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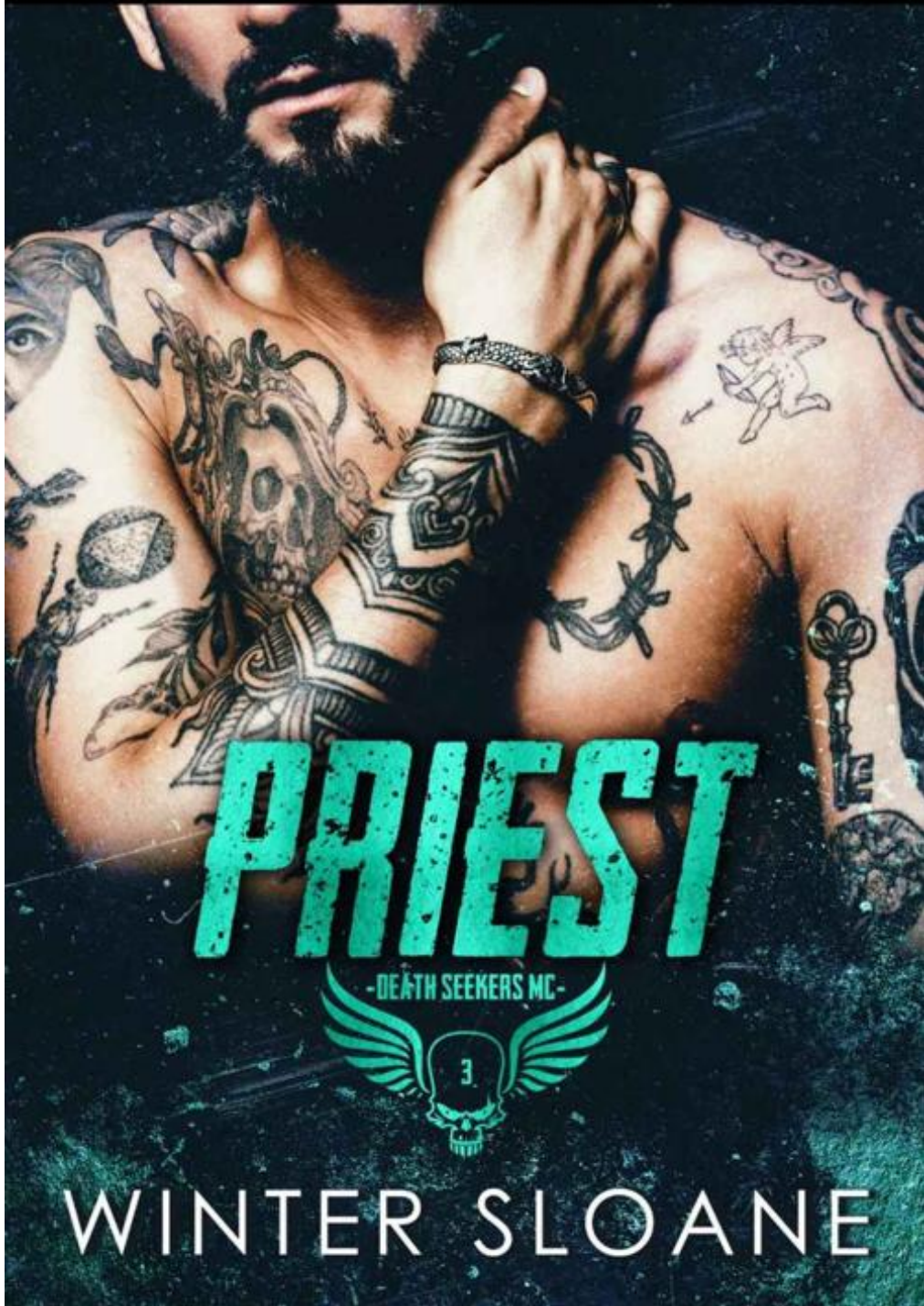
PRIEST

-DEATH SEEKERS MC-



WINTER SLOANE

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DEDICATION

To my readers, I hope you enjoy reading Priest and Sadie's story as much as I loved writing it.

PRIEST

Death Seekers MC, 3

Winter Sloane

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Chapter One

Sadie White's footsteps thudded on the hardwood floor as she rushed into the bathroom, her breaths shallow and uneven. Panic gripped her chest, and with trembling hands, she fumbled to lock the door behind her. Pressing her back against the cold surface, she took a moment to collect herself, but her heart continued to race.

