their cages out and take them for walks until they get adopted."

This man.

"That sounds awesome," she says, shoveling mouthfuls of chips into her mouth.

Hawk glances at me. "That's okay, isn't it?"

I nod. "Yes, of course."

Ever since Steel, one of Cash's friends from the Bracken Ridge Rebels, set up his own dog rescue, Faux Paws, in Arizona, the club here decided to do something similar.

So Faux Paws New Orleans was born.

Luna is usually one of the main volunteers in between her day jobs, and she's always trying to lure us into helping. I know I'd end up housing half the dogs there if it were up to me. So I try to stay away. I can't have pets in this building without written permission, and I know my heart would give in if I saw their sorry faces.

"Wow, cool, Hawk!" Ella says, then she looks at me. "Maybe we could adopt a dog, Aunt Jas?"

I give Hawk a *thanks for that* look, then turn to Ella. "We'll see, honey. But for now, you can help Hawk out after school..." I wait for an argument, but one doesn't come.

I don't know how, but this man is having some kind of positive influence over Ella, and I'm just gonna run with it. She hasn't been too keen on moving schools, but we both know it has to happen.

"Maybe after I help out, we can see about a dog," she rattles on, ignoring what I said. "Like if I'm good and get all my chores done, then it could be possible, right?"

I try not to smile. She's a very persuasive kid.

I haven't even given her a list of chores, but I think this is something that Lyndall did.

"We'll see," I reply. "But I'd need to get special permission in the building, so it may not be possible." I don't want to be promising things I can't deliver on.

HAWK

I HOLD JAS'S HAND AT THE FUNERAL.

Nothing could be worse than seeing her like this and being surrounded by all this sadness.

I've never been to a funeral before. They're depressing as fuck.

The worst part: seeing Ella's face when she placed flowers on the casket.

I don't think I've ever seen anything quite so horrible.

This poor kid.

She doesn't know if she's coming or going. Having a family who loves and wants you is one thing, and she's lucky in that way, but unfortunately, Ryan is still threatening legal action and that won't be good for anyone.

I don't know a lot about anything, but I know that a kid needs stability, especially after a horrific, life-changing event.

Cash and Deanna came, despite Deanna's due date being almost here, along with Manny, Summer, and Luna.

As I sit there and the screen plays photos of Lyndall throughout her life, I wonder why all of a sudden Lyndall is so familiar. Unease hits me. I don't know her; I'm certain we've never met. She used to live in New Orleans years ago, but again, I don't know her, I would've remembered... yet she seems familiar. Maybe because she's Jas's family, though, they look nothing alike. Or maybe we've met in passing sometime ago. Again, I know she has no dealings with the club, so it can't be that. As the photos continue, there are more of her as a younger girl and then I'm almost certain I've seen her before. I don't know where. Not from school or anywhere like that, but somewhere.... A memory tugs at me but I can't place it.

I shake it off.

After the funeral, I pull Jas into my arms when we have a free moment. Lyndall's family decided to have the gathering at a restaurant so everyone could pay their respects.

"How you doin', baby?" I kiss the top of her head.

"Okay, I guess."

"Ella is holding up well."

"That's the thing, I don't think she's coping, Hawk. She's barely spoken about any of it."

"She'll come around. It'll just take time. She's been through so much. None of this is easy on anyone, especially her."

"You're right." She pauses. "It was a beautiful ceremony, as far as these things go."

"It was."

I rub her back, holding her close to me.

She's exhausted.

I want to take all of the stress away, but I don't know how. All I can do is be there for her. Be her rock. Be here when she needs me. That's what I can offer without fail.

"You're so strong," I add. "Whether you know it or not."

"Doesn't feel that way," she whispers. "I wish I could say I have all the answers, but I don't."

"You don't need to have them. Rome wasn't built in a day and all of that. You'll get into a new routine with Ella. She'll start school, make new friends, things will get better."

"What if they get worse?"

I feel the fear in her voice. "Then we'll tackle it head on. Things might get worse, but I'll be here. I ain't goin' nowhere. Neither are your parents. Cash and D. Manny. Summer. Luna... all the guys at the club. We can't bring her back, baby, but we can try to lighten the load."

"I love you," she whispers. "I don't know how I would have gotten through this without you, Hawk."

I pull her to my chest tighter. "Never think for one second that you're alone." The words aren't even hard to say... I mean them... "I love you, too. Don't forget that."

She stills, and we just hold each other until I hear someone clear their throat.

Jas's father walks out onto the patio where we're standing.
He gives me a chin lift as Jas turns in my arms.

"Hey, Dad."

"Hey, princess." Chris looks up at me. "Just wanted to say thank you to Hawk, and the club, for all the support you've given to Jas and the family..."

I shake my head. "It's nothin'."

"We all appreciate it. As you can imagine, Tom and Jane; Lyndall's parents, are very distressed. We thought it was a good idea if Ella stays with them for a few days, but now I think it may be better to visit in a few weeks when the dust has settled. Ella needs to settle into Jas's home and enroll in school. There's a lot to do."

Jas already told me that her mom and Jane are sisters.

Jas nods. "I think that's a good idea, Dad. They need time to mourn the loss of their daughter. When they're ready, we can visit them, or they can come to New Orleans."

"So, just to clarify," I say. "Lyndall's parents are fine with Jas having Ella, right?"

We don't need another family headache.

Her father nods. "They are. They can't talk sense into Ryan, as he's acting on impulse. He's hurt, and he's not thinking straight. He didn't have the best relationship with his sister, so some of that could be guilt talking. We all want what's best for Ella, and what's best for her is to be with Jas. We will support you if things go further, which I'm sure they won't."

He clearly doesn't know about the argument I broke up the other day at the hospital. The guy is a piece of shit.

Jas hugs her dad. "Thank you, Dad, and Mom. I don't know what I'd do without you guys."

"Of course, sweetie. And we were thinking," he goes on, "me and your Mom have been talking about it, and we're thinking of moving permanently to New Orleans, or getting a weekend place so we can help with Ella. Then Tom and Jane could come and stay with us and see Ella whenever they want, and we can stay out of your hair."

He's a good man. Just like his daughter, he raised her right.

"Oh, Dad," Jas cries as he pulls her to his chest. "That would be amazing, but you don't have to uproot your life."

He shakes his head. "Nonsense. We want to do it. We'd rather be closer to you. We're not exactly old timers, or at least I like to think not, so we've

no excuse not to move. We both want this, as long as you're okay with it."

Jas wipes her eyes, "Of course I am, Dad."

He smiles and kisses her head. "Good. It's settled."

I swallow the lump in my throat, unsure if this is the right time. But it's now or never.

"Sir, I know now isn't probably the best time," I start as Jas turns to look at me. "But I wanted to let you know... I'm crazy about your daughter."

I'm not that great with parents. Well, I've never really done this shit before. I've never had a real girlfriend, and I can see how much love and respect Chris has for his daughter, and she has for him. Family is very important to her, as it is to me.

I can't wait for her to meet my mom, my sister, and Lexi.

Her dad stares at me and I don't know what the hell he's going to say.

He surprises me when he juts his arm out to shake my hand. "I can tell you're a good man, Hawk," he says as our hands clasp. "You're here to support not just Jas and Ella, but the whole family. That says a lot about a man. I'm not going to go all 'Dad' on you and tell you that if you hurt her, I'll hurt you twice as bad, or anything like that, because I'm sure you can see how much we love her. And I know you wouldn't do that."

Well, the man has balls, I'll give him that.

If I had a daughter, I'd be the same way. She wouldn't be dating until she's at least forty-five.

I don't like the idea of my sister dating, and she's at that age now that I don't even want to think about. Just, no.

"I can see that," I say. "I'm close to my Mom, and my sister and I have a great relationship. I'm family oriented and I can see how much Jas is too. I know I run with a motorcycle club, but we're very much a family, even though we're not blood related. I respect it more than anything else in my life."

Her dad nods approvingly as he lets go of my hand. The man has an iron grip that makes me smile.

Chris looks at his daughter as she smiles softly. "Hawk also has a cousin who could be a good friend for Ella," Jas says, smiling up at me. "Of course it's early days, but the one thing I will say is this has brought us closer together. Hawk has been my rock, and I know in time when you and Mom get to know him, you'll love him too."

Her dad's eyes blink in surprise.

She said love.

Holy fuck.

She said love in front of her dad.

My chest fills with pride as I stare at her.

She gazes up at me. "He's amazing."

"I don't know about that." I wrap an arm around her shoulders. "But I think she's a beautiful, smart, and funny woman. You've raised a wonderful daughter, not that I need to tell you that."

I see the tears in her eyes, and I didn't want to make her cry again. I just need her to know I'm serious.

"We are very proud. She's been a tower of strength for all of us," Chris says. He gives me a man slap on the shoulder. "Just don't break her heart, son. She's a good girl with a big heart who always thinks about other people and puts them first and herself last. She deserves to be happy. Life's too short."

I nod. "I know she does. And I plan on doing everything I can to keep her."

Chris looks at his daughter. "We'll talk after, okay?"

She nods. "Okay, Dad."

He gives me one last look, and then turns to leave.

Jas tucks her hair behind her ears as I cup her face. "You okay with what I said?"

She smiles softly. "Yes. Of course I am. My parents kinda need to know what's going on with us."

"Even if we don't?"

"Well, we know we want to give us a shot, right?"

"More than a shot," I say, lowering my voice. "I'm nuts about you. Ever since you made me get down on my knees and beg."

"I didn't do that. You wanted to do it."

I smirk. "Maybe I did. I guess there is more than one reason for a man to be on his knees."

"I can't take you anywhere."

I tilt her chin to look up at me. "Yes, you can. Home. After this, we go home. All of us."

"I'd like that, Hawk. Thank you. It's what we both need."

For now, that's Jas's place, and I'm okay with that.

"And you think Ella would be okay with me stayin' over?"

“I’m sure she will be, but I can ask her before we just assume. I don’t want her to feel weird about it.”

I nod.

Through the window, I watch Ella. She’s sitting on the couch, her back straight as she talks to her grandparents. She looks so lost and little that I want to sweep her up into a big bear hug and take all the pain away. It’s one thing for an adult to suffer, but quite another for a child.

I don’t give a fuck what anyone thinks. If they want to go back to New Orleans tonight, then we will.

Ryan, thankfully, stays away and doesn’t cause a fuss. Now isn’t the time nor the place.

When we’re driving home, later that night, the car falls silent.

Both of the girls cried a lot today. But now Ella just stares out the window, and Jas has her eyes closed, even though I know she’s not asleep.

Two hours later, I carry Ella into the apartment as she finally fell asleep. Poor kid is exhausted. I lay her on her bed and Jas pulls the duvet over her after removing her shoes.

After that, I run a long hot bath for Jas, giving her some time by herself. She’s been surrounded by people all day. I get that she might need some time alone.

I sit up in bed when she comes out of the bathroom, a waft of steam following behind her.

“Feel better?” I ask, knowing she probably doesn’t, but sometimes it’s as good as it gets.

She nods. “A little.”

“You sure you don’t want to eat?”

She shakes her head and climbs into bed, wrapping her arms around me as she finally collapses and buries her head into the crook of my neck.

“Thank you for today,” she says. “It was hard, really fucking hard.”

I pull her into my arms and hold her tight. A warmth floods over me that I’ve rarely felt in my life. The need to nurture and protect runs deep in my veins.

“I know, but you handled it really fuckin’ well, baby.”

She curls into my side as she trembles, and she sobs quietly.

Her uncontrollable shaking has me holding her tighter as I say, “I’ve got you, Jas. I’m here. Nothin’ in this world is gonna tear me away.”

And I mean it.

Nothing ever can.

Life is unfair, this is something I know to be true. As much as I try to console her, I know she needs to get it all out.

“I’ve got you, Jas,” I repeat over and over until she eventually stills, falling asleep as I hold her in my arms.



Three days later

“Who is the fucker?” Tag gives Cash a chin lift as we sit around the table.

Things with Indigo and the bakery have only gotten worse. Aside from an attempted break-in, she’s now refusing to cooperate with having prospects look out for the place, even though they stay out of sight.

I don’t know what this woman is playing at, but she needs to be more responsible.

Fuckers who ran with a one-percenter club like the Devils are like goddamn leaches. We may not have gotten every one of them, but we sure as fuck made sure they would never return to New Orleans. The handful who managed to get away wouldn’t dare show back up in this town ever again. When we thought there may be trouble with their brother chapter, Devils Ink MC Cali, their Prez informed Cash that Razor had officially withdrawn from the brotherhood years ago, preferring to go out on his own. Which, in turn, meant that Cali chapter wouldn’t be coming after any of us because of Razor - and the club’s - untimely demise.

“Some guy called Forger, apparently,” Harlem informs us. “Haven't seen him, nor have I heard of him, so couldn’t have been a committee member. If I had, he’d be a dead man.”

I roll my eyes. “Fuck’s sake.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose. Sleep has been hard this week. Every time I close my eyes, I jolt awake thinking there’s something wrong and I’ve missed it.

For many years, I was the protector of my mom, and some habits just die hard.

Jas hasn’t been herself and the stress is really starting to show. Ella is due

to start school on Monday, and I've planned an outing to Faux Paws this afternoon so Ella can meet Lexi.

Jas, on the other hand, has thrown herself back into work like a woman possessed.

I didn't want her coming back, and neither did Cash, but she insisted. Work keeps her mind occupied, and I get that, but I don't want her pushing things too early. Trauma can stay with you for a long time. But if this is what she needs to do in order to cope, then so be it.

"Firstly, Indigo will have to start doin' as she's told," Cash says. "She has her own safety and that of her daughter to consider, as well our vested business interests. She needs to drop the pissed off biker's daughter act and start wakin' up to the idea that we're not the enemy."

"Why the fuck did she even let us buy a cut in the business, if she's gonna be such a fuckin' bitch?" Nevada asks.

Harlem gives him a look at his choice of words, and through teeth gritted, he says, "Because it was that or go bust. It wasn't like she was gonna let Razor and his ilk let her foreclose, and she had to make a fast decision. The woman is proud, and when a woman is proud, she's gonna be a fuckin' handful."

"More like two handfuls," Nevada complains.

"Still, the issue remains," Ryder puts in. "That she's not cooperating, and if that's the case, then we need to go back to the contract. She may have a 51% vote, but that doesn't mean she can put herself or the club's interests in duress. Whether she likes it or not, she's gettin' a goddamn chaperone."

"Let me guess who that's gonna be," Riot mutters under his breath.

"I'm literally the only one she'll mildly tolerate," Harlem says. "Aside from Cash, and with Deanna close to havin' their kid, that ain't gonna work. She's fine with the security levels we've put in place, but she's not okay with bikers hangin' around the bakery."

"Long as you're not mixin' business with pleasure." Bronco gives him a wink.

Harlem shakes his head. "It ain't like that."

I feel for the guy. He can never catch a break with this lot. But we all know that him and Indigo have some kind of weird chemistry. My guess is if they banged, and got all that frustration out, things might just improve on their own accord.

"Uh huh," Nevada goes on. "I think if you put some frosting on Indigo's

cupcakes, she might actually start likin' you."

Chuckles go around the table, and Harlem reaches around and slaps him upside the head.

"Smartass."

"Just sayin', gotta give a bitch what she wants."

"Call her a bitch one more time, and I'll knock your fuckin' teeth out," Harlem says.

"Touchy," Nevada snickers. "You guys need to screw. Might be a lot less tension around here. Be better for all of us."

"How about I unscrew the head off your shoulders, pretty boy?" he fires back.

Everyone should know by now that you don't mess with Harlem. He's as big as me and even more wide set. He might seem easy going, and he is charming to the ladies and very respectful, but I know better. He'd crush a man's skull if he thought he was doing something wrong to this club, or to himself or someone he cares about.

And this just might be the longest meeting I've ever had in my entire life.

HAWK

“CALM DOWN,” CASH INTERRUPTS. “CAN’T EXPECT NEVADA TO HAVE HALF A brain in his head at this time of the mornin’.”

More laughs ensue.

“Still,” Priest, the voice of reason, goes on. “We have to have an amicable business relationship, regardless. If Indigo isn’t willing to take our protection, then more extreme measures may need to be taken. Not like she can run the bakery without us. That ship has sailed.”

“You mean threaten her?” Tag questions, looking bored. “Maybe they should send me, not Harlem.”

Harlem looks over at him. “I’ll get the job done. Nobody in this club needs to question my loyalty.”

“Nobody’s doin’ that.” I shake my head. “But I get what Priest is sayin’. If Indigo isn’t takin’ this seriously, or worse... she thinks she can protect herself, then she needs to be made aware that ain’t how we roll. She might hate bikers, but it was her decision to become partners with us. Nobody forced her hand.”

“You’ve got a point,” Cash agrees.

Nods and “yeahs” go around the table.

I can see this is a touchy subject of Harlem, as he obviously likes her more than he lets on. Everyone knows it, and that’s why Nevada is antagonizing him. Harlem takes everything literally. And the only people he jokes with, or is close to, are Cash and Tag. Maybe it’s because they’re older and Harlem is old school, I don’t know. But if anyone will make sure that the point gets across in the most diplomatic way possible, he’d be the best person

to do it.