Sadie momentarily shut her eyes, then she took a deep breath. She couldn't hide in the confines of the bathroom forever. Sooner or later, she would have to face Mason Prescott, the man her father had chosen for her to marry.

At 23, Sadie considered herself an adult capable of making her own decisions. So, why had she agreed to this arrangement in the first place? Sadie scoffed. That answer was easy. Her father always targeted her weaknesses. All he had to do was flash her his big, sad eyes and the moment he uttered the word "debts," she caved like she always did.

She promised she'd do anything for him. To save his business, he said there was only one solution. Sadie had to marry Mason, the mayor's son. Her father neglected to mention that Mason was a monster in human skin.

Turning her attention to the bathroom mirror, Sadie winced as the harsh light revealed her face. Sadie didn't recognize the terrified woman staring back at her.

Her cheek throbbed where Mason had struck her. Sadie didn't even have time to process what happened. Mason didn't apologize. He merely stared at her with those cruel green eyes and Sadie knew what her future and her marriage would be like.

She ran her fingers through disheveled hair, frustrated. Sadie wanted to be anywhere else but in that lavish town house, probably a gift from Mason's wealthy parents. Sadie let out a bitter laugh. He probably had never worked a single day in his life while Sadie juggled two jobs just to pay her rent and support her and her dad.

Heavy footsteps echoed ominously outside the bathroom door, and Sadie's heart quickened with dread. The sound of the doorknob rattling intensified the unease knotting in her stomach.

"I know you're in there," Mason said. "Open this damn door right this instant."

"Go to hell," she answered, her words laced with an unexpected defiance.

It surprised even her, this assertiveness she hadn't known she possessed. Growing up, friends had often labeled her a pushover—a good girl who shied away from confrontation, always compliant.

Only one man had seen a hidden fire within her, but he was long gone now. A fleeting figure from the past, existing only in her memories. Sadie wondered if that man from her past were here now, would he encourage her to keep fighting?

Remembering him sparked a flicker of strength within her. Sadie couldn't help but imagine his voice whispering words of encouragement: *"You don't have to put up with anyone's crap, Sadie. You're strong, but you just don't know it yet."*

"What did you say to me, you bitch?" Mason thundered.

Pissing him off wasn't the right move, but if Sadie didn't make her stand right here and now, Mason would think he could do whatever he wanted with her.

"You shouldn't have done that," she said.

Mason laughed. "I'll do worse if you don't come out right this instant. You're my fiancée, Sadie. My bitch. I own you now."

His words sent a chill down her spine. Sadie felt like an animal caught in a trap.

"Nothing has been finalized yet," she told him. Who the hell did Mason think he was? What kind of parents raised him to speak that way to a woman?

“You should be grateful,” Mason said. “When your father went to mine, begging for scraps, he reminded me of a kicked dog. You’re just like him.”

“You’re wrong,” she answered back. Sadie clenched her fists by her side. She was so angry, she almost felt like bursting.

Sadie took a deep breath before saying the next words slowly and carefully. “The deal is off, Mason. I have no intention of marrying a pig like you.”

At that moment, Sadie felt reckless and so sure of herself. Screw this and damn her father to hell. Sadie never had the courage to leave her hometown but this might be the right push she needed.

Sadie would pack her bags and tell her old man to go screw himself. Her dad had to make his own bed sooner or later. She could start somewhere fresh. Reinvent herself. Why did it take this long for Sadie to come to this realization?

After her mother passed away from cancer when she was 12, she thought it was her responsibility to take care of her father. It should’ve been the other way around. It was time she took care of herself and focused on her own future.

“Well, too bad, because all the arrangements have been made. My mother paid a shit ton of money to hire the best wedding planner in the country.” Mason’s words dripped with arrogance.

“I don’t give a damn,” Sadie retorted.

Every little girl dreamed of having her perfect wedding day, but being shackled to a man like Mason would be a living nightmare. All her dreams of escaping the suffocating confines of this small town would crumble into dust if she didn’t find a way out of this house.

A glimmer of hope sparked as Sadie remembered her cellphone tucked safely in her pocket. Pulling it out, she hesitated, her thumb hovering over the contacts.

A bitter realization twisted in her gut. All her so-called friends had been jealous of her engagement to Mason. They

never failed to remind her how lucky she was. She would get no help from them. With a dismissive shake of her head, Sadie scrolled through her contacts, searching for someone she could trust. Finally, she found a number she knew wouldn't betray her. Emery, her second cousin, stood out as the one genuine friend and confidant in her life.

Knowing that making a call might enrage Mason and escalate the situation, she opted for a quicker, discreet approach. Sadie sent a quick text to Emery: **Emergency. Need your help. Meet me ASAP.**

Mason's heavy footsteps gradually faded away, and she grew anxious. Sadie waited, her heart thudding in her chest. The silence hung heavy, pregnant with uncertainty. Had he given up? Was it finally safe to leave?

In the stillness, a distant door slammed shut, a muffled sound echoing through the house. The tension in the air shifted, and Sadie seized the opportunity. Now was the time to move. With cautious steps, she gingerly unlocked the bathroom door. No sound. No movement. Taking a deep breath, Sadie left the safety of the bathroom and began to tiptoe her way down the creaking stairs.

The only thing standing between her and freedom was the front door. Every step felt like an eternity, the seconds ticking away in suspense.

Just as the front door loomed within reach, hope threatened to swell within her. But before she could break into a sprint, an unexpected force jerked at the back of her shirt. A gasp caught in Sadie's throat as she felt the abrupt tug, her momentum halted abruptly.

"You're not going anywhere," Mason whispered in her ear, his grip unyielding as he yanked her close.

The warmth of his breath against her skin sent a shiver down her spine, and the sudden proximity ignited a wave of fear.

Sadie's eyes fluttered open, her head throbbing and her body protesting with every ache. Panic gripped her momentarily as she braced for the possibility of waking up in Mason's bedroom.

To her immense relief, the reality she faced was different—she found herself in the backseat of a car, though not Mason's.

“Emery?” she whispered, her voice fragile as she searched the dimly lit space.

“I'm here, Sadie,” Emery's reassuring voice replied from the front seat.

Every attempt to sit up was met with a series of aches that reverberated through her entire body.

“What happened?” she asked, the words barely more than a breath.

“You don't remember?” Emery asked.

Sadie turned her gaze toward the window, catching a glimpse of her reflection. The sight made her grimace at the disheveled and battered image that stared back.

“You told me to wait for you outside Mason's house. I waited and waited. When you finally stumbled out, you looked...” Emery's voice trailed off, sounding worried.

A flood of memories rushed back to Sadie. After Mason had finished with her, she lay on his bed, pretending to be unconscious. By some miracle, fate intervened. Mason received a call from his father. He left and that provided her with a small window of opportunity.

Summoning every ounce of remaining strength, she gathered herself, and with sheer determination, left the miserable house that would soon become her prison if she didn't do anything about her engagement.

“I'm bringing you to the hospital,” Emery stated.

“No,” Sadie blurted out.

The mayor's influence, his pervasive presence in every corner of the town, made the hospital a dangerous option. Trusting the medical staff to be discreet was a gamble she couldn't afford to take.

"Go to St. Patrick's," she instructed. Thinking of the quiet place where she had first met him, a smile appeared on her lips.

"The church? Why there?" Emery questioned, confusion evident in his voice.

Nevertheless, he complied, turning the car around without further inquiry.

"There's only one man who can help me, but first, I need to find out where he is," Sadie explained, her thoughts veering toward Silas. The last time she had seen him was five years ago. Practically an entire lifetime.

As Sadie rode in Emery's car, her thoughts spiraled into the past. Would he even remember her? Silas, the man who had been her refuge all those years ago. She often wondered where he was now, what his life looked like, and whether he ever thought of her. The musings felt like foolish girly thoughts, but the desperation in her current situation led her back to the only person who had heard her and helped her in a time of need.

Lost in contemplation, Sadie must've drifted off to sleep, only to be roused by voices.

"You should take her to the hospital," an older man was saying.

"No, that's the last place she wants to be," Emery curtly replied. Thank God Sadie had Emery on her side.

Focusing on the older man, Sadie recognized Father Nick, the parish priest. Her attention sharpened as she overheard the conversation unfolding around her.

"I need to know where he went," Sadie said.

Father Nick widened his eyes, really looking at her for the first time.

“You know who I am, Father?” she asked, seeking confirmation.

He nodded, a grave expression settling on his face. “Yes, you’re Sadie White. You’re looking for Silas, I assume?”