“I’ll handle it,” he says simply. “I’ll make her understand.”

“How, exactly?” Ryder gives him a chin lift. “The decisions on the future of our business can’t just be all about Indigo and what she wants and doesn’t want. Fuck that. Frankly, I’m pissed that she isn’t takin’ this shit with Forger a little more seriously. We all know how it turned out for her old man.”

Maybe Harlem is too close to her, but then again, if he is the only one she’ll pretend to listen to, then it could work in our favor.

The way she makes out that we can’t be seen around the bakery is just plain ridiculous. She might need a simple reminder who’s funding half of the costs to keep the business afloat.

“If she won’t see sense and realize that we protect what’s ours, then the only thing I can see is one of the crew goin’ and workin’ there. Nobody can stop that, even her. And she’s short staffed as it is.”

“Oh, she’d love that,” Harlem mutters.

“I think it’s high time that we all grew some balls in this place and put our feet down,” Tag goes on, surprising me. Usually, he doesn’t have a lot to say; he just grunts a lot and does as he’s expected to do. “The women of this club have their place, but *we* are the founders of this MC, and here we are playin’ fuckin’ second fiddle to a bunch of goddamn bi— *Women*, who won’t even protect themselves when there’s an obvious threat. Somethin’s gotta give.”

“I’d like you to say that to Luna,” Nevada cajoles. “I’d take a front-row seat.”

“Bring your straw, you’ll be drinkin’ out of one soon,” Tag fires back.

Nevada makes shaking hands while he pulls a face. Goddamn idiot. “You know I do Tae Bo, right?”

Tag just shakes his head and ignores him. Nevada is muscled and has a wide build, but he’s no match for Tag. And Tag will hurt him if he says one more word.

“After everythin’ that happened with Trinity betrayin’ the club, the ranks have been divided ever since. The girls are rulin’ the goddamn roost,” Tag goes on, clearly unimpressed. “We need to put a stop to it. *We* make the rules around here. They joined this club knowin’ that. Indigo signed those papers knowin’ that we’d have input and a say. If she’s too goddamn naive to realize that, then why the fuck is that our issue?”

“Mainly because draggin’ women by the hair into your lair kinda went

out a few centuries ago,” Nevada puts in helpfully. “And then there’s the whole misogynistic thing that most women hate.”

Tag scowls across the table. Like he gives a shit. “Then they know better than to join an MC.”

I roll my lips. Not getting into this, but Nevada always dances on the edge of reason, just waiting for his next face punch.

“Tag’s right in a roundabout way. She’ll be cryin’ wolf one minute, then demandin’ why we didn’t step in the next,” Jett adds. “Harlem needs to follow Indigo and keep tabs on her, not the prospects, whether she likes it or not. We keep a tight lid on it. Once we find fuckface, then we deal with it.”

“How is Harlem followin’ her gonna help, aside from him gettin’ his rocks off?” Riot asks.

Jett pops a shoulder. “She might start to take the threats more seriously. If this jerk has a thing for her, or some kind of revenge, she also needs to realize that we have her back. Rather than goin’ against her, we work with her. We all have a vested interest in the bakery, and obviously, we don’t want any harm to come to Indigo or her daughter.”

“That’s awfully generous of us,” Ryder mutters. “Considering nobody else in New Orleans would get this kind of special treatment.”

“Forty-nine percent share,” I remind them. “She has the majority vote in most things.”

“Not over her safety,” Harlem counters. “Or the club’s investment. I’ll make it known she’s gettin’ protection, whether she likes it or not. She’s gotta fuckin’ stop all this shit that bikers are only out for themselves. We let her run the goddamn bakery without changin’ anythin’, and the place is busy. We leave her in charge. The goddamn woman has nothin’ to complain about, so she can cut us some slack.”

I feel his frustration. She’s being difficult over something that has nothing to do with us.

Old news.

She needs to take that up with her dead father. He’s the one who did what he did, not us.

“You gonna be the one to tell her that?” Priest gives him a grin.

“Not scared of a goddamn woman,” he barks. “The point we should be raisin’ is what the fuck Forger is doin’ back in New Orleans and what this vendetta is.”

“Workin’ on it,” Jett says. “Shit takes time. Not much is well known

about Indigo's father or about the MC he ran with. It was short lived, and the entire club was wiped out."

"We could just ask her." Nevada shrugs. "If she hates bikers so much, she might just give us a list of reasons why."

"Right." Riot rolls his eyes. "I'm sure she's gonna be completely forthcomin' about why her father was shot dead to bikers she hates."

"Or I could offer my services," he goes on. "I have a big dick."

Groans and lots of "oh, fuck no" rings around the table, as well as shaking heads.

"For fuck's sake," I bark. "The last thing anyone wants around this table, asswipe, is to be thinkin' about your junk."

"Fuckin' disgustin'," Tag agrees.

"Does Nevada have to be part of these meetings?" Bronco chimes.

"Or you could be dickless?" Harlem suggests. "Got a switch blade that can slice through butter."

"It's okay, big guy." Nevada gives him a reassuring smile. "But I'm here if you need backup."

"Will all of you shut the fuck up?" Cash all but bellows across the room. "For fuck's sake, what are we runnin' here, a kindergarten? Never heard so much whinin' and complainin' in all my life."

"I second that," Ryder agrees.

"I've come up with an idea," Priest announces, before anyone else can get into an argument. "How about we send in a spy? Luna is currently indisposed at Rock's on reception, but isn't Stella lookin' for some work?"

We all look to Harlem.

He runs a hand through his hair. It's no secret he has a tomboy on his hands. She likes to tinker with motorbikes, just like her old man, but I'm not sure she'd want to work in a bakery.

"I thought she wanted to get into mechanics?" Ryder asks before he can speak.

"Well, I canned the idea of her comin' to the garage," Harlem says. "But now she's eighteen, I can't exactly stop her from doin' what she wants to do."

"She gonna try out for prospect?" Nevada shoots out his mouth. *Great, just what we need.*

"Nevada, you're gonna die tonight," I tell him. "I'm sure of it."

"No, but she's my baby, so you say one more word, and I'll fuckin' slit

your throat and hang you upside down on your momma's doorstep until you bleed out," he replies.

Nevada's eyes go slightly wide.

"A female prospect?" Tag grunts. "What fuckin' shit are you smokin'?"

"What?" Nevada defends. "Equal rights and all that shit."

"She doesn't need any encouragement, especially from the likes of you," Harlem says.

Stella grew up around the club. She knows the life, and I'm not surprised she's a chip off the old block. But a female prospect?

"Could be a good thing," Priest says, as I look up at him. "Look at what Jas has done for the club."

Everyone stays silent because nobody can argue with that.

Ryder shakes his head.

"There's gonna be no female prospect, nor is there gonna be anyone hangin' upside down bleedin' out," Cash says, sounding exasperated. "But I like the idea of Stella bein' a spy. Think you can wing it, H? I'm sure Indigo is a lot nicer to humans who aren't bikers."

"Yeah, then you've got an excuse to be there," Nevada says.

"Don't need no fuckin' excuse," he replies. "But it can't hurt to ask Stell, and to have another ally in our corner."

"Hey, is it true she keeps a shotgun under the counter?" Riot asks, shaking his head.

A small smile creeps on Harlem's face. "Alongside the baseball bat."

"Jesus Christ," Cash mutters.

"Better be a good boy," Nevada pipes up. "Or she might use it on you."

Harlem takes another swipe at Nevada's head, but this time he's fast enough to duck.

I can see the annoyance on Cash's face at what all of this has brought to the surface with Forger.

We thought this was done with.

The goddamn look on his face tells me that he knows it isn't and that is troubling.

We need to find out why the fuck Forger is after Indigo, or is he using that as a ploy because it'll lure us out?

It's not like he has any goddamn club brothers left. They're all floating out in the bayou or in jail.

"It's settled," Cash says. "Harlem will talk to Indigo, and once Stella's

working there, we might have a little more scope on what's going on. All in favor."

"Aye," everyone chimes.

Cash bangs the gavel down.



Ella peers into the cage and frowns. "They take rabbits here, too?"

I chuckle. "Yup. Anything with paws."

"So cool!" She pokes a finger through the cage and tickles the rabbit's forehead. "He's so soft."

"Yeah, and we've got carrots and stuff for him and his buddy if you want to feed them in a bit."

She beams. "I've never held a rabbit before."

"No?"

She shakes her head.

"That's a damn shame," I say.

A few minutes later, Lexi comes bouncing in the door. "Uncle Hawk!" she yells, running up to me as she launches herself at me.

"Hey, kiddo!" I say, scuffing up her hair as she laughs. "How's it going?"

Her eyes immediately land on Ella. Of course, I've told her all about Ella and she's to be nice to her. Lexi's a good kid, but sometimes kids can blurt things out that may be upsetting.

"Good, Uncle H." Then to Ella, she says, "Hi, I'm Lexi." She holds out a hand, and Ella frowns at it. My cousin is a bookworm with an IQ of a hundred and thirty plus, or so it seems.

They shake hands and it's so stinkin' cute.

"Hi, I'm Ella."

I clear my throat. "Ella was just meetin' Flopsy and Mopsy," I say. "But we're gonna clean out the dog cages first, yeah? Then we can feed the rabbits and give them some fresh water."

"Okay!" Lexi says enthusiastically.

Ella nods, seeming a little bit shy.

"Are you going to be coming to my school?" Lexi asks when we walk toward the dog cages. All but two are empty. "Because we have a really good basketball team, and a drama class where we get to perform at the end of the

year... and then there's the library... I mean, it's good if you like books, obviously.

"Lex," I say, giving her a look. "Come up for air."

Ella smiles softly. "That sounds fun."

"So you will be coming to my school?" Lexi goes on. "I go to St. Charles. Uncle Hawk said you would be."

Ella shrugs. "I think so, right, Hawk?"

I nod. "That's the school closest to your district, and it's not far from the clubhouse."

"Have you been for a ride on Hawk's bike yet?" Lexi asks.

Ella's eyes go round as she shakes her head. "No. Have you?"

Lexi nods. "Just once, but it was only around the block."

"Wow. What was it like?"

"Loud, pretty much."

I snort. "You were scared."

"Was not!" She pokes her tongue at me.

"Hey, Lex, maybe you could introduce Maverick to Ella."

Lexi's eyes light up. "Yes! OMG. He is the cutest little thing you've ever seen."

The dogs are well looked after here, even though it's a charity run on donations. Some dogs are more distressed than others and some need medical attention which is all done pro-bono.

We have a good crew, and vets that donate their time for free.

Then there're dogs like Maverick, who don't do well because they're frightened and don't cope with loud noises. We don't know a lot about his history, only that he was from a puppy farm. One of the carers here has been taking the little dachshund home at night so he doesn't get distressed. She already has two dogs and three cats, so she can only foster until he gets adopted. And he really is the cutest little thing. He's chocolate brown and dapple colored all over him and he has blue eyes.

The little guy starts to yap when we get closer. I'm one of the few who can pick him up, along with Lexi, but it's taken a few weeks to even get that far. He does love going out into the yard too.

When we get to his cage, Lexi starts talking to him and Ella watches on, a smile lighting up her face. She's a sweet kid, and it's better when she smiles. I'm glad Jas let me bring her here. Who can be sad when there're cute puppies around?

I open the cage and let Lexi move inside, reminding her not to be loud.

Maverick comes toward her but stops when he sees Ella. Ella doesn't move inside, just simply stays in the doorway while he looks up at her.

Then he moves closer, past Lexi and starts to sniff Ella's sneakers.

She giggles.

I smile behind her back as Lexi lowers her voice to a whisper and says, "I think he likes you, Ella."

When he's done sniffing, he sits down and continues to look at her.

"I think he wants a treat, right, Hawk?"

I pull the treats out of my pocket and drop a few in each of the girls' hands. "Make sure you show Ella how to do it properly, so you don't scare him."

Lexi nods, sitting down on the edge of his soft bed. "Here, Ella, come and sit with me. Just move slowly, because he'll run and hide if you go too fast."

Ella does exactly that, and while Mav moves back a few steps, he doesn't fully retreat.

This is going better than expected. Usually, he doesn't warm up well to people, even Jenny, the volunteer who's been taking him home. But as he watches Ella cross the cage and sit down next to Lexi, his curiosity gets the better of him.

"Holy moly," Lexi says. "He never usually does this. He must definitely like you."

I see the smile on Ella's face, and I can't help but smile too.

"Why is he so shy?" Ella asks softly.

"We're not sure, but we think that there were a lot of puppies at his home before he came here, and maybe it was just too noisy for him."

I don't like to tell Lexi the real reasons why Maverick is here and that he was rescued from a puppy farm that was dirty and disgusting. And the main reason he's still here is because he was the runt of the litter. All of the other puppies have been taken already. He had a few minor medical issues and that tends to scare people away. I think with the right person or family, he would make a really great addition. It would just take time and a lot of patience.

"He's so cute!" Ella gushes as he toddles over toward them. "And he's so small!"

Lexi giggles. "I love his floppy ears."

Ella giggles too. "They are kinda big."

Lexi holds out her hand with the treats in her palm and Mav sniffs before

diving in, munching the biscuits like his life depends on it.

The girls watch with fascination.

I knew this would be a good idea, especially because the shelter is almost empty for the moment, so Ella wouldn't be too overwhelmed with too much barking.

"Would you like to take him for a walk?" I ask as both the girls look up at me.

They nod enthusiastically. "Yes!" Lexi squeals.

Ella seems just as excited as she nods too.

"How about we clean out these couple of cages first, and then will take him around the block on his leash," I say.

"Okay," they say in unison.

I can see they're going to get along just fine. At least Ella will know one person in school.

Lexi drops a couple of the broken-up biscuits into Ella's palm as they continue to feed their new little friend.

An idea comes to me, but I'd have to check it over with Jas first. I know she said she has to get permission for pets in her building, but seeing the look on Ella's face is enough to warm even the coldest of hearts.

Maybe we could foster him instead at the very least, until he gets a new family.

As we walk around the block later, the girls take it in turns to hold Mav's leash as he trots along happily.

Mav is king of the castle when he's on his walks. He's like a different dog. I guess the one thing about being around animals is they remind you to appreciate the little things.

They just take it all in their stride.

This might be the breakthrough that we needed, even if it is short lived. It doesn't fix anything for Ella, we can't bring her mom back, but if I can make her forget her sadness for a little while, then it's all worth it.

And all it really took was a little Dachshund called Maverick to seal the deal.

JASMYNE

SO I LEARNED TODAY THAT RYAN STILL PLANS ON TAKING ME TO COURT, AND there's been a date set for the hearing. Not only that, but he's contesting the will. I don't want Lyndall's money; the little that she did have has all gone into a trust for Ella. As it should.

I don't honestly know what his problem is or why he's doing this. But I suspect it's his wife. She puts him up to most things. And this is more about winning than what is actually right for Ella.

I'm really hoping the judge will throw the case out, but now that I've had to seek legal advice, things are really scary.

I don't know what I would do if they took her away.

Over the last few weeks, things have gotten better, but it's been slow going. Ella is still very much in the process of grieving and trying to understand the loss of her mother. And she's been seeing a counselor, which has helped tremendously. But to be honest, the best thing of all has been hanging out with Hawk.

He's been amazing.

Especially the first time that Ella went with him to Faux Paws. It was a game changer.

Ella came back full of life and energy. She was bouncing on her toes, bursting to tell me everything that had taken place that day. The highlight was hanging out with Lexi, feeding little Maverick and taking him for a walk. Seeing the excitement and joy on her face reminded me that sometimes the best things in life are free.

Of course over the weeks that passed, Ella became closer and closer to

Maverick and we started fostering him. When my landlord said no to pets, but then had a sudden change of heart after Hawk went and saw him, I didn't question it. It's annoying that it has to come to that, and Hawk has to use his MC status to get the point across, but if it means giving Maverick a home, then I'd suck it up.

Ever since we fostered Maverick, I have seen a change in Ella and her behavior. She nurtures him, she gives him so much love, and she takes full responsibility of looking after him. Even though she knows it could be temporary. I don't want to get her hopes up and then have to rip it away from her if Ryan gains custody. They don't have pets.

This small thing she now does weekly with Hawk has given her a purpose, other than just being a kid who lost her mother and had to up and move. And then there's Lexi. They've become inseparable. She was the first friend Ella made, and it's a godsend that she is at the same school so she has someone she knows there.

There's nothing more intimidating than trying to make new friends in a new place where you don't know anyone. And kids can be cruel.

So far, so good. Ella has befriended most of Lexi's friends at school, too, and they've been very welcoming. She also really likes her new teacher, so I couldn't be happier with her progress.

Learning the ropes on how to deal with a teenager hasn't been easy. I wonder if I'm doing any of it right. I'm lucky that Ella is a good kid, even if she is confused and displaced at the moment.

In some ways, she's a lot wiser than her years. I can only hope that I continue to live up to the expectations placed on me. I'll never replace her mother, nobody can. And I'm not here to be her friend, as bad as that might sound. Lyndall would want me to be firm but fair, and above all else, loving.