“It’s important. Please. I need to find him or ... my fiancé will end up killing me,” Sadie confessed.

The church stood as a sanctuary, untouched by the mayor’s influence—or at least Sadie fervently hoped so.

Father Nick said nothing. Sadie couldn’t shake the feeling that she was an unwelcome reminder of a past that had brought tumult to his parish. Five years ago, she had cost his parish another priest—Silas.

“I know Silas and you were good friends,” she said. Sadie could hear the plea in her voice but at that moment, she couldn’t care less.

Her head spun, a dull ache gnawing at her senses. Perhaps Emery was right, maybe she did need medical attention. However, right now, she wanted—no, *needed*—answers.

“We still are,” Father Nick said, a faint smile touching his lips.

For a moment, she thought Father Nick was going to give her bad news, that Silas had passed away.

“Then, you’ll tell me where he is?” Sadie desperately asked. Hope flickered inside Sadie’s chest.

“Sadie, he’s a much different man now,” Father Nick responded, his tone unexpectedly gentle. “I’m not sure you’ll like what you find.”

Sadie shook her head. It doesn’t matter. To me, he’ll always be...” Sadie trailed off, the unspoken words lingering on the tip of her tongue. She hesitated, unsure whether she wanted Father Nick to know how important Silas was to her both then and now.

“I understand. Just be prepared for what you find,” Father Nick said. Then he gave her an address.

Chapter Two

The acrid stench of stale beer lingered in the air as Priest took one last swig from his beer bottle, the amber liquid burning its way down his throat. The crude jokes, raucous laughter, and the sound of rock music blaring from the clubhouse's speakers seemed to fade into the background. Priest stood up, the worn wooden chair scraping against the concrete floor.

Priest briefly touched the Death Seekers patch on the left shoulder of his leather cut, a reminder of the brotherhood he would die and kill for. He sighed as he made his way through the bar area, nodding to patched members and associates. Some of the prospects couldn't meet his gaze. Priest didn't blame them. Some of them probably knew Larry better than he did and they also understood that Priest did the MC's dirtiest work. Work that stained the soul and sometimes tested the limits of his loyalty, but in the end, Priest always delivered.

He pushed open the heavy door leading to the back of the clubhouse, the harsh neon lights casting a flickering glow over the compound. Priest's boots crunched on the gravel as he headed to the shed in the back of the compound. Inside, the air was thick with the scent of oil and rust. He wished he was back in the clubhouse, where it was warm and beer and inane conversation flowed freely, but he had a job to do.

Priest found the grip of the cold metal gun tucked into the holster at his side. The gun felt heavy when he first started out. In those days, Priest was no better than the wet-behind-the-ears prospects who couldn't meet his gaze earlier. It still felt heavy.

Killing never got easier, no matter how many times he had done it for the sake of the club.

Spotting him, Larry Martin's eyes widened. He let out a sound of protest, muffled by the gag around his mouth. He looked miserable and pathetic, tied to a metal chair in the

middle of the shed. At that moment, Larry also looked young and miserable. What a waste, Priest thought. Then he reminded himself that this prospect was a traitor in the eyes of the Death Seekers. Larry had left a brother to die, a sin that demanded retribution. As Priest approached the task at hand, he couldn't help but feel a knot tightening in his gut.

Larry looked at Priest unblinkingly, his brown eyes full of fear. He even pissed himself. Priest plucked the gag from Larry's mouth.

"You thirsty?" Priest asked.

Larry, who he suspected was about to beg or curse him, closed his mouth, surprised. He seemed to think about it for a second, before nodding.

Still holding his gun, Priest took out a flask from his jacket's inner pocket with his free hand. With the same hand, he uncorked the flask and tipped it over Larry's open mouth.

Larry licked his lips after. "Thanks," Larry whispered.

Priest was momentarily transported to a different time and place. Back then, he'd been a different man, one who gave water to the dying before administering last rites.

He pulled himself away from old memories, then looked Larry in the eyes. "Any last words?" Priest asked him.

"Fuck you and the club," Larry whispered.

"How unoriginal," Priest said, raising the gun.

Larry squeezed his eyes shut as Priest took the safety off and fired. At such close range, Priest didn't miss. Once the task was done, he tucked his gun in his holster and returned to the clubhouse.

Priest could use a drink or two. Once back inside, he gestured toward the nearest prospect.