So I sit here with my name on an envelope in Lyndall's handwriting. Her parents gave it to me a few days ago, and I just haven't had the heart to open it. I can't.

I've been too chickenshit, which seems stupid now.

So it sits in front of me, practically burning a hole in my desk. I don't know why I'm acting this way. I need to know what it says.

I don't understand why she's gone, and I never will, why she had to miss out on raising her daughter. Life is so unfair.

She'll never get to see Ella graduate. Go to prom. Learn to drive. Get engaged. Get married. Have kids, if that's what she wants. The whole

unfairness of it all rattles my brain.

My parents rang yesterday to say that the police found the driver, and he's currently in custody. Thankfully, Ella can give her statement via video link instead of having to go to court. All of this takes a tremendous toll.

The worst part is, I feel like I'm going to see Ryan on the news one day, eaten by an alligator out in the bayou, and I'll know exactly who to blame for that.

Hawk will do anything, and I mean *anything*, to protect us. He's become slightly worse over this short time of Ella moving here, but it's not a bad thing. My father was the exact same when I was growing up. That's who he reminds me of, even though he and my dad are nothing alike in personality or stature. I always felt protected growing up.

I stare at the envelope, realizing it's dumb to feel inferior to a letter.

I came back to work to keep myself occupied. That's one thing that I can rely on because there's always something to do here. A problem to fix. And it's what I love.

The truth of it is, I know Ryan and his attorney are making a case against me.

No doubt they'll use the fact that I work for an MC to make me look bad.

Ella hasn't even been to the clubhouse. It's not a place for a child unless it's a family day when we sometimes have a barbecue and everyone gets together.

But I can't hide Ella away forever. The club is my life, this is where I work, and she's going to get curious at some point.

If I thought the club was a bad influence, then I would leave and find a job elsewhere, but this club is part of my blood. Cash has been so good to me, and I love Deanna like she's my own sister. I'm not changing my life just because Ryan doesn't approve.

I rub my temples and rest my elbows on the desk as I try to think.

I need to open the letter.

I need to see what Lyndall has to say.

But every time I go to open it, my hands begin to tremble, and I just can't go through with it.

I miss her.

I've always been the type of person who's grateful for the things in my life, but you don't realize how good you have it until somebody you love is gone.

Suddenly, there's a knock at the door.

"Hey, beautiful." Luna sticks her head around the door. "Are you ready?"

That's a good question. *Am I ready?*

I don't think I'll ever be ready, but I still have to face it.

I wish the hearing would be thrown out of court, but apparently, that's not how these things work. Especially when there is a child involved.

That's what breaks my heart the most. I just want to get on with it, move on and start to build something special and make Ella as comfortable as she can be.

"Not really," I admit. "But that isn't going to make any of this go away."

She nods with sympathy, and again, I'm nothing but grateful for all the wonderful people in my life. Without my friends and the brotherhood of the club, I honestly don't know what I would've done.

They've all been so supportive.

Every time I feel myself about to break down, I remind myself of that, and how lucky I am in lots of ways. The kindness shown toward me and Ella has tears welling up in my eyes.

Luna comes around the side of the desk and pulls me into a hug.

"You have the whole club behind you, babe," she says. "Nobody in the Rebels is going to let anything bad happen. You can be certain of that."

"I know. But that doesn't mean that they can't take her away from me if they think I'm a bad choice. You don't know how these things are going to play out in court; it all depends on the judge and what they throw at me." I stop, unable to go on. Luna steps back, and rests her hands on my shoulders. I can feel a pep talk coming on. "Nobody knows what's going to happen. And we all know you're more than capable of looking after Ella, and they'll see that too."

"The judge will do what's best for Ella," I say. "Which he should do, obviously. But I don't know how I'll cope if he decides I'm not good enough. What the fuck am I going to do, or tell her?"

"Babe, you need to calm down and breathe," Luna says, demonstrating how it's done. "Just don't get too ahead of yourself. One step at a time, okay?"

"Okay," I say, feeling more unsure than I ever have in my life.

The pain of losing Ella would just be too much. We need each other. I need her as much as she needs me.

"You're one of the strongest women I know," she goes on. "If anyone can

fight this, it's you, Jas."

I try to hold my chin up. "Thanks for believing in me. I might need alcohol after this."

"I've got you covered."

Thank God Ella doesn't have to be here for this hearing. There is no point in dragging her through this if she doesn't have to. I want to try and shield as much as I can; I just don't know how I'm going to break it to her if she has to leave.

She smiles softly. "Come on, babe," she says. "We don't want to be late."

I slowly rise from the desk as Luna steps back. I try to hold back the dread in the pit of my stomach as I pull myself together. I still have the envelope in my purse as we leave. I don't want to read that and get emotional right before the hearing, otherwise I won't be able to get through what I have to.

Right now, I just have to get through today.

When we step out into the hall, Hawk and Cash are talking near the bar.

They stop as we approach.

I fold into Hawk's arms as he hugs me and says, "Hey, baby, how you doin'?"

I smile up at him. "I'm doing okay."

Cash watches me carefully. If he's looking for any signs that I may break, he's not going to find them here.

I have to pull up my big girl pants and put my devastation to one side and be the Jas who everybody knows and loves. I know I can do this.

No matter what happens, I will not give up without a fight. I know that much.

When I walk through the bar with Hawk's arm around my shoulders, I gasp as I exit through the front doors.

All of the brothers are lined up on either side of the walkway.

Every single one of them.

Along with Manny, Deanna, and Summer.

Tears spring to my eyes as I look at each of them, unable to grasp the situation.

Nevada gives me a soft smile, which is the first sign that things are serious, because I've never been in his vicinity and not heard him say something crude.

Harlem gives me a chin lift. Jett does the same. Priest smiles and salutes

me. Riot, a thumbs up. All down the line, the men of the club acknowledge me and let me know that they're here in their own way.

I turn to Hawk. "What the hell?"

He just smiles and says, "The boys wanted to do something for you. This is the best way they know how."

"Oh, Hawk," I cry, curling myself into his chest as he wraps them around me.

I feel a hand on my shoulder as Cash gives me a squeeze. "We all want to be there today, Jas. But we don't want our presence to look bad in court. Even though we do a lot of good for BADV, this is different with a custody case. You need to have the best fighting chance possible to keep Ella in your custody. We respect that."

I nod, even though my face is buried in Hawk's chest.

"I want you to be there," I mumble, unable to face him.

"And I will be. I'll even put a suit jacket on for you, kid."

I sniffle. "Thanks, Cash." I pull back and wipe my eyes as Hawk catches a stray tear.

I turn to the boys. "Thank you, everyone, you don't know what this means to me, and to Ella, to have all your support. I can't thank you enough for everything you've all done for us..." I shake my head.

"You'll do good," Harlem says. "You've got a fire inside you, Jas. We all see it."

I smile gratefully. "Thanks, Harlem."

"We're coming with you," Manny tells me. "We'll ride with Cash and D."

I nod. "Okay."

Luna slides to the other side of me and links her arm through mine. "You're gonna be okay, babe. We've got this."

I glance up and give her a smile. "Thank you."

"Come on," Hawk prompts. "We gotta go."

I step down off the porch, looking everyone in the eye as I pass by them. Even Tag looks sympathetic.

"I wish they could all come," I say to Hawk as we walk toward his truck. "It's not fair how much judgment there is because you're all part of an MC. These men of the club are all like brothers to me, I don't know what I'd do without them, and you."

He kisses me on the head. "Cash, Harlem, and Priest will come with us

for support. As well as your three besties. All of us are behind you one hundred percent. Just remember that when it feels like it's all too hard."

I nod, unable to keep tears from streaming down my face. "Now you've all gone and ruined my makeup." I laugh.

Hawk stops at his truck and wipes the tears away with his thumbs and hands me a tissue. "It's gonna be okay, no matter the outcome. We will fight it. Nobody is gonna take her away from us."

Us.

I know it's only been a short time, but to hear him say those words fills me with hope.

"All this time, I never knew how lucky I was," I whisper. "I never realized that I had it all. How sad is that?"

He pulls me into his arms once more. "Of course you knew. You're the glue that keeps this club together, baby," he says. "We're all guilty of not smellin' the roses from time to time. But now it's time you did something for yourself. You've worked so hard, and you've taken Ella into your home unexpectedly. No matter what, I'm proud of you. For gettin' this far. I'd be a mess if she were mine."

I glance up at him. "I love how much she's warmed to you. It's more than I could have hoped for."

He smiles. "What can I say? I'm just a likable kinda guy."

I wrinkle my nose. "Not really."

"No?"

I shake my head. "I guess you're okay. In small doses."

He bumps me with his hips. "You're just sayin' that because I found Maverick and you wish you'd thought of it."

"Hey, I helped!"

"You refused to pick up poop off the floor, Jas."

"That is disgusting."

"What's gonna happen when we have kids? You gonna make me change all the diapers?"

My eyes go wide at his words. "Kids?"

He pecks my lips. "Not just yet, but one day. I want to put a baby in you. Be lyin' if I said otherwise."

"You're going to make me cry again."

He kisses me on the nose, then turns to open the passenger side of the truck and helps me in.

All of this is for a reason, I tell myself. I just don't know what that reason is, or why this is all happening, but whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Or so they say.

I'm hoping that Tom and Jane's statement about me being the best choice as Ella's guardian will hold some weight, considering Ryan is their son. It has caused a dispute between the family, and I never wanted that. But I'm not the cause of it, and I have to remind myself of that every chance I get.

Hawk rests his hand on my knee as we drive.

He makes me feel calmer.

It's hard to imagine how crazy we used to drive one another.

We both have strong personalities, and we both have to be right, but when we cut through all the bullshit, it was obvious we had a connection.

There is nobody else who makes me feel how Hawk does.

He's been my rock and a shoulder to cry on. If I lose custody of Ella, I don't know if there are enough arms in the world to hold me upright.

Being strong is all I know how to do. And I'll do that. Until my last breath, I will do it.

For Ella and for Lyndall.

JASMYNE

“WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?” I ASK MY LAWYER.

She looks sideways at me. “It means the judge is going to look more deeply into the case, they’ll likely want to hear what Ella wants, too, before he makes his final decision.”

I swallow hard. “Is that normal?”

She nods her head. “Very. Try not to worry.”

“Try not to worry?” I try not to sound hysterical, but fail.

Everything about my background came up in the hearing. And of course, Ryan seems like a saint. Not only is he married with two children, but he also has a very generous income, owns his own home, and is in the military. Dad of the year. They may as well give him his own parking space and an office with a view.

She’s going to be taken away from me.

I shake it off. I can’t break down until later.

I close my eyes for a second and breathe. I wish I could believe what my lawyer was telling me, but in all honesty, she seems as uncertain as everybody else.

Why can’t she lie and say we’ve got this? Telling me not to worry just won’t cut it.

And these cases can go either way. When there’s a child involved, nothing is cut and dry. Anything can happen. And that kind of uncertainty just fills me with even more dread.

I’ve never been to court before. I’ve never stood before a judge and had to tell them about myself, and make myself sound like the best candidate

possible to raise a twelve-year-old who I love dearly but never planned on raising.

But, I did my best...

“I know that I can give Ella the best life possible,” I’d said to the judge. “It’s the reason that her mother chose me. Ella and I have always been very close, and Lyndall and I were more like sisters. I love her so much. I can’t say I will be half the person she is, because that would be impossible, but I can tell you that I will give it my all. There is nothing I won’t do to make sure that Ella is safe and happy. I’m in a steady and secure relationship with a man who adores Ella as much as I do. He’s been taking her out on day trips to the dog shelter and we’ve even recently got a puppy that Ella adores. I have a great job. I have the flexibility in my work to be able to fit in around Ella and school. I have lots of family and friends here in New Orleans. It’s my home, and every single one of them has offered to help. None of these situations are ever easy or pleasant, and I understand where Ryan is coming from, and it’s a place of love. I’m sure he only wants what’s best for Ella, too. I would never keep her from anyone in the family, especially him, her aunt, and her cousins. But they live out of state, and I feel that a big move like that will only upset Ella even further and make the transition that much harder when she’s still grieving the loss of her mom.” I took a pause as I tried to gather myself. I couldn’t help but be emotional because this is the time that calls for it. I can only speak from my heart.

“If her mother didn’t think I was a good candidate to look after her daughter, she never would have put my name in the will or left me with such a big responsibility. We all know it. I can never replace Ella’s mother, but I will give her all the love that I have to give and then some. I will put her needs before my own. And I will do everything in my power possible to make sure she continues to grow into the amazing, beautiful young lady she is. I want to make her Mother proud.”

My lawyer squeezed me on the arm and gave me a short nod of approval.

I was emotional, and I don’t care.

I wiped a few stray tears from my face and took my seat.

I zoned out most of what the judge said. Only when Sara started to shuffle her papers did I snap out of my reverie.

Although Hawk and the boys are sitting behind me, along with Luna, Deanna, Summer, and Manny, I can feel Hawk’s eyes boring into me, as much as I can feel his love. I needed their support. They’re my family.

My parents sit with them, along with Tom and Jane.

It's sad that it has come to this. It breaks my heart.

Ultimately, when things don't go to plan, you always find out who your friends are. You find out who's there for you and who's not. That's the one thing I can take away from all of this.

My extended family in New Orleans mean the world to me, and if some judge wants to tell me they're not good enough, then they can go fuck themselves.

"Your speech was very heartfelt," Sara says. "I honestly think that if the judge has any sense, he will rule in our favor. Taking Ella away at this crucial time in her life would be a mistake. He should see reason. Especially when Ryan's only argument was that he was a better fit because he's Lyndall's brother. As you said, they weren't close to Ryan or his family. Putting Ella in that situation would only cause her harm. Nobody wants that. Their own parents spoke in favor of you."

"I hope so," I whisper. "But the things that Ryan said make me sound so bad."

"He's clutching at straws," she tells me. "All he has against you is the motorcycle club, unless you're willing to give them away, then there's nothing we can do about that. We've proven they're not a one-percent club and Ella doesn't frequent the clubhouse. I can't say it will be enough, but they're a part of you."

Sara also told the judge about BADV and all of the amazing things that Cash and the club do to keep the organization afloat. There's always that stigma surrounding bikers, and as much as you explain that they are not an illegal club, the judgement still remains.

I've also had a change of heart, and I've decided that if I had to give up the club temporarily for Ella, then that's a sacrifice I'll have to make to keep her with me. I don't know what I would do without them, but this stopped being about me a while back.

The thought gives me nausea.

I turn a look over my shoulder and Hawk gives me a nod of approval.

I give him a soft smile, even though I don't feel any of it.

I just want to bury myself in his arms and lock myself away in our bedroom, and never come out. But that isn't going to solve anything. I know that deep down.

I look back at Sara. "I'm so scared," I whisper. "I hope it's enough. I

hope he sees sense.”

She gives me a soft smile. “We can’t do any more except wait. Just know that I’m sure wherever your cousin is, she’s looking down and feeling proud of you right now.”

I swallow down my fears. “I certainly hope so.” I take a breath, and then add, “Is it normal for the judge to keep us waiting that long?”

She nods. “Unfortunately, it is. We should have an answer within two or three days, and will reconvene here. But you need to prepare yourself and have a conversation with Ella. She needs to know, Jasmyne.”

I nod. “I know.”

Sara is right. We do need to talk. The last thing I want to do is scare Ella and make her feel afraid of what’s to come, but there is a chance that they will rule in favor of living with Ryan. There’s every chance. And if that does happen, I have to be prepared to fight to get her back.

“Thank you, Sara. For everything.”

She places her papers into a briefcase. “Of course. I’ll call you as soon as we hear anything. Until then, hang in there, okay?”

“Okay,” I whisper.

My friends, Hawk, and the others, all stand when I walk toward them.

“Thanks for being here, everyone,” I say as the girls and Manny hug me. “It means a lot.”

“Anytime,” Manny says. “We just hope that the judge isn’t a douchebag and makes the right decision. Anyone can see that you’re amazing, Jas. It’s a no-brainer.”

“I hope so too,” I say quietly. Then I look up at Hawk as he takes my hand, and I say, “Take me home.”

He gives my hand a soft squeeze. “Let’s go.”



All the way home, I keep having visions of having to tell Ella, and then having her ripped out of my arms by the police when I refuse to hand her over. I know it’s a terrible way to think, but I have to face the reality.

And Ryan and his lawyer made out that the situation Ella would be in would be catastrophic for her, much to my Aunt and Uncle’s dismay. The opposition council even called the NOLA Rebels a “motorcycle gang,” which

only further escalates the fact that they're using whatever tactic they can to win.

He doesn't even want her. He just wants to win and tarnish Lyndall and her wishes, just like he did in real life. I hope he rots in his own guilt.

I don't talk much on the drive back. And Hawk doesn't rush to fill the silence with words, which I'm grateful for.

It also breaks my heart that I know I may have to walk away from the club for a while.

Would Hawk leave the club too?

I couldn't ask that of him. This club is his life.

I would never want him to choose between the club and me. I never want to drag him into any of this mess, but it's not like any of us could've predicted the future.

Unlike Ryan, this isn't just about winning. It's about a little girl's life and happiness.

I know with sheer determination that I can do this. And more to the point, I *want* to do it.

When we pull up to my apartment, I tell Hawk that I just need a little bit of time alone. He had a few errands to run downtown anyway.

In my mind, I plan on having a hot shower, washing away all the doubts of today, and making myself a hot cup of tea and sit in silence for a while with my thoughts. But I don't do any of those things.

"I don't want to leave you," he tells me, looking down at me with concern. "But I'll only be gone for a few hours."

I know some shit's going on at the bakery, but I don't know exactly what yet.

"It's okay, Hawk. I need the time to clear my head for a little bit."

He nods. "I'll pick up some dinner while I'm out."

I smile gratefully. "Okay, that would be great."

I know he's reluctant to go because he thinks I'm going to crack, but I need to have a breather.

While he's gone, I pour myself a shot of vodka and down it in one gulp. I fist my chest as I cough, because I'm not used to shooting liquor down my throat in the middle of the afternoon, but I have to admit, it does make it feel better.

Then I stand at the sink and look out the window across the city skyline without really seeing anything.

God, that was awful. I'm dreading having to go back to that place.

And now I have to tell Ella what could be happening and break her heart all over again.

Hours later, we sit on the couch and I explain everything as best I can.

"If I thought that you would have a better life with Uncle Ryan, or that you'd have better opportunities by moving, then I would say so," I tell her as she looks at me, stunned. "But I truly believe that your mom did the right thing. She knew that I was the better fit and how well we get along. I just need to know this is what you really want. I mean, you'd be with your cousins..."

She shakes her head. "No. It's not what Mom would've wanted. And I don't even know my cousins. They barely ever visit, and when they did, all uncle Ryan and Aunt Tess did was argue. Plus, my mom didn't even like Tess. I don't want to live with them. I want to live with you, Aunt Jas. Grandma and Grandad want it too." She says the last few words with a contempt in her voice that reminds me of her mother.

Lyndall was the sweetest, but if you crossed her, Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

"Okay, sweetheart. I just had to be sure. You don't just have to go along with what your mom wanted. You get a choice in all of this."

She looks sad when she says, "I didn't get a choice in losing my mom, though."

I hold her hands in mine. "I know, and I'm so very sorry for that. But you know how much she loved you. Ever since the day you were born, she wanted you and adored you."

Little Maverick moves his head as he looks to see what the disturbance is all about. He's such a cute little guy. There is no way that we are going to be giving him back. We're going to adopt no matter what.

"It's not your fault, Aunt Jas."

"How are things going with the counselor?" I ask. "Do you think you want to keep going?"

She shrugs. "It's okay. We talk about Mom sometimes, but not always. She asked me about school and whether I've made any friends. That kinda stuff. I think for a while... I could keep going."

"I'm glad it's helping," I say. "Sometimes it's good to get thoughts out to someone who isn't related to you."

She reaches down to pat Mav's head, stroking him gently.

“When will I ever stop missing her?” Ella asks softly.

“You’ll never stop missing her,” I say with a small smile. “You suffered an immense trauma, Ella, and there is no time frame on healing. That’s all I know. But I also know your mom wouldn’t want you to grieve for her. She’d want you to live your life and do all the things you want to do. She gave you life so you could live it.”

A smile plays on her lips. “She did, Aunt Jas.”

“And me and Hawk both want you here,” I say, just in case we haven’t made it clear enough.

“I like Hawk,” she says, stroking Maverick’s head. “He’s cool. And I can tell that he’s really into you, which is pretty gross.”

I raise my eyebrows in question. “Gross?”

“Yes. He’s all kinda... gooey.”

I laugh. “Gooey?” I’d never in a million years use that word to describe Hawk.

She nods. “It’s pretty obvious.”

“And here I was thinking we were being discreet.” I barely let Hawk stay over, and we keep our hands to ourselves when she’s in our presence.

Luckily, he’s not a PDA type of guy.

She rolls her eyes. “The way he’s always looking at you, I don’t think so, Aunt Jas.”

I purse my lips. “I guess I can’t argue there.”

“I don’t mind if you want Hawk to stay over. I mean, he is your boyfriend, and it is kinda mean that we kick him out every night.”

I laugh. I just didn’t want her to feel uncomfortable while everything was new for her.

“He’s a big boy, he can handle it.”

We sober for a few minutes, and then Ella looks up to meet my eyes. “What if I have to go?”

I take a deep breath, trying not to let the trepidation show on my face. “Then we will work it out. I won’t give up, Ella. I promise you.”

She knows, but I see sadness in her eyes “I know, Aunt Jas. I know that you’re doing all you can. I just really hope I get to stay.”

I lean up and kiss her on the forehead. “No matter what happens, just know that I love you, okay?”

“I love you too, Aunt Jas.”

We hug, and after a while, Ella leaves to go do her homework. Maverick

trots in step behind her like he owns the apartment.

I run a hand over my face, watching her leave.

I get a text from Hawk, saying he got held up, but he'll be there with dinner shortly.

I wasn't sure whether to have the talk with him as well, but he suggested just talking to Ella by myself, so she didn't feel intimidated by him being there.

I start putting the plates out on the kitchen bench. I pick up my purse from the couch and it's then I remember the letter.

Digging into my bag, I pull it out. I completely forgot to open it.

I go into my room and sit on the end of the bed.

Bracing myself, I hold the paper in my hands for a few moments and I know it's now or never.

I carefully unpeel the envelope and slide the letter out.

Dear Jasmyne

If you're reading this, it means something happened to me. And while I'm not the most articulate person, I want to write down my thoughts, and what I want to happen to my daughter.

By now you'll know that I have appointed you as my daughter's guardian. It may not be a job you ever imagined for yourself, but I couldn't think of anyone better to look after my baby.

Of course, I hope it doesn't come to that. But life can take unexpected turns that we never anticipate, and so I have to cover all my bases.

It feels weird even writing this.

I don't want to get all morbid, but this is adulting, and I have to pull up my big girl pants and get it done.

Ella has always looked up to you, and I know that you will do what's best for her if you had to make any hard decisions in my absence. She loves you so much, and it gives me joy to see you with her when we visit.

As for her father. I never spoke about him much because I was only 16 when I had her, and I didn't really know the guy. Over the years, I've often wondered about him, and what he would've done if he did know about her. I tried to look for him, but I only had his first name to go on, as you already know. Even going to the place where we met a few times to see if he'd showed up unexpectedly, but he never did.

He's a mystery. One that I hold fond memories of because I liked him a lot.

It's funny. When I first found out I was pregnant, I was horrified. My whole life flashed before my eyes, and I had no idea what I was gonna tell my parents. But I got through it. And Ella became the most important thing in my life. My parents are good people. They've always supported me, and I have no doubt they will agree with my decision.

Everything else, you'll just have to work out for yourself. Parenting is hard, but it's so worth it. Just don't let my stubborn side to her personality throw you. We can be stubborn.

I feel silly writing this because I know I'm going to be around for a long time. But I just wanted you to know that those are my thoughts, and that's how I feel, and I love you, Jas. You're the sister I never had.

If I could say one thing to Chad, Ella's father, it would be that I'm sorry I didn't get to know you. And he'll never get to know Ella. For that, it makes me so deeply sad. I'm sure he would've loved to have known her, or at least I play it that way in my mind.

What I am most grateful for is our friendship and what we have together. You're my best friend.

I love you, Jas, now and forever.

Love always, Lyndall.

P.S. It's your turn to buy the margaritas and I want a double.

I stare at the letter through a stream of tears.

Ella's father was named Chad?

I think about how ironic that is and how the world works in mysterious ways.

I fall back onto the bed, clutching the letter to my chest and cry all the tears that I've held in all day.

It pours out of me until I sob silently, wishing that the ground would swallow me whole.

HAWK

BOTH THE GIRLS WERE QUIET AT DINNER.

And I know that Jas talked to Ella before I got back. It had to be done. There is no point keeping the kid in the dark about any of it. She's smart. It isn't like she doesn't know what her uncle is doing.

I wish there was something I could do, but some things are just best left alone. Shy of threatening him, or taking the asshole out, I'm back at square one.

I don't think a real scare from the club would hurt. He'd probably piss his pants.

Ella's only a kid. It's a pity that she's had to learn so young how life can be so unjust. Sometimes life shits all over you, and that's the truth of it. There's no point sugar coating it.

Jas tucks Ella into bed with Mav and we go to bed ourselves.

"How did it go?" I asked Jas as I sit on the edge of the bed, watching her put her pajamas on.

She shrugs. "As good as can be expected. There were a lot of tears, but Ella understands that some things are just out of my control. It's hard on her. She doesn't need this shit, none of us do."

I shake my head. Maybe cutting Ryan into little pieces and feeding him to the alligators won't be such a bad thing after all.

"I also couldn't say anything about adopting Maverick just in case things change," she goes on. "Jesus, Hawk, what am I gonna do if she leaves?"

"Baby," I say, as I pull her towards me. She stands between my legs, and I stare up at her beautiful face. "One day at a time, that's all we can do. You

can't predict the future."

"I know, it just feels so unfair after everything she's been through. She doesn't want to go."

"We won't let her go."

She looks down at the space in between us. "Lyndall left me a letter," she says quietly. "Tom and Jane gave it to me the other day, and I just got around to reading it."

"Did it make you feel any better?"

She nods, but then shrugs. "It was completely devastating. But her wishes are clear. And you want to know the ironic thing? Lyndall never really knew the baby's father, and it turns out his name is Chad. How weird is that?"

My eyebrows knit together. "Really?"

"Yeah, she got pregnant when she was really young. She never knew the guy. They had one night together."

"So I take it Ella never knew who her Father was?"

"No. Lyndall said she never saw him again, or even got his last name. She said she'd tried to find him but didn't have any luck. It's not like she had much to go on. It's sad that Ella will never know him."

I frown. "How old was she when she had Ella?"

"Seventeen."

I blink a couple of times.

"Seventeen?"

"Uh huh. Yep, her parents were so mad. Our grandparents... oh my god."

"I can imagine. You're really still a kid yourself at that age..."

It's a coincidence. I mean, I was sexually active at seventeen years old... but there are a lot of men called Chad out there.

To even think that I could be... No. That's ridiculous.

She wraps her arms around my neck. "It was hard for her. Having to tell her parents. Of course, they wanted to know where it happened, who the guy was, etcetera, but she didn't have much to go on and never found him. She said in the letter, she wondered what he would've done if he'd ever known about the baby."

"That's too bad. Really, for both of them."

"She loved Ella so much. How many twelve year old's would cope with something like that and come out the other end? She fought so hard for everything..."

"I know, baby."

She snorts at a sudden memory. “Lyndall really hated her name. She was named after our grandmother. So whenever we went somewhere, she introduced herself as Red.”

“Red?” My brows furrow.

“Yeah, she had flame red hair back then. Much to her disgust.”

I stare at her as she shakes her head, and we fall silent. Sudden nerves settle in my stomach.

“Red,” I mutter.

I think a couple more times, *no*.

Chad is a popular name.

Jas meets my eye. “What? You’re not thinking about the Chad thing, are you? You didn’t even know her.”

“But... how would I know? For real. People change from seventeen to twenty-nine...”

“You’re not thinking...”

I shake my head. “It’s impossible.” I slide her off my lap and begin to stand.

“Maybe I should show you her photo back then, just to be sure.”

“There’s no need. Really, I’m not Ella’s father.”

“But you could be. I mean... It’s possible, Hawk,” Jas says, as I start to pace.

“No, we’re clutchin’ at straws, that’s all.”

She narrows her eyes. “Really? Then why are you pacing?”

I run my hands through my hair. “I don’t know.”

“Yes, you do know.”

“It’s a coincidence.”

She shakes her head. “But we don’t know for sure.”

I frown. “What are you suggestin’? That I fucked a girl called Red all those years ago, and I have a secret love child?”

“You don’t have to say it like that, like I’m crazy.”

“But it is crazy.” I’m almost panting, I’m so worked up.

“Stranger things have happened.”

I stop pacing. “Jas, I know you want this to be true, to fix things. But I don’t wanna set you up for more heartbreak. The judge’s decision is likely gonna be tomorrow.”

“You’re right, I know I’m being irrational.” She starts to pace, too. “But think back.”

“I’ll look up how many Chads resided in Louisiana around that time, and I’ll bet there’s a fuckin’ few.”

Her face drops. “You’re right.”

In any case. I would’ve noticed at the funeral after seeing her picture. Surely? Then again, my focus and attention were all on Jas.

I rub my chin.

I stop. “Baby, don’t be upset. I just don’t want you to be let down. This is beyond nuts.”

I can see she has that maddening glint in her eye where she has to be right.

Here we fuckin’ go.

“Fine. I’m nuts.”

I sigh, feeling a bit shaky. “Okay, find me a picture. We’ll settle this once and for all.”

I can’t be Ella’s father.

My stomach churns at the thought and my head spins. Wouldn’t that just tie everything up nice and neatly with a bow? Then Ella wouldn’t be going anywhere.

Easier said than done.

Jas’s face, though... For a moment, there was hope.

It’s wishful thinking. That’s all it is.

“Okay, I will,” she says, as if challenging me.

I sigh as she leaves the room.

This isn’t what anybody needs. Jas is just setting herself up for heartache. Latching onto a name like it’ll solve everything. Which, I guess it would, but that’s not the point.

By the time she comes back holding a photo album, I’m sure a few gray hairs have grown on my head. Not that I’ve got anything to worry about.

“My grandparents gave me this album years ago,” she says. “There has to be a picture of her in here somewhere from back then.”

She sits down on the bed and begins to flick through the album. A slight sliver of anxiety rising with me burns like nothing I’ve ever felt before.

Now I’m wishful thinking.

But, even if my mind did cast that far back... I was a reckless teenager. I wouldn’t have remembered a goddamn thing.

Jas madly flips through the pages, stopping every now and again, but then she continues. I can barely take the anticipation.

“Here!” Jas says, eventually, shoving the album over her shoulder at me. I take the album out of her hands as I stare at the photo.

Well, I’ll be damned.

Flame-red hair.

Bright green eyes.

A smile on her face that could hang the moon.

Holy fuck.

“Hawk? Do you recognize her?”

I’m unable to work out whether it is just my mind playing tricks on me or not.

“I don’t... I don’t know...”

“You must know! For heaven’s sake, how many women were you screwing at seventeen?”

I grit my teeth. “A lot. I’ve had a lot of women, Jas. And some of them were redheads. If she looks familiar... that doesn’t mean that we fucked or that I’m Ella’s father... I’m an asshole that I don’t remember, okay, but I also drank back then too and smoked weed...”

“Then do a paternity test.”

I frown. “You’ve lost your mind.”

I stare down at the photo again. She was pretty. Really fuckin’ pretty.

“No, I haven’t. Weird things happen all the time. It takes a few days, I’d bet.”

I walk to her and clutch her shoulders. “Jas, you need to stop.”

Tears well in her eyes. “God, Hawk, I want it to be true. So, so much. It would solve everything but I’m also clutching at straws, and I’m kinda in shock right now. I mean this is all so weird.”

“I know. It’s a shock to me too. But gettin’ your hopes up like this, baby, it’s not right. You’ll give yourself a goddamn heart attack.”

“I want to believe that there’s hope,” she says, her voice cracking. “That in all of this mess, we’re given our Christmas miracle. Hell knows Ella could do with some good news right before the holidays. Being shipped off out of state isn’t one of them.”

“But you know it’s probably just settin’ yourself up for a fall. I hate to say it, but it’s so unlikely, baby.”

Jasmyne shakes her head. “Lyndall didn’t sleep around. That wasn’t who she was. When she found out she was pregnant, she tried everything to find the baby’s father. Maybe I am hoping for some kind of miracle, but so what?”

At least I have some hope left.”

I shake my head. “Baby, I have hope too. But jumpin’ to conclusions isn’t the way.”

I look at her face, and I realize more than anything how much I want it to be true. It would solve so many problems. And Ella... she’s a great kid, but that doesn’t mean she’s mine.

As much as the possibility is slim, Jas seems determined to prove a point.

My heart hammers as I say, “If it makes you feel any better, I’ll do a paternity test, but please don’t go gettin’ your hopes up. There’s over a million people who live in this city.”

I am starting to think Jas is slightly unhinged, but it makes me sadder than anything.

She wants a way out of this, I get it. But let’s face facts... I’m not gonna be Ella’s father just because my first name is Chad, for Christ’s sake.

“Okay, that’s great that you’ll do it,” she says, wiping her tears. I watch as she runs over to the bed and fishes around in her purse.

“What are you doin’?”

“I need to call Sara.”

“Baby...”

“Well, it only means that we may get to stall the ruling.”

“The judge will think that we’re just clutchin’ at straws, Jas. It may not change a thing.”

“But it *might*.”

I run a hand through my hair.

I wish I could make all of this better for her, but it just feels like it’s an even bigger mess than before.

“Just please don’t go gettin’ all excited just because her photo seemed familiar. We have a first name to go on and not much more.”