"Miller, clean the mess in the shed. Make sure the place is spotless when it's done," he said. Miller gulped, then nodded.

Priest returned to his usual seat at the bar. Cross, the club's sergeant-at-arms, soon joined him.

"It's done?" Cross asked as the bartender set a cold one in front of Priest.

"Sure," Priest answered.

He doubted he'd get any sleep the next few days. Larry would haunt his nightmares for a while, but give him a week, maybe two, and Larry would just be another ghost.

"You know what you need, Priest?" Cross asked.

"What's that?" Priest asked, not really paying attention. He drank the entire bottle without pause, but still couldn't wash the awful taste in his mouth.

"An old lady of your own," Cross told him.

"While I'm happy for you and Dana, I'm happy with what's available," Priest said.

Priest nodded to the two club whores chatting at a nearby table. In truth, he really had no plans of taking a woman to his room tonight, even a willing one.

The last time Priest executed someone, he fell into bed, drunk, with additional company. When he woke up the next morning, Priest found his fingers wrapped around a club whore's neck. Thankfully, she hadn't died. That incident only served to worsen his already black reputation in the club. Priest wasn't going to take risks.

"Well, I can see you're not in a chatty mood tonight so I'll leave you and go home to my wife," Cross said. He gave Priest's shoulder a pat.

Several bottles later, Priest was still at the bar. He should probably call it a day, but he wasn't looking forward to another sleepless night. Maybe Cross was right. Priest should find a woman to call his own, someone permanent, but how the hell would Priest find a woman who wasn't scared shitless of him or what he did?

He could make out laughter and jeers amidst the distant rumble of motorcycles. There was some kind of commotion

outside the clubhouse. At first, Priest dismissed it. It might just be some of his brothers messing around. If a serious fight broke out, there were still a few senior associates around to sort the mess out.

The noises persisted. Turning away from the bar, Priest cast a scrutinizing glance toward the entrance. The heavy door swung open, revealing two figures stumbling inside. The first was a young man in his twenties, wearing a button-down shirt and chinos. He looked a fish out of water in the biker bar. The second figure, though, grabbed Priest's attention right away. A woman, also in her mid-twenties, clung to the guy, and she looked roughed-up. Her makeup was smeared and the dress she wore under an oversized jacket, was ripped. Priest also noted she only had one shoe on.

As she scanned the room, her eyes met Priest's, and for a moment, time seemed to pause.

Standing from his stool, memories from his past and present collided in Priest's mind. Recognition flickered in his eyes as he stared at the golden-haired woman who stood a little straighter when their gazes crossed. The last time he had seen her, Sadie White had entered his confessional box in a white knee-length dress. He thought her a demon in an angel's guise, sent to earth to tempt him from his vows. This woman was trouble. He thought that the first time she entered his little box, and kept doing it, week after week.

Priest pushed away from the bar. Realizing he was still foolishly holding his beer bottle, he set it back on the bar. A ripple of hushed conversations spread through the room as he approached Sadie and the uncertain young man who had accompanied her.

Priest closed the distance between him and Sadie. For a fleeting moment, he questioned if the alcohol had played a trick on his senses. Maybe after offing Larry, he had imagined Sadie appearing in the clubhouse. That was crazy, though, because he hadn't thought about her in years. No, that was a blatant lie, because even when there was a random club whore under him, Priest sometimes pictured Sadie's face.

The young man with Sadie eyed Priest with uncertainty.

“This is him?” he asked Sadie.

Priest briefly wondered who this guy was to Sadie. A boyfriend? No, he decided, a relative then? But all of Sadie’s relatives, to his knowledge, were jerks. A friend, then, who had courage enough to take Sadie to a place like this. Priest soon forgot all about the guy, because his attention was on Sadie.

Sadie took hesitant steps toward him but stumbled at the last moment. In a reflexive motion, Priest instinctively reached out, firmly grasping her arms. He didn’t miss the wince that marred her delicate features. Whoever did this to her, hurt her good.

A surge of rage, primal and fierce, welled up from the depths of Priest’s being. An involuntary growl escaped his throat. The guy with Sadie even took a step backward from him. The protective instinct that lay dormant within him flared to life, a wildfire threatening to consume reason. Forcing himself to calm down, Priest assessed the woman before him. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been this angry.

All he wanted in that moment was to hunt down the bastard responsible for reducing Sadie to this vulnerable state. The fury evaporated the moment Sadie ran her fingers over his stubbled face. She cupped his jaw and her touch was unbelievably soft and warm. Her ocean-blue eyes locked onto his, and for a suspended moment, Priest wondered what she was thinking. What did she see when she looked at him? Displeasure? Disappointment? Relief?

“Father Silas,” she whispered. “I finally found you.”

Priest couldn’t even remember the last time anyone called him that. He left his former identity five years ago, like a snake shedding its old skin. Priest never expected his two worlds to collide—his past life as a man of the cloth, and his present existence as a member of the Death Seekers MC.

“Who the hell is Father Silas?” Priest could hear one of his MC brothers behind him.

“Sadie, it’s just Priest now,” he told her.

“Priest,” she murmured, the sound of her voice a soft echo in the air.

It tugged at something inside him, a dormant emotion he had thought extinguished long ago. Deep hunger. Priest had never wanted anyone as much as he wanted her. When he left his parish and the small town of Verdant Hills years ago, he knew he’d never return. Priest never imagined it was Sadie who would come to him. Fate had a wicked sense of humor sometimes.

Focus on her, Priest reminded himself. Right now, Sadie needed his help and she was going to get it. He didn’t care about the circumstances that brought her here or who was after her. Priest would do anything in his power to help her.

“Sadie, who did this to you? What happened?” he asked impatiently.

She didn’t answer with words. Instead, Sadie pressed her head against his chest, and the gesture undid him completely. Priest was a complete stranger to her and yet she placed her trust in him without question. It took him a few seconds to register the subtle change. Sadie’s body slackened against him, her weight growing heavier. Panic flickered in his eyes as he realized she had lost consciousness.

Priest looked over her shoulder and found Rage, the club VP. “Rage,” Priest croaked out.

“What do you need, Priest?” Rage automatically asked.

“She needs a doctor,” Priest said.

“I’ll get you one. Take her to your room, she looks like she needs rest,” Rage told him.

“Will do,” Priest said. He easily hefted Sadie in his arms. She was light as a feather. Then he proceeded to the stairs that would take him to the second floor of the clubhouse, where the members’ individual quarters were located.

“Hold on a darn second, where are you taking Sadie?” a voice demanded. The guy Sadie came in with struggled to match his strides, even though Priest was carrying Sadie in his arms.

Priest stopped, irritated by the interruption. The guy gulped when Priest gazed down at him from a few flights of stairs.

“What’s your name, boy?” Priest asked.

“Emery, and I’m not a boy. I’m 25,” Emery said. “I’m her second cousin.”

Priest nodded, taking in that information. “You can entrust Sadie to me, but you don’t belong here, Emery. Leave your cellphone number with one of my MC brothers. I’ll contact you once I take care of Sadie,” he said.

Emery hesitated for a moment, before finally nodding. He suddenly looked awfully young and exhausted. Emery reminded Priest a little of Larry.

“You’ll really call me?” Emery asked.

“I will. I don’t make promises I can’t keep,” he said.

“That’s what Sadie told me. Take care of her. I gotta head back home,” Emery said.

Priest continued his descent, until he was finally back in his own quarters. He gently laid Sadie down on his bed.

“What the hell happened to you, Angel?” Priest murmured.

Chapter Three

Sadie fluttered her eyes open to an unfamiliar sight—an unknown bed in a room that was not her own. Panic gripped her momentarily as the disorientation set in.

For a fleeting instant, fear clenched her heart, the haunting possibility that she might have woken up in Mason's bed. Taking a calming breath, Sadie scanned the room, her initial trepidation giving way to a gradual sense of reassurance. The space, though small, was warm and comfy. Her gaze lingered on a leather cut hanging on a hook by the door, and a wave of recognition washed over her.

Memories surfaced—the journey with Emery, the visit to the church, and the final destination here in Hanging Grove, Kansas.

Emery had been concerned that the man she sought might not be found, but against the odds, she found Silas. A sense of relief washed over Sadie as she looked down and realized she was wearing one of Silas's oversized shirts. The worn-down fabric, the scent that clung to it, enveloped her in a sense of security. She tugged at the shirt, the material soft beneath her touch, and brought it to her nose, inhaling deeply. A fleeting smile touched her lips as she momentarily shut her eyes.

She couldn't quite explain why, but in that moment, she associated Silas with safety. Sadie always did, even in the past.

Sadie vividly recalled the look of concern on Silas's face when he carried