Jas ignores me and tries to call Sara three times. On the third call, she leaves a voice message to call her back urgently.

There is no way to calm this woman down. I just have to ride this out.

We’ll do the paternity test, and it’ll come back that I’m not Ella’s father, and then Jas will spiral back into this sad state she’s been in ever since Ryan got lawyers involved.

“Fine. But I feel so strongly that this could be a sign... Like, Hawk, just think back...”

I shake my head. “Baby, you want it to be true so Ella can stay with us. I

get that you're comin' from a good place, but you need to get a grip."

"Don't tell me what to do."

"Don't get mad."

"Don't tell me what to do!"

I move toward her as she tries to dash out of my grip. I press my body into hers as I push her up against the wall, her back to my front. "Stop runnin' from me."

"Then stop being a douchebag."

I bite down on her neck. "Fuck you."

"No, fuck you!" she whisper-shouts.

I grunt. "You're hot when you're mad."

"Shut up."

"But we can't fuck here. Ella's right next door."

She pushes her ass against my dick. "Later then, when she's gone to bed."

I grip her hips and hold her in place. "Is she okay with me bein' here?"

Jas snorts. "She loves you more than me."

"We'd have to be quiet."

"Duh."

I slap her butt, and she yelps. "Don't make me shut your mouth up, Jas. We both know you can't keep quiet."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

I ease off her. "Please just let's see what happens, without expectation."

"Okay."

"You don't mean it."

"I do. I know that I'm jumping the gun, but I can't help it, Hawk. She's so happy here. We're making it work, despite the situation and how much she misses her mom. I just don't know how she'd cope having to move."

"I promise you, I'll bury him before it comes to that."

"If only you could."

"Terrible accidents can happen."

"Hawk, you wouldn't." Her eyes grow wide.

"Try me."

She stops resisting. "I love you so much."

I ease off, then spin her around. "Not as much as I love you."

I press my lips to hers, and she moans softly as our tongues meet.

My dick, already rock hard, presses into her hip as she throws her arms around my neck.

I pull back, both of us gasping and say, “Not here, Jas. Later...”

We kiss again, and I know I could unzip my jeans right here and fuck her quietly without Ella hearing, but still, the thought still unnerves me. Now there’s a kid around, I’ve got to start behaving a little more responsibly.

“Then stop kissing me,” she replies.

“I’m tryin’.”

She cups my face. “I’ll try and behave.”

I smirk. “I won’t.”

“Just tell me that it’s going to be all right.”

“It’ll be all right, no matter what happens, I promise.”

She smiles softly, and I push off the wall. “Let’s go eat dinner.” I turn and look at her over my shoulder, and add, “Then I’ll eat you later.”



Jas groans into the pillow, muffling her moans as I do exactly what I said I’d do.

Her legs spread, I lick and suck her until she’s squirming underneath me. I keep her pinned, my head between her legs and my hands at her thighs, holding them open.

“Such a sweet pussy,” I whisper as I latch onto her clit, sucking it into my mouth. I insert a finger, then two, fucking her tight hole until she’s coming. I lap up her slickness and move behind her, lining up my dick as I push into her without warning.

I grip her hips and start to move slowly. In out, in out.

She grips the sheets as I run a palm up her spine. Her perfect ass bared before me as I watch my dick sink in and out of her.

I’ve never fucked a woman this quietly before, and I kinda dig it.

Not that I’m loud normally, but I know Jas is.

She likes to scream.

“Take it, baby,” I tell her, thrusting at the end. “This tight little pussy is beggin’ for me.”

She mumbles into the pillow as I speed up a little, banging her hard but slowly.

She likes it any which way I give her, but like this she knows that her orgasm will draw out for longer.

“I need it,” she whispers. “*Hawk!*”

I move faster, lifting her hips higher as I sink in deeper. *Fuck yeah.*

I fuck her until she’s squirming again, and I feel my balls tighten.

I shoot my cum inside her as we both come silently, fighting the urge to not shout her name.

It feels that much more intense.

She collapses down on her stomach as I pull out of her.

“You obliterated my pussy,” she pants.

I ate her out for a while. A long while. Teasing her with my cock. Rubbing through her pussy without penetrating. Then I made her get on her knees and suck me off. I came down her throat and painted that pretty mouth with my release. She was begging for it. As she always does.

“You wanted it.”

“You made me wait,” she complains.

“Makin’ you wait only feels that much better.”

She can’t argue with that.

She yawns sleepily. “I should check on Ella and Mav.”

I pull her back to my front. “They’re fine. Stop fussin’.”

She shakes her head. “Are you going to be this grumpy about everything?”

I shrug. “You knew who I was a long time before we got together.”

She turns in my arms, pressing her gorgeous tits against me. As I stare down at them, my dick stirs again.

This woman drives me to the brink of insanity, and I think she knows it.

“That’s no excuse to be a grump.”

“How am I bein’ a grump? I just ate your pussy for an eternity and you’re still complainin’.”

“I just wanted to make sure she’s okay.”

“She sleeps through the night, she’s fully grown.”

She shakes her head. “Very funny.”

“Get some sleep. We’ve got a big day tomorrow.”

Even just saying the words makes me uneasy.

I know she has her whole world gunning for this. At least I’ll be here for her when it all comes crashing down. As much as we want something to be true, it doesn’t mean it will be.

“Okay,” she yawns. “I love you... Grumpy.”

I chuckle. “I love you, even when you’re naggin’ and bein’ your usual

self.”

She mumbles something else I don't decipher.

For the first time in a long time, I feel content.

There may be a storm on the horizon, and we don't know what the fuck we're gonna be facing, but we have each other. We have this. And it's where I need to be.

JASMYNE

I DON'T KNOW HOW I'VE BEEN ABLE TO FUNCTION THESE LAST FEW DAYS.

My heart has been filled with hope as much as it has dread.

I'm being ridiculous.

The chances are slim.

But I prayed for Lyndall to send us a miracle. A sign. *Something*.

And she did.

If I turn out to be wrong, so be it. But just seeing that Ella's father's name was Chad is a sign in and of itself.

The judge, however, did not agree to an extension of the decision. It seems he thinks we're clutching at straws too. But so far, it's been three days, and we're due to hear the decision tomorrow.

I googled it, and it takes two to five days for a result.

Two to five days...

But even so, if Hawk isn't Ella's father, then there is a very high possibility that she could be leaving. And though I haven't come to terms with it, I know I have to.

Sara and I have been working on building a case against Ryan should the judge swing in his favor. This won't be over.

As far as I'm concerned, I'm never going to have anything to do with him again. It didn't need to come to this.

I've tried to keep myself busy, even disclosing to Manny what my suspicions are. Of course, he's fully on board with my paranoia. I didn't talk to the girls about it, as they'll only convince me I'm nuts. Not Manny. He's all for conspiracy theories and the unexplainable.

And I can't explain it myself.

It's like I just have this feeling that Hawk is wrong, and not just because I want it so badly, which I do.

If Hawk is by chance Ella's father... I mean, it would just be so wonderful if she were to find him after all these years of not knowing.

I bite my lip. I'm not getting any work done.

I'm on the edge. The worry and stress of all of this has taken its toll.

The pain of losing my cousin and best friend weighs heavily on me daily. I cry for her loss every single day. I text Jane multiple times a day, checking in to make sure she's okay.

They were very close and she's suffering from her daughter's loss the most.

"Your children are not supposed to die before you," she'd told me in one of our earlier messages.

I can't even imagine the heartache, and the fact they've been so supportive of Lyndall's wishes. It would be easy for them to side with Ryan and fight against me. The fact that they want me to raise Ella says a lot to the court. I just hope it's enough.

It's the not knowing.

That's what it is.

Manny appears like magic, waving a plate in front of me.

I smile. "BLTs? And it's only Tuesday."

He grins, placing it on my desk. "You're going to eat all of that, or I'm not leaving."

I shake my head. "Is that a threat?"

"No, girlfriend, it's a promise. You've not been eating much lately and you're already tiny. We don't need you wasting away."

"I'm fine, stop worrying."

He sits in the chair opposite and folds his arms over his chest. "Eat."

"You're looking particularly dapper today."

"Shut up and eat, and stop trying to distract me. Of course I look good. It takes a while to get this kind of perfection, Jas. I don't just wake up like this."

I burst out laughing.

Manny's lips twitch. He always knows how to make me laugh.

"You are kinda cute, though."

"I was going for a handsome, boss man extraordinaire."

"You might need a little more eyeliner for that, sweetie."

He shoots me a look. “Now you’re talking my language, babe.”

I smile and Manny sobers. “You okay?” he goes on.

I nod. “I’m gonna be, one way or the other.”

“It’ll be freaky, though, if Hawk is Ella’s dad. Does he have any clue that he could be?”

I shrug. “He doesn’t want to admit that he could be. I saw the recognition on his face, no matter how much he tries to deny it. I think that he wants it to be true, but he knows that it’s a million to one shot, too.”

I pick up one half of the BLT as Manny shoves it closer to me. “Eat.”

I do as he says. He’s right; I haven’t been looking after myself very well at all.

I wish that I could speed up time and that we could have an outcome either way, then at least we’ll know.

While I munch away, Manny tells me that he heard about the shit going on at the bakery.

“Apparently, this guy has some vendetta against Indigo,” he says. “Goes by the name of Forger—what a pissy name—anyway, something to do with her old man who was a biker and was shot and killed years ago. We all know she hates bikers with a passion, and now Harlem has been sent to watch over her and the prospects are on stakeout duty.”

I shake my head, bewildered. “I’m still trying to figure out how you know all of this and I’m the one sleeping with a biker.”

He winks. “I have my ways.”

“I seriously don’t want to know.”

“So, now Indigo’s all pissy because she’s got Harlem breathing down her neck. Meanwhile, Stella’s going to work there, until she’ll be allowed into the club.”

I frown. “Into the club?”

“Well, there was talk about a female prospect, but Cash poo-pooed it.”

“A *female* prospect.” For some reason, I like the sound of that. “Maybe that’s what this club needs, a little shake up.”

If anyone could pull it off, it would be Stella. She’s cut from the same cloth as her father.

Manny laughs. “Not gonna happen. They shut it down fast.”

“Do you have hidden cameras in there or something?”

“No. But I know when to conveniently top up drinks and bring in snacks.” He shrugs. “Not like it’s hard. Nobody says no to my sliders or

BLTs.” He nods to the other half of the sandwich.

“Sharing all your trade secrets?”

“Honey, the way to a man is through his stomach. Don’t believe anything else you hear.”

“I’ll remember that tip, if I ever need it.”

“So, anyway, getting back to Stella. She’s going to spy on Indi for a little while...”

“Wait, surely she knows that she’s Harlem’s kid?”

“Nope. They’ve never met and she’s desperate for staff. Since Covid, it’s the same everywhere, and she already kicked Giggs out of the bakery. Claims he was trying to help, but frankly, I wouldn’t want to eat anything he’s touched.”

I bite into my sandwich, enjoying every morsel. “That I can agree with.”

“So it’ll be interesting to see how that all plays out. Personally, I think Indigo’s got balls of steel.”

“Totally. She’d have to in order to be so brash. I don’t honestly see why she let the club buy in if she’s going to be so difficult about her own safety.”

“I guess she hates bikers for reasons pertaining to her old man. Wonder what the hell he did?”

“Enough to get shot,” I reply.

A few moments later, Luna appears at the door, holding a bag of Krispy Kreme donuts. She shakes the bag. “Hey, babe, I brought you some comfort food.”

I groan. “Not you too.”

“Ungrateful much? That’s the last time I bring you donuts,” Luna says, perching on the arm of Manny’s chair.

Manny reaches out and fist pumps her. “That’s my girl, gotta fatten her up somehow.”

“Sorry, Manny just forced a BLT down my throat,” I say. “You all bring me food when my life’s in utter chaos.”

“Babe, if that’s all I’m forcing down your neck, think yourself lucky,” he fires back.

We all laugh, and I hear a grunt from the doorway.

Tag appears.

Of course. Wherever Luna is, Tag is sure to be close by.

I don’t know why he pushed her away the first time, but now she’s back, he seems to just appear whenever she’s around.

“Hey, Tag,” I say. “What’s up?”

“What’s in the bag?” he asks Luna.

She clutches the bag to her chest. “None of your business.”

“Can’t go gettin’ donuts and not sharin’.”

“Did you actually want something?” she fires back. “Or are you just going to stand there, being annoying?”

I roll my lips.

I don’t know anyone else in this club who would dare talk to the club’s Sergeant at Arms that way. But that’s Luna. She doesn’t give a shit.

“Always got a fuckin’ mouth on you,” he mutters.

“That’s right. The very same one that won’t be on you ever again.”

“You speak to your mother with that mouth?”

“Yep. And I do a lot more with it too.”

His nostrils literally flair as his eyes flick to me. “Not a good idea to test me, sugar.”

The way he says *sugar*, sounds like he’s saying *cyanide*.

“Like I’m scared of any of you,” she snorts.

“Aren’t you supposed to be at work?” he grunts, changing the subject.

“You’re not my keeper,” she sniffs. “Anyway, I’m here to check on Jas, if that’s okay with you?”

“Now, now, children,” Manny interrupts. “If you give Tag a donut, he might be inclined to leave us alone and thus ensure World War three doesn’t break out.”

“He started it,” she mutters.

“Tag,” I say again. “What’s up?”

“Saw Hawk at the garage, said he left his phone at home... he’s gonna meet you at your place at three.”

My eyes go round.

Why does he need to see me at three?

“He could’ve called me from the office phone,” I mumble.

“Could’ve, but his hands were covered in grease. Said I was headin’ back, and I’d give you the message.” He flicks Luna a dirty look. “Glad I did now, always a fuckin’ pleasure.”

Luna rolls her eyes, still clutching the bag to her chest. She’s not giving those donuts up for anything.

“Well, I better get back to work,” I say, dying to pick up the phone so I can call Hawk and find out what’s going on.

“Yeah, I gotta get back to it.” Manny stands, and Luna follows.

She places the bag on my desk, then reaches in and takes a powdered donut out and turns to Tag. She takes a huge big bite out of it and *oohs* and *ahhs* as she eats it.

He stares at her. His face is a blank expression of distaste.

She’s definitely asking for trouble. “Tastes so good.”

She waltzes toward him, and before I can blink, his hand snakes out and snatches the remaining donut from her fingers as she shrieks.

He shoves the whole thing in his mouth and turns, walking out of the room with his usual brusque swagger, and says nothing more.

“Asshole!” Luna yells after him.

I throw my head back and laugh, as does Manny.

“Oh my god, that was electric,” Manny says, holding his sides. “He’s so into you.”

“Yeah right, he looks like he wants to gauge my eyeballs out and feed them to his pet alligator.”

“He has an alligator?” Manny queries.

I laugh. “If anyone did, it’d be him.”

Manny swings an arm around Luna’s neck. “I think we should try to make him jealous.”

Her eyes light up. “That sounds like a great idea.”

They disappear, and I pull my phone out and dial the garage.

Pipes answers. “Oh hey, Jas. He’s stuck under a car. I can maybe slide the phone under there to him?”

“Yes please, Pipes.”

A few moments go by, and I hear rustling and voices. Then, “Jas?”

“What’s up? Why do you need to meet me at three?”

“Stuck under a car, can’t really talk.”

“Okay, I’ll talk. Is it the paternity test?”

“Yes.”

“Holy shit.”

“Can say that again. I’ll pick you up at home, better that way.”

We don’t want anyone knowing, and if they hear we’re going to the doctor’s, everyone will just assume that I’m pregnant. I don’t need rumors flying around on top of everything else.

“Okay.”

“See you at three. Don’t be late.”

“I won’t.”

We hang up, and my hand trembles as I take deep breaths. This is it.

Don’t get your hopes up. Don’t get your hopes up.

I clear my throat and stretch my arms out, like I’m going into battle.

Glancing at the clock, it’s only after one. Two whole hours of torture...

Breathe, I tell myself. Just fucking breathe!

Two hours later, I sit in my car, unable to make it into the house as Hawk pulls up in his truck.

Immediately, I jump out and hop into his. I lean over toward him, and he leans to me, and I peck him on the lips.

“How are you feeling?”

He shrugs. “All right.”

He doesn’t think it’s true. That’s why. Unlike me, he’s not a bundle of nerves.

I wish I could take a leaf out of his book, but I can’t. I’m my own crown of thorns.

“Ready?”

“As I’ll ever be.” He turns to look over his shoulder and starts to reverse.

“Anything you’d like to talk about? Thoughts, feelings?”

“Nope.”

“Okay.”

“Jas.”

I turn to him. “What?”

“Just be cool. I can hear the cogs in your head turnin’. Quit it. It’s crazy enough that I took a goddamn test. We need to face reality.”

I shake my head, looking out the window. “Remind me you said that in half an hour.”

I don’t want to listen to him. I don’t have to. I’ll do a Luna and put my fingers in my ears and sing if I have to.

“You don’t have to be so grouchy.”

“Really? Our whole lives could change over this test, Jas. Have we even discussed what happens if I am, somehow, Ella’s father?”

“No, because you won’t discuss it.”

“Well, maybe we should, now that you’ve got me all paranoid about it.”

I glare at him. “Don’t blame me. I’m not the one who was such a manwhore when I was younger, to the point that I don’t remember who I did and didn’t sleep with. I can count my lovers on one hand, Hawk.”

He turns and glares right back at me. "It's not easy livin' with an angel."

I open my mouth, and then close it again. "You can't say stuff like that."

He reaches over and puts his hand on my knee. "I don't want to fight, not today. Tomorrow, sure. But today, can we just have a day when we pretend that this isn't either the best or worst day of our lives?"

I take a breath. "Sure. But, we should talk about what we say to Ella... if it's true."

He pops a shoulder. "We tell her the truth. I met her Mom briefly and never saw her again. I didn't know she existed until today. I don't wanna lie to her."

"I know, but it might be a shock, with everything that's going on..."

He looks at me again. "No lies, Jas. Not gonna do that. So it's settled. If it's true, which, by the way, I don't think it is, and I still think we're nuts for even doin' this, then we tell her today. If it's not, then we never mention it again."

"Deal," I say, my stomach swirling with nerves.

I mean, I can't ask for more than that, not really.

A big part of me agrees with him. We are a little bit nuts, but at least we can't say we didn't try every single avenue.

"Good."

I look out of the window again, then, "Do you hope she is?"

I hear him take a deep breath. He links his fingers through mine. "Jas. You know, I'd love nothin' more than to be a Father someday. I never thought I'd ever want that, and then I met you. And now I want kids. Somethin' inside me changed so quickly. I want it all. And that includes Ella. Not just to make the custody battle easier, but because I know we'd make a great family. In time, of course, at the pace Ella needs." I take a long, deep breath of relief as he continues. "But regardless of if Ella is my blood or not, I still want all those things. I want to be with you, and if that includes her and Maverick, then I'm on board. Even if she's not my kid."

I try not to let the tears well, but it's becoming impossible these days. "I love that, Hawk. I love all of what you said. And I don't want to push the envelope any more than I already have. I feel better knowing how we're going to handle things, but you can't blame me for wanting this. Maybe I am selfish, but I don't want Ella to suffer any more."

He brings my hand to his mouth and kisses my knuckles. "I don't either."

We roll up to the doctor's office and sit anxiously in the waiting room.

It feels like hours, when only a few minutes have passed. I try not to bite my nails. A range of emotions rolls through me.

We hold hands when it's our turn to go into the doctor's office. When the pleasantries are over, she hands Hawk the report.

He swallows hard, holding it in his hands but not looking at it.

My heart races in my chest.

"What does it say?" he asks the doc.

"Well... ultimately, it states whether you and the child share genetic markers."

Hawk looks at me.

"Go ahead," I say as he swallows hard.

He looks down at the report and reads it for a few moments, then he looks back up at the doc.

"Hawk?" I question, not able to read his expression. "What does it say?"

He looks back down, swallowing roughly. "It says... that there's a ninety-eight point five percent..."

"You're Ella's Father," the doc clarifies.

My eyes go wide. "What the hell?" I practically jump in Hawk's lap as I snatch the papers from his hands.

"Holy fuck," Hawk says. "I'm... I'm Ella's father, for real?"

The doc smiles. "I'm taking it this comes as a surprise?"

"Somethin' like that," he replies. "Holy shit... and this can't be... wrong, right?"

She shakes her head. "You're the father, in layman's terms."

I read the top few lines, as that's all we need to know... "Hawk?"

His eyes meet mine. "I know."

"Holy crap."

He pulls me into his arms. "See. I told you it was gonna be okay." He presses his lips against mine and the tears freely flow from my eyes.

The doc clears her throat, and we pull apart.

"Sorry," I stammer. "It's just... we didn't expect this."

Hawk snorts. "I didn't. *You*, however, definitely did."

She smiles. "I can give you two a few moments, if you'd like."

I smile at her gratefully as she takes her leave.

Hawk runs a hand through his hair as I wrap my arms around his neck. "Holy shit, you're a father. I... I almost don't know what to say."

His lips twitch. "Almost? You sure? That's not like you."

“Fuck, Hawk... all those years ago...”

“I should feel guilty that I don’t remember all that much. Like I said, we were both probably drunk and I was pretty wild back then. When you showed me the picture, it jogged a memory. She was beautiful. I remember her smile...”

“But you never said anything.”

“I didn’t want to get your hopes up, Jas. This is just as shocking to me as it is to you. I fathered a kid I’ve only just met, and only by chance. You don’t know how that makes me feel.”

I shake my head. “I don’t understand how the universe works. Lyndall never knew you...”

He pushes my hair back off my face. “No, but maybe deep down she did. This has worked out how it was supposed to, in a twisted, round-about way. Fate brought it all together.”

I pull back, eyes wide. “But you don’t believe in any of that stuff.”

He snorts. “I do now.”

I press my lips to his. “I didn’t just want you to be Ella’s father so she could stay,” I whisper. “I wanted it so much for you, because of how great it would be for the two of you to get to know one another.”

“And now we can,” he says. “I’m her biological father, Jas. She’s mine. And that means Ryan doesn’t have a snowball in Hell’s chance of taking my daughter.”

Tears well in my eyes. “I love you so much.”

He kisses me softly. “I love you too.”

“I can’t wait to tell Ella. It’s going to be strange, breaking the news to her...”

“Well, maybe we should call her therapist, see what we should do.”

I stare at him. “When you say shit like that, it makes my heart so happy that you care so much.”

He kisses my nose. “Of course I care. I always will.”

“Let’s go back to my place. There’s still an hour until Ella gets out of basketball practice.”

His lips twitch as I stand. “What?” I ask.

“I don’t want to go to your place.”

I frown. “You don’t?”

He shakes his head. “No, I want to go home.”

It’s him. Everything I ever wanted is right in front of me.

“Home?”

“Yes. With you, Ella, and Maverick. My family.” He stands and wraps his arms around me. “What do you say to that, baby?”

I laugh, throwing my arms around him once more. “I say yes, *Hawkie*.”

HAWK

I'VE NEVER EXPERIENCED THIS FEELING BEFORE.

Falling in love with Jasmyne is one thing, but finding out I'm a father is completely another.

It's blown me away.

I never thought this would happen, even though Lyndall was a part of my past that I could never regret.

Now I have a ready-made family and I couldn't be happier.

If anyone told me I'd be in this situation only a few months ago, I would've laughed in their faces.

Like Manny keeps saying; we're all falling like dominos. And I guess he has a point.

I'm usually calm, but my hands are sweaty and I feel tightness in my chest. I'm a father. This changes things.

I also asked Jas if it was okay if I picked up Ella from school. I won't tell her anything until we get back to Jas's place. But I need this time with her. I also didn't add that it was on my Harley. Ella has always wanted a ride, so why not let her have one? I just bought her a helmet. It might be pink and all, but I'm sure she'll like it.

As I wait for her at the school gates, I take a couple of deep breaths.

I obviously cared about her before, but now she's my flesh and blood... my *daughter*. *Something* inside me instantly changed.

I'm almost thirty years old, and I feel like I just grew up.

I've always wanted Jas, and only until recently I admitted I wanted kids, but knowing that Ella was out in the world these last twelve years and I've

missed it makes me sad.

I don't know what kind of dad I would've been, but things happen for a reason. I have to accept that and the years I missed out on. I can only make up for it now.

She's here now. So am I. And that's all that matters.

She bounds toward me, swinging her school bag.

I can only now see the resemblance. She has my eyes. And my hair color. But everything else about her is Lyndall.

I swallow hard as she says, "Hey, Hawk. What are you doing here?"

I smile back. "I... Uh... I thought you might like to take a ride with me."

Her eyes go wide when she sees my motorcycle parked behind me.

"For real?"

"Uh, huh." I hand her the helmet.

"Aunt Jas okayed it?"

I grin. "Nope. But I'm sure she'll be cool with it."

She gives me a look. Okay, so I'm the reckless one.

I'm not gonna be an idiot with my kid on my bike. I'll go slower.

I take her backpack from her and loosen the straps so it'll fit on my back.

We walk over to my sled and she stares at it wide-eyed.

"You good?"

"Yes!" she says excitedly.

I pull her helmet on her head and fix the strap. "So you lean with me, when we take corners, got me?"

"Okay."

"And hold on."

"Are we really doing this?"

I lift her and sit her on the seat. She looks tiny.

"Yes. And Jas will ground me for it.

She laughs. "I'd like to see that."

I grin. "I bet you would." I move her backpack to my front, so she can hold on to me better.

I climb on and instruct her to hold on to me and to not let go.

I start the engine and it guns to life.

She squeals excitedly and I laugh.

She makes me feel like a kid again myself.

I crab walk backward and then we take off. She squeals again.

I pat her hands around my waist and I know I'm gonna be in trouble with

Jas, but I don't care. Ella has always wanted to ride with me, and we'll stick to the speed limit.

We move through the city traffic with ease, the downtown flow busy but manageable.

I know it's gonna bug Jas, and that is a consequence I'll take after hearing my kid scream with laughter.

I can't believe she's mine. I've been in disbelief all afternoon.

She was my child this whole time?

I feel like an asshole for not knowing sooner about Lyndall, and guilt racks through me because of it. I don't feel good about any of it, especially the not knowing. Maybe, with time and reflection, I can forgive myself for the missed years.

The ride can't last forever; we need to tell her the truth.

Plus, Jas will be waiting and I know she's dying to spill the tea.

Pulling up to her place, I kick the stand down and kill the engine. Ella hops off, using my shoulders to hoist herself to the pavement.

When her feet hit the ground, she undoes her helmet and pulls it off. Jumping up and down, she says. "Hawk! That was so much fun!"

I swing my leg over and grin at her. "Yeah?"

She does a twirl, laughing, as I can't help but watch in awe. "Yes! I want to do it again!"

"Not so fast," I start, then I see Jas coming out of her apartment, her hands on her hips.

"Hawk?" she gapes when she sees us.

I make a face at Ella. "Guess we got busted."

Ella runs up to Jas and gives her a big hug, and though I can see she's mad, she can't stop herself smiling when Ella starts telling her how great it was and all the things she saw.

I shrug. "Sorry, babe. Spur of the moment thing."

I sling an arm around her as Ella runs on ahead into the house.

She looks up at me. "Is this how it's going to be now? Just doing shit without discussing it with me."

"No," I say. "I wanted Ella to remember this day."

She takes a breath, then says, "I don't think she'll forget this day in a hurry, babe."

"She did good. She's a natural."

She rolls her eyes. "I mean it, Hawk. She's a kid. She shouldn't be on a

Harley.”

I pull her to my side and kiss the top of her head. “Relax. She was safe with me. She loved it.”

“You’re a bad influence.”

“Never said I was an angel.”

She pauses and asks, “How are we going to do this?”

We already discussed it in the car on the way home from the doctors. We’re going to sit her down and tell her the truth.

“You know how.”

“I know, but I’m nervous now.”

I chuckle. “You’re nervous? What if she doesn’t want me as her Dad?”

“We both know that won’t happen. She adores you.”

“Yes, but it could be a shock... I mean, it’s all kinda weird for her.”

“Agreed, but whatever happens, we’re in this together. Right?”

I smooth back her hair. “Just like we said.”

She smiles and reaches up onto her tippy toes to kiss me. I lean down and meet her half way.

“It’s gonna be fine,” she adds when we part. “I promise.”

We head inside and find Ella playing with Maverick.

I guess it’s now or never.

“Hey kiddo, we might get takeout tonight. Your choice.”

“Sounds good,” she says. “Can I give Maverick his treat?”

Jas looks at me and I give her a chin lift. “Hawk and I need to talk to you about something after that, okay?”

“If it’s about homework, I already did it at lunch.”

My kid’s smart. I love that about her.

“It’s not about that,” I say, my heart racing with anxiety. I feel that rush of adrenaline and I don’t know quite where to put myself.

I mean, will she accept it? She’s easygoing, but that doesn’t mean that she’ll be cool with it. And then what?

We’ve hung out a lot, but she doesn’t really know me, and I don’t know her.

Obviously, that will change in time, but that’s a long way off.

For now, I need to stay focused.

She and Maverick run off, leaving Jas and me to our own devices.

“Why is this so fuckin’ hard?” I gripe, beginning to pace.

Jas turns to face me. “Because it’s all brand new,” she says. “We want

this to work because you care about Ella. I really think you're stressing for nothing."

"I just want it to go well."

Jas cups my face with one hand. "You're worrying way too much."

"Can you blame me? A lot happened today."

She gives me a reassuring smile. "No time like the present, right?"

I clear my throat. "Yeah."

"Ella!" Jas yells as I move over to the couch. I sit, then stand, then sit again.

I feel so awkward.

"Yeah?" she yells back.

"Come out here for a second. Hawk and I need to talk to you."

A few moments later, with Maverick running ahead of her, she appears again.

"He's so fast," she pants, doubling over, trying to catch her breath.

It's a joy to see her smiling and playing with the dog. Things I never anticipated or desired. How wrong I was in that assumption.

Her blue eyes. Just like mine. I can see myself in her and also her mom.

I also didn't have a growth spurt until about thirteen, and though she's slight, something tells me she might have a growth spurt soon as tallness does run in the family.

"Ella," I say, my voice shaking just a little. "Let's sit for a second."

She looks to Jas, then to me. "Uh oh. This sounds bad."

I shake my head. "Not at all. I promise."

She scoots on the couch next to me, picking up Maverick as he whines at her feet. Jas sits beside her.

"Is this about Uncle Ryan?" she frowns.

"No, kiddo. It's about something more important. Jas and I both want you to know that you're wanted and needed. We both want you, Ella. We want to be a family with Maverick and create new memories" *Does that sound lame?*

"Okay," she says warily. "So does that mean I get to stay?" There's hope in her eyes that pleads with me. It tugs at my heartstrings like nothing else.

"Yes, Ella. It does. If that's what you want."

She nods, turning to look at Jas. "Can I stay?"

Jas smiles, tears forming in her eyes. "Yes, honey. It means you can stay."

She brightens and then does a little happy dance, holding Maverick in her

arms.

“But there’s something else,” I say, before I lose my nerve. “Something that affects you and me.”

She looks up at me with those big blue eyes. “You’re not leaving, are you?”

I smile. “No, sweetheart. Nobody is going anywhere.” I flick my eyes over to Jas, who sits there patiently, her prayer hands pressed over her mouth. “In fact... I took a paternity test. Do you know what one of those is?”

She shakes her head. “Not really.”

“Well. You have a DNA test to determine if you are related to a person. Like if I wanted to confirm if I’m a child’s Father, for example.” *God why is this so hard?*

She looks a little confused, but I plow on. “I knew your Mom a long time ago. When we were both younger... and I didn’t know that we...” I run a hand through my hair. Her blue eyes searching mine, breaking me further. It puts me in a choke hold I’ve never had before. “I didn’t know that we made a baby, Ella. I’m your... I’m your Father...”

Her eyes go wide. “You’re my Dad?”

I swallow hard. “I know it’s a lot. You don’t have to be okay with it, but I never knew you existed, baby girl. I didn’t know. Me and your Mom only met up once and went our separate ways. Had I known, I would have been deeply involved in your life.”

She bites her lip, processing the overwhelming information.

Jas puts an arm around her shoulders. “We’re in just as much shock as you are, Ella. And if you have mixed feelings or questions, then we’re here to answer them.”

“You’re my Dad?” she says again, looking at me with new eyes. “I mean, I know we have the same eyes... and hair...”

I nod. “I’m your Dad, kiddo. The test is accurate. I’m just so sorry that I never knew about you sooner. I missed out on so much.” The emotion shows in my voice and I don’t care. This is my family. Without vulnerability in front of them, what do I have?

“And my Mom never knew?” she asks, stroking Maverick on the head.

“No, honey, she didn’t. We only exchanged first names.” *How do you explain a one-night stand to a twelve-year-old?* “And then we lost touch after that.” I try not to feel angry. It wasn’t Lyndall’s fault. She had no clue where to start searching. I hadn’t even joined the MC back then.

So many years.

Maybe I would have been better with the responsibility of a kid. I also may have fucked it up. I guess we'll never know that now.

"How do you feel about that?" Jas asks gently. "And it's okay to tell the truth."

She turns to Jas. "I think it's pretty cool," she says, surprising us both. "I mean, we get along. I look like him. We're both obsessed with Maverick and love motorcycles. It seems kinda obvious now."

I chuckle. "It does?"

"Well, not really, but if Mom liked you, then that kinda says it all."

I don't want to push her, although my heart could explode. She can do this in her own time and I'll take whatever she's willing to give.

"I'm so lucky," I tell her. "That we found each other. And I don't ever want you to think I could ever replace your Mom, or Jas either. She was an amazing Mom and I'm so sorry her life was cut short. But just remember you are wanted, Ella. You're very much loved by both of us and if you'd like, we've talked about moving to my house. It's much larger, and it has a real yard for Maverick."

She rolls both her lips together and nods her head. "We'd love that. Wouldn't we Mav?" She claps his little paws together and I laugh.

Okay, so she's taking it better than I thought. And she isn't horrified I'm her dad.

Jasmyne meets my eye, and a tear rolls down her cheek.

"Why are you crying?" Ella asks, reaching up to brush it away.

"Because I'm happy," she says. "I know your Mom would be so proud of you. All she ever wanted was your happiness. You're being so good about all of this, and I know it must be so hard."

She folds into Jas's arms and Jas kisses the top of her head. I'm not jealous of Ella's comfort with her, but I hope she can feel the same about me eventually. I've raised my sister and I'm good with kids, but it has to be her choice. And I would never push her.

"I'm glad I have you," Ella whispers as Jas holds her tight. "Mom would be happy."

She kisses her head again. "Yes she would."

We sit for a few moments of silence, letting it all sink in.

Maverick pushes his way onto my lap and snuggles into my arms. He's such a good little dog. I'm so pleased he's fit in and Ella just adores him.

“Well, I’ve got a few things to do…” I start, as I get up to leave.

Before I know it, Ella is folding herself around me and squashing her face into Maverick’s as she attempts to hug me. I bend down and take her in my arms, bewilderment coming over me.

“I’m glad you’re my Dad, Hawk,” she says, surprising me once more.

“Yeah?”

“Yep. I mean, it could be a lot worse.”

I laugh. “Gee, thanks.” I let her go and I pass her Maverick back.

Ella turns and looks up at me. “Hey, Hawk?”

I give her a chin lift.

She giggles when she says, “Am I supposed to be calling you Dad now?”

I chuckle. “No honey, you can call me whatever you feel comfortable doing. No pressure.”

She nods. “Wanna go shoot some hoops?”

I’m glad that she doesn’t want me to go, or that she’s sad or confused. She has every right to be. “Only if you let me win.”

“Not happening.”

“Hurry and change and we’ll take the bike to the courts… if that’s okay with Jas.” I look down as Jasmyne folds into my arms.

“You two are a bad influence on each other,” she chastises. “But I’m sure I’m not going to win this battle.”

Ella skips off happily.

“Well, that was the most painful thing I’ve ever done,” I mutter.

She leans up and I reach down to peck her lips. “You did great.”

“You think?”

“Nope, I know. She just needs time. It’s a lot to drop on a kid.”

“I get it. I’m still coming to terms with it myself.”

She looks up at me as I plant a kiss on her forehead. “I love you, Hawk.”

I smile. “I love you, too. I’m sorry I was such an ass when we first got together.”

“You’re not getting soft on me now, are you?”

I reach down and grab her ass as she yelps. “I’ll remember you said that later.”

“Promise?”

I grin, finding her mouth once more. “Until my dying day, babe, until my dying day.”

EPILOGUE

TWO WEEKS LATER

Jasmyne

“I can’t,” I pant, riding Hawk’s mouth as he crouches under my desk and eats me out like a starving man. He’s been working a lot lately, so we haven’t had much alone time. “Hawk... we shouldn’t do this here...”

“Tryin’ to eat here,” he growls, and I spread my legs wider. “Give a man a minute.”

I fall back into my chair and let him have his way with me.

This man never ceases to surprise me.

“Anyone could walk in,” I pant.

“Sucks to be you, then.”

“Oh God,” I cry, clamping a hand over my mouth.

“That’s it, Jas. I’ve been neglectin’ your pussy lately, but I’m makin’ up for it now.” He flicks my clit with his tongue and I detonate. I try not to be loud, but this man is exceptionally skilled. I cry out, savoring every lick and suck as he rides me through it. My body is so needy since it’s been a few days since we had sex. Now we have Ella with us and my apartment is small, we have to prioritize our alone time... and then we have to be quiet. Hawk is repainting his house before we move in. We can’t wait.

I grip one hand in his hair and yank his head up so he has to look at me. “Jesus, you’re so good at that.”

He grins. “I’m not done yet.”

“I need your dick inside me,” I moan. “Hurry.”

“So bossy,” he admonishes, pushing my chair back on its wheels as he starts to rise from the carpet. “You know what bossy little bitches get.”

I turn and sit on my desk, letting my skirt rise up so he can see everything.

Reaching between my legs, he hisses as he fondles me. “So ready for me.”

“I’m always ready for you.”

He starts to unbuckle his jeans and frees himself in a few deft seconds. His giant dick springing free as I grasp it in my palm and squeeze as I pull.

“Fuck,” he mutters.

We play with each other as he stares down at his hand.

I know what he needs... so I undo my blouse quickly, letting my lace covered bra peek through as he grunts.

“So fuckin’ beautiful, baby. You’re mine now.”

Hawk claimed me at the table a few weeks ago and despite the fact I still think bikers are meatheads. If this is what he needs, then I can bend a little.

“Fuck me,” I cry when he pinches my nipple through my bra.

“What happened to ‘*oh no, somebody might see us,*’” he says in a high-pitched voice mimicking mine.

“Shut up and get inside me.” I tug on his dick and he chuckles as I slide of the desk and bend over, my ass facing him as I lean my elbows down on my paperwork.

He grunts, spreading my legs further apart. He grabs one ass cheek hard and then growls in my ear, “You want this big cock, babe?”

I push my ass out further and he reaches around to yank my bra down. “Yes, but hurry, Hawk.”

He bites down on my neck at the same time he lines up and sinks into me. I know from how grumbly and persistent he is that this is gonna be hot and rough. He pulls out and then slams back in as the breath leaves my chest with an *oomph*. I stick my ass out further as he gropes my breast with one hand, the other at my hip, where he grips hard.

God, he feels like a dream. His big, thick cock slides in and out as he starts to move his hips.

In out. In out. He drives me completely insane.

When Hawk wants what he wants, he just takes it, and I can’t deny that I love that about him.

I love how strong he is.

How dependable he is.

He's really taken with Ella and they've come a long way in the last few weeks. Their relationship continues to flourish and grow. Ella has had a lot of questions and Hawk has been only too happy to try to answer what he can.

She continues to mourn her mom and will for a long time. But I'm happy that she's in our care where we can watch over her and give her all the love and support she needs.

"Fuck, baby," he groans.

He really starts to hammer it home, gripping both my hips as I feel his balls hit my pussy repeatedly. God, this man... he's so good at this... and so damn big...

"Hawk!" I cry.

"Shh, baby. Let's not let everyone in the clubhouse know what I'm doing to you during work."

He rams in and out as I push up onto my hands and in turn I stick my ass out further, wanting him so deep.

"Fuck," he mutters. "I'm coming, Jas."

"Oh," I cry as he pounds in and out of me, my hands gripping the papers, which are now flying everywhere. "Yes!"

I still as he spills his seed inside me, reveling in how good this feels and how bad ass he is.

When he's spent, he leans down and cups my face, bringing his mouth to mine as he plunges his tongue inside.

"You're so bad," I whisper.

"Was just thinkin' the same thing about you," he mutter against my lips.

He pulls out and I already mourn the loss of him. He reaches for the tissues on the desk and cleans himself up. When I reach for one, he purposely knocks the box off the desk.

"No you don't," he tells me, pulling my panties back up, cupping my mound. "You can walk around with my cum drippin' out of you for the rest of the day. That's what bad girls get when they let their old man fuck them at work."

"I love it when you talk dirty."

"That's because you're greedy." He kisses me again and tucks himself back into his jeans as I pull myself together.

"We're both as bad as each other."

He chuckles. “Well, you shouldn’t be such a hot piece of ass.” He gives my ass a squeeze as I pull my skirt down and swat his hand away.

“You know how to turn a girl’s head.”

He pulls my back to his front. “Long as I’m always turnin’ it, that’s all that matters.”

I turn in his arms, cupping his face. “You’re just too damn much.”

His eyes assess me and he leans in and rubs his nose against mine. “You make me better, baby. I’ll always want this.”

“What? Sex on my desk?”

He rolls his eyes. “Can you be serious for one damn minute?”

“Sorry.” I grin.

“You,” he goes on. “I’ll always want this closeness with you. No more dancin’ around what we want. We just tell each other. Sure, we’re gonna piss one another off. I get that. But as long as we come back together... and have great makeup sex, I’m happy.”

I kiss him softly. “Are you, Hawk? Truly?”

“Yes,” he says. “And I can’t wait to put a ring on your finger and put a baby in you.”

My eyes go wide. “Before discussing babies, let’s enjoy this for half a second.”

He grins against my lips. “Just don’t take too long about it.”

“Bossy.”

I love him so damn much. I never thought I’d have kids, or that it would be with Hawk. But now I can’t imagine anything else. I want to enjoy this time with Ella, Maverick, and the man of my dreams a little longer. We’ve been through so much. It’s time to focus on Ella and her needs for a little bit. Then we’ll think about us.

“Let’s go home,” he mutters. “Blow off work. Ella’s at school and you owe me.”

“Because you went down on me under my desk?”

“Exactly. Now you get to clean me up with that hot little mouth of yours.”

I grin. “Such a romantic.”

“That’s what you ordered,” he muses. “Take it or leave it.”

I shake my head. “I’ll take it,” I say, pulling him closer. “I’ll always want this.”

“Me too, babe, me too.”



Hawk

Two months later

If you'd have told me that I'd be going to a middle school Daddy/Daughter dance a few months ago, I'd tell you that you're crazy.

But this is my life now.

It's Ella's first dance, and since she turned thirteen a month back, my daughter is officially a teenager. I can't even believe I'm old enough to have a thirteen-year-old daughter, but here we are.

We take our places on the dance floor, and I try to remember the steps.

Yes, my bossy daughter has been making me practice.

I'm willing to do anything for the women in my life. Thank god I've got Maverick, or I'd be outnumbered for real, not that he's on my side with anything.

I dressed up in nice slacks and a white shirt, but Ella insisted that I wear my cut if that made me more comfortable. For tonight, I thought it may scare the other kids and parents, so I wore a suit jacket instead.

I've never worn a suit in my entire life, and judging by the way Jas looked at me when we left, I think I'll be getting lucky tonight.

We begin to dance the formal routine we put together and I just hope I don't step on her toes.

Ella's face lit up when she asked if I would come and I said yes. It couldn't match my grin, though. She hasn't called me dad officially yet, but I know in time that will come. Or at least I hope it will.

I'm less panicked now that I see others looking nervous too.

Unlike most of these father's, I'm pretty new at this. Over the last few months, Ella and I have become close. Spending weekends doing stuff I usually wouldn't like going to the movies, playing basket-ball - which is one of Ella's favorite pastimes- and our nightly dog walk. Jas has helped to keep us both connected. Giving us space when we need it and offering me solutions to some of the awkward questions I get from Ella.

I still feel bad about how things began with her mom. We were just kids. The young lady that Lyndall raised alone is a credit to her. I wish I could've known her and seen what an amazing mom she was. My daughter is beautiful. Just like her mom.

She's been up and down with her emotions. She'll always miss her mom

and Jas isn't and would never try to replace her, but she's been a rock. Making sure Ella has everything she needs to settle her in to this. I can only hope we're both doing it right.

She's met my sister, my mom... In fact, my mom can't get enough of her. She dotes on her and Ella loves the attention. She kinda takes after Sistine in that way.

Tonight is a night to enjoy ourselves.

Jas sent everyone in the family, including Ella's side, photos of us together before we left for the dance and I'm over the moon. I'm so proud to be her father.

"You good, angel?" I ask when I spin her around the room.

"Yes," she says, and I can tell she's counting steps in her head.

"Remember what Jas said," I prompt as she meets my eye. "To have fun."

A slow smile creeps on her face. "I don't want to fall on my face."

I laugh. "As if you would."

This has truly been one of the best nights of my life, especially when Jas picks us up in my truck after the dance.

"How did it all go?" she beams, looking from me to Ella.

Ella and I grin at one another. "Amazing," Ella says as I wrap an arm around her.

"It was pretty cool," I admit. "Even if I was the only one with two left feet."

Ella laughs. "You did fine, Dad."

I open my mouth then close it again. *Did I hear that right?*

Jas tries not to make a big deal out of it, but she bites on her bottom lip to save from a side-splitting grin.

She says it casually, like it's nothing, but my heart races in my chest at her words.

"I'm proud of you, Ella," I say, when I find my words. "You look all grown up, which by the way is not allowed. I'd like you to stay thirteen for just a little while."

She giggles. "At least a year, anyway."

I pull her close and kiss her on the forehead. "So proud," I mutter.

"Love you, Dad," she whispers as she folds into my arms. "Thanks for dancing with me, even though I know you hated every minute."

My throat thickens at her words. *Love you, Dad?*

I fight for air. "I love you too, kiddo. You don't even know how much."

She unfolds herself and gives Jas a hug before climbing into the back seat of my truck.

“Holy shit,” I whisper.

“Oh, Hawk. I’m so happy for you,” Jas whispers, tears leaking from her eyes.

I wipe a stray tear, forming in my eye. I’ve only cried twice in my life, not that I’d ever admit that.

“She called me Dad, and she…” I trail off.

Jas folds into my arms as I pull her in for a hug.

“Holy shit,” Jas whispers. “But let’s face it, Hawk. She loved you on the day you met.”

I guess that is kind of true. We hit it off straight away. I guess my kid is just a chip of old block after all.

“She must be an excellent judge of character,” I chuckle. “That or my trying too hard paid off.”

The window winds down and Ella calls out, “Get a room you two, jeez.”

We both turn as Ella rolls her eyes, and the window goes back up.

“I guess that’s our cue to leave,” I say.

“I guess it is,” Jas agrees, then she whispers, “You do not know how hot you look in that suit.”

I pull on the lapels of my jacket. “Might make you wait for it.”

“Don’t you dare!” she points.

I kiss her. “Play your cards right and I might relent.”

“Promises, promises.”

Driving home, for the first time in my life, I finally feel complete.



Harlem slumps down in the chair just before church. As usual, I’m here early.

He gives me a chin lift. “Hawk.”

“You good, brother?”

His jaw clenches and I know all is not well in paradise. “Fine.”

“Let me take a stab at it?”

He gives me a look.

Harlem can make your life a living hell if you get on his bad side, but he’s usually pretty easygoing.

I'm organizing a club run this weekend before winter sets in, and I can't wait to take Jas. The bakery takeover and attempted break-in have resulted in few club runs these last few weeks.

To think I'd never considered a family until I found Jas. Now that's all I can think about.

I can't wait to put a baby in her and give Ella a little brother or sister.

"Indigo is given' you hell, and she's not givin' you any sugar to soften the blow?"

He grunts.

Bingo.

Though it's not a hard one to figure out. He's been quiet on the lady front, and I know it's because he has a thing for her. Even if he won't admit it.

"Woman is drivin' me nuts with her array of crap more like," he grumbles.

I have to admit that he seems pretty stressed.

"So? What's your plan?"

"Nothin'. Stayin' away seems like a good idea."

I roll my eyes. "Seriously?"

"Just because your life is like the Brady Bunch, doesn't mean the rest of us are livin' it."

I smirk. "Brady Bunch, like you can talk. Dad of the year."

The one thing Harlem is most proud of, are his kids.

He gives me a chin lift. "How are things goin' with Ella?"

"Fantastic," I admit. "Better than expected. She misses her Mom a lot, but that's to be expected."

He nods. "Shit gotta be rough."

"We're doin' okay."

He gives me a hard pat on the back. "Believe in your ability to do right by both of them. Now you have a family, shit changes."

Of course the club knows everything and are supportive. Everyone has been understanding and we're looking forward to our first Christmas together.

"Tell me about it, but I wouldn't want it any other way."

He looks at me with genuine pride in his eyes, momentarily forgetting his woman troubles.

"You know what else?" I say, just in case he thinks I'm going soft. "I think you need to get on over to *Sweet Treats* and remind Indigo why you're

the Enforcer of this club.”

He glances at me, his lips twitch. "Is this the woman with a baseball bat and gun hidden in her kitchen?"

I chuckle. "Point taken."

He runs a hand through his hair. I've never seen Harlem unglued. He must like this chick.

"You know what they say?" I go on, as the others pile into the room ready for our meeting.

He gives me a look. "What's that?"

"Everything happens for a reason."

"Yeah?"

I shrug. "I guess I'm a testament to that."

"I guess you are."

I have no clue what the hell he's going to do, but as Enforcer of this club, Indigo falls under the club's protection. She has to go along with it. Something else that makes me shake my head.

I know she won't go down without a fight, but I'm intrigued to see how this plays out. Harlem has been going there whenever he can, and I think this woman intrigues him with her mystery.

I sit back and look around at my brothers. Damn, I feel better than I ever did.

I feel... *happy*. I owe it all to Jasmyne. She gave me everything I could ever need, and then Ella came into my life.

I can't say I'm the worlds greatest dad like Harlem is, but I'll be damned if I don't try my absolute hardest.

They're my family.

And my compass will always point to them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to everyone who has been waiting for Hawk and Jasmyne's story.

Thanks firstly to my amazing readers! I'm so happy y'all are enjoying the NOLA Rebels series so far. We've so much to do together and I've so many more books planned for next year.

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Thank you to the new and existing blogger ARC's who signed up to read and review, your honest reviews are much appreciated!

If you can spare the time to leave a review on GR and/or Amazon if you loved Cash or any of my books that would be greatly appreciated and helps me so much as an indie author. Links are on the following pages.

Anddd... I have a BONUS EPILOGUE for you featuring Cash and Deanna, just click the link below to download.

Also Harlem and Indigo will be coming on 4th January 2024. These two are so damn fun to write. Both single parents. He's the club's Enforcer and she's the bakery owner who won't back down. Fireworks definitely fly with these two and I love Harlem's protective side so much and how much he loves his kids. I love single dad trope and I love everything about this couple.

Be sure to check out my private Facebook group (links below) as I update this page regularly before anything gets released on other social media channels.

Love from Australia, MF xx

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mackenzey Fox is an author of contemporary, enemies to lovers, motorcycle and dark themed romance novels. When she's not writing she loves vegan cooking, walking her beloved pooch's, reading books and is an expert on online shopping.

She's slightly obsessed with drinking tea, testing bubbly Moscato, watching home decorating shows and has a black belt in origami. She strives to live a quiet and introverted life in Western Australia's South-West with her hubby, twin sister and her dogs.

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WANT MORE?

Cash and Deanna's BONUS EPILOGUE. Click here to see what is going on with their BIG NEWS!!

Link: <https://dl.bookfunnel.com/mhc6r7rrkb>

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WANT MORE?

Harlem and Indigo... coming January 4th 2024

Synopsis (subject to change and unedited):

NOLA Rebels MC - (New Orleans Series Book 4)

Harlem is a single dad MC club Enforcer romance with a 18 year age-gap, praise and daddy kink, a tough spit-fire heroine, single mom, H is very protective with lots of steam.

The men of the NOLA Rebels MC will do anything for their club. They're a brotherhood, a club who stands mighty, and above all else, they take care of business, New Orleans style.

The bikers may rule this city, but the women of the club have their hearts, and the men will do anything to protect what's theirs.

It is part of a series but can be read stand-alone with a HEA. This book is recommended for mature readers 18+

Blurb:

Harlem

There's no point in denying it

I have a thing for her

Indigo Monroe

The Sweet Treats bakery owner

But now the MC owns a share

Now she's forced to listen

Not that there is any taming Indigo
She's a wildcat
Testing me at every turn
A woman on a mission to outrun her past
And outrun me
But when it comes to her
I'm always one step ahead
She's not just under my protection
She's under my skin
And that's a very bad place to be

Indigo

He's the man I tried to stay away from
The MC club's Enforcer
He's larger than life
Says what he thinks
Does what he wants
And he isn't sorry about it
I overlook all the good things about him
Because I don't want to fall
The last time I did, it almost cost me my life
I have my child to think of
And my business
But the way Harlem watches me
It makes me want to fall
It makes me want to forget everything
Especially how much I want him

Tropes:

MC club Enforcer
Age gap (18 years)
Daddy/Praise kink
Protector
Single dad/Single mom
Tough heroine
He falls first

SNEAK PEAK - HARLEM

I stare up at the *Sweet Treats Bakery* and frown.

The neon sign is out.

Jett just installed new security cameras, locks and a safe since Indigo's place had an attempted break in not so long ago.

In the months that I've been keeping an eye on the place, I've learned quite a bit about Maddog's daughter.

Of course, I didn't know the guy well. Only met him in passing years ago before the old bastard was shot.

There was a vendetta with a rival club, and death is usually how most of these things worked. Thought we're not a 1%er club, that doesn't mean we don't have our own setbacks from time to time.

As the club's Enforcer, I'm responsible for ensuring the club rules are followed at all times and I respond to any threats within or outside the club. Anyone who holds a patch at this club is under my protection, and I try to keep conflicts between the brothers to a bare minimum. In a club this big, there are always disagreements but most of the time we're all on the same page.

If a fight breaks out with another club, I'm generally the one who carries it out, along with the Sergeant at Arms, Tag, as he's one of the strangest brothers in the club along with Hawk.

The Raging Fury MC was notorious back in the day, but that was over twenty years ago. They were known for shady deals, running drugs, guns, people, anything they could get their hands on.

Indigo would've been a teenager when her old man was shot. I'm sure

that time doesn't hold good memories for her.

I'm forty-seven and she couldn't be a day older than thirty, but I'm not exactly sure of her age.

She has a kid. Camille is fourteen, the same age as my boy, Kai.

I have a daughter too, Stella, she's eighteen going on thirty.

She wants to be a mechanic, much to my dismay. Not that I'm not all for women doing jobs that are usually predominantly done by men, on the contrary, my daughter is smart and she can do anything she sets her mind to. But those environments are very male orientated. I worry about her at the best of times, and I know that being a female she'd be taken advantage of.

She also asked me recently about prospecting for the club, something I'm not entirely happy about. But Stella has a stubbornness that runs in her genes. Unfortunately she gets that from me and there ain't much I can do about it. As much as I try to dissuade her into pursuing avenues I wish she knew nothing about, my girl has a spirit that I fear will only come back to bite me very soon.

She's been a good kid. She's helped me a lot raising her younger brother since my wife left us several years ago. I can't say it's been a whole bag load of fun raising two kids by myself, but we managed. I tried to give them everything they needed, without a mother's touch, not that her touch had a positive influence on either of them.

Why we stuck it out I'll never know. Well, I do know if I'm honest; for the sake of the kids.

My kids are my world. I loved them the moment we knew we were pregnant, when they were born and every minute in between. My daughter is the apple of my eye and my son is a gift that I'm not sure I even deserve.

To say I'd lay down my life for them is an understatement.

Now Stella might be working here because we need a spy within the ranks, until she finds a mechanic to start an apprenticeship with. I'm kinda hoping the bakery will win out and she'll forget all about it. Stella needs something to do, she can't sit still, she's never been able to. Trouble is, she's always been a tomboy.

The sound of my straight pipes must have alerted Indigo to my presence because a few moments later, I see her at the window.

The scowl on her face says a thousand words.

As much as she hates bikers, she let us buy into her business to save it. So that's got to mean something. Granted, the choices were limited and she'd

rather have us buy in than see the place demolished.

Another club, the Devils Ink MC wanted the property too, but we put a stop to that when Cash's step-brother, Razor, put a hit out on Cash's ol' lady and a war broke out.

Razor's dead now, and the club disbanded. Even the Cali chapter disowned them years ago.

But there's been a brother hanging around, trying to get to Indigo and none of us know why. His name is Forger. I don't know what the fuck his problem is, but if I get a hold of him, the Bayou looks like a good place to bury a body.

Indigo might not believe she's part of the club, but now that we're in business together, she falls under the protection that the club offers. Like it or not.

She might think she's tough but 1% clubs don't mess around, something she should know since her old man was a Fury member.

She scowls at me through the window and I pretend not to notice.

Unlike everyone else, I pull up out front. I know she hates that. Apparently bikers are bad for business. Like I give a fuck.

Indigo doesn't scare me, most women don't. But I can't say that her spit-fire personality isn't a turn on, because frankly it is.

She makes me rock hard. Yeah, she caught my dick's interest a while back.

Rumor has it you'd be sleeping between her and a shot-gun if you even made it that far.

As I make my way inside, the little bell jingling annoyingly on the top of the door, I contemplate if I am actually the man for the job.

Cash wants someone watching Indi and her kid 24/7 until Forger shows his face around. And when he does. We'll take him to the club for 'questioning'.

It's been a long time since I assisted with an interrogation and when it comes to this mysterious woman, I think I'd enjoy inflicting pain on a man just to get intel on her.

As I close the door behind me, earning me another jingle, Indigo stands with her hands on her hips and says, "What are you doing here?"

No greeting.

No smile.

No nothing.

Just a scowl and her eyes narrowing like I have some kind of contagious disease.

“I need a reason to be here?”

She takes a visible breath, making my eyes dart down to her chest.

She’s not hugely top heavy, which is usually how I like my women. She’s also more slender than I usually prefer, but I won’t hold her long legs against her. Or that slim waist.

Her long, chestnut hair is tied back in a high ponytail. Her hazel eyes are pretty, along with her perfect skin and a small smattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks.

She’s visually stunning.

Beautiful.

And I don’t quite know what to make of her, or what to do with her.

She’s wild.

She can’t be tamed.

Not when she grew up within an MC and hates all things biker related.

It makes me wanna ask her outright why the hell she wanted us a business partners.

“I told Cash when I signed the papers; bikers are bad for business.”

“That’s no way to greet someone who technically owns shares in this place.”

I told Cash that nobody had a right to question my loyalty when he tasked me with looking out for her. Everyone was having their two cents worth about how ungrateful they think she is for basically wanting to kick all of us out. And I get it.

But I also get that she has her reasons. I don’t tell her that, though. The less she knows about how invested I am the better.

And she has a smart mouth on her too. One that I’d like to shut up with my...

“And don’t you all just love reminding me of that,” she goes on.

This woman is infuriating.

I stare down at her. She doesn’t quite reach my shoulders, and the woman isn’t exactly short. But she holds her head high, her back straight like she ain’t afraid of nothing.

Some people say I’m intimidating. It comes with the territory of running with an MC.

The cut.

The straight pipes.

My stature.

It all screams that I'm a bad dude who's looking for trouble. All of which are entirely untrue. My job as enforcer is to try and avoid conflict, not create it.

I also don't miss the way her eyes drop down my body slightly as I straighten. She isn't the only one who can hold her head high. I've as much right to be here as anyone else in this club, and she's going to have to start realizing that.

I think back to what Tag said at our last meeting and how the women of the club are starting to get a little too lippy and like they run the place. I try not to laugh at his annoyed face. The man has a point, but since when did women not stick their noses in club business? And they always have a lot to say for themselves. The ol' ladies aren't ol' ladies because they're weak individuals. On the contrary.

It's apparent to me now, as I stand here and stare at this woman who's driving me crazy.

She's got balls, I'll give her that.

"That's my job. I'm the club's Enforcer. You of all people don't need a lesson in the dynamics of the MC and how it works."

A flash of annoyance in her eyes tells me she's mad. Good. I'm mad too.

For not being able to do anything about this goddamn rocket in my pants.

More to the point... now I'm mid-forties it's been a little... difficult at times to get it up. Maybe it's because I've been stressed lately. Or maybe I'm bored with the same women at the club. The fact that it could be me... getting older... could be a factor that I don't want to consider. But it's been an issue, which is why I've stayed away from the sweet butts. The last thing I need is it going around the club I have a soft cock.

Or so I thought until recently because being around Indigo and her smart mouth, I'm straight as a goddamn arrow.

Ready to fuck. Ready to make her scream.

If only she'd do something about it... suddenly I get a vision of her in her apron with *Sweet Treats Bakery* on the front, down on her knees, taking my cock down her throat while I shut her mouth the hell up.

Holy fuck.

I'm being tortured, there's no two ways about it. This woman is going to be my goddamn downfall.

I curse Cash, knowing it's not really his fault, but he could've put Tag on the case.

I may be the club's Enforcer, but I'm not a goddamn babysitter.

"Me of all people?" She quirks an eyebrow. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

I roll my eyes. "*Maddog*. We know who your Father was."

Her nostrils flair. "Don't ever use that name again in my shop."

"*Our* shop." I realize pissing her off isn't exactly the best way to get her to listen to me, but she needs to be brought down a peg or two.

She can't just go shooting her mouth off and having no consequences.

Indigo will learn, one way or the other.

She snorts. "Right. Maybe you can help me then, since you're so great at telling me what to do."

I frown. "Not sure you'd want my hands anywhere near your dough if you knew where they've been."

I didn't mean that to sound dirty but it just came out that way.

His eyes drop for half a second to my crotch and I hope to hell that my hard on isn't apparent.

I'm not small in that department, either. It's not bragging. It's just a fact.

Imagining my cock sliding in and out of her tight little hole is about enough to make me come in my pants.

It's the conflict, I realize.

This shit is what turns me on.

She clears her throat. "Do you actually want anything, or did you just come to stand here and eyeball me?"

I grunt a laugh. "Eyeballing? Honey, trust me. If I were eyeballing you, you'd know about it."

She turns and stalks off behind the counter, clearly exasperated with me and I haven't even set more than two steps in the building.

"I've got work to do," she mutters.

"That's why I'm here," I say, leaning on the cake fridge. "Got a proposition for you."

She gives me another one of her looks. "God help me."

"A helper." I don't add it's my daughter. No need to add fuel to the fire.

"Oh? Are you doing interviews for me now?"

"All part of the service."

"When can he or she start?"

I know she needs staff, so I'm not surprised she doesn't fight me on it.

Is it being a little bit dishonest? Yes. But on the other hand, if she doesn't directly ask me who the employee is, then it's not really lying.

"*She*. And she can start tomorrow."

"So soon?"

I shrug. "She's a good worker, has references. She's eighteen but has a good head on her shoulders... from what I know." Okay, so I may be going to Hell just a little bit.

"I'm sure the club wouldn't send me anybody who was going to be a problem, right?"

I point a finger at her. "Right."

She wrinkles her nose. "I'm not sure. She's so young. Young ones today are lazy. Or they spend too much time on their phones, or come to work hungover. It's a risk."

"Well, it's either that or I send Pipes in to help."

She gives me another one of her looks.

She turns her back to do something and I adjust my cock.

Fuck sakes. I'm like a goddamn teenager.

Though, I'm thrilled it's not a viagra type situation, for a second there I thought there might be an issue.

It's not like I want to be attracted to this woman who hates me and all things club related. Not when there are women willing and able back at the club. Busting a nut is something that doesn't require too much effort around an MC. But lately my attention has been divided between all the shit going on that I have to sort out.

My job is never easy.

Between that and managing the garage and helping Jett out with security, I rarely have any free time on my hands.

In truth. I miss the arms of a loving woman.

I haven't had that for such a long time and I've almost forgotten what it's like.

A quick fuck with random women isn't the same.

It never is.

I never really wanted to be single. I also never had any inclination to be a single dad, either, but here we are. My kids came first, so I put romance on the back burner.

Now my kids are getting older, and Stella is more or less independent,

I've thought about it more and more.

Not that I'd even know where to start dating.

The idea give me nausea.

Then there's online dating... I don't have social media, nor do I know how to do anything on a computer. If that's what the world has resorted to, then I'll stay single.

Whatever happened to meeting someone in person? Finding out if you really like them first and then the anticipation of seeing them again.

And the idea that I'm far too old to be dating springs to mind. Things have changed since I was a young, single man.

There are different expectations now.

And I wouldn't have a goddamn clue where to start.

"So, what's her name?" Indigo says after a long bout of silence.

"Stella," I reply. "I'll send you her number."

I wait for her to tell me that Hell will freeze over before I get her cell number, but strangely, she doesn't.

I don't expect her to give me it, and I could probably find it if I dug hard enough or asked Cash, but I go to my contacts and start to send her the message.

She reels her cell off and I hit send.

Now I have her number.

I'm not a texter by nature. In fact, I hate goddamn phones. They are a necessary evil, but I hate them all the same.

Most of my business is done on my phone since I haven't opened my laptop in over a year. I hate the damn things.

"I'll give her a call."

No thanks or anything.

I smirk to myself.

If we get away with this, it'll be a miracle.

She turns to look at me. "Is that all?"

My gaze meets hers. "Are you dismissin' me?"

"You're not just here for that," she says. "I've hung around bikers enough to know that there's an ulterior motive."

I clear my throat. She's very perceptive, I'll give her that.

"Fine. Let's just cut to the chase. Forger."

She takes a long breath. "What about him?"

"Seen him lately?"

She shakes her head.

“And if you do see him?”

She reaches under the counter and pulls out a baseball bat. “I use this?”

“Please tell me you’re jokin?”

She smirks to herself. Wise ass.

“I’m not a child, Harlem.”

Fuck.

Well, hello.

I’ve never heard her say my name before... and I kinda like it. Even though it is laced with obvious sarcasm.

“Good, then it’ll be easier to agree on the fact that you’re under my protection until he’s found.”

She opens her mouth but no sound comes out. Then, “Come again?”

“You heard me, Indigo.”

Her eyes go wide and fuck me if my eyes aren’t glued to her lips. They’re so fuckin’ pretty...

“I’m under your *protection*?”

“Glad you heard that right.”

“I’m pretty sure I *didn’t* hear it right. I’m not going to be bossed around by you or by anyone.”

“Right. That’s exactly what I thought you’d say.”

“And yet here you are?”

“I’m here because we own part of this bakery, *sugar lips*. You don’t like it? Then you should’ve thought about that before you signed those papers and the club got you out of trouble.”

Dick move, but whatever. She needs to understand that she isn’t making all of the rules around here. Not anymore.

“Don’t call me sugar lips.”

“Sweet cheeks then?”

She gives me another withering look.

I tilt my head and give her my best shit-eating grin. Apparently, I have a nice smile.

When I smile. Which isn’t very often.

“Indigo is just fine.”

“It is a pretty name,” I say, before I can stop myself.

Shit.

I didn’t mean to say that. Then again, all kinds of weird shit flies out of

my mouth when I'm around her.

Why oh why can't I just keep a goddamn lid on it?



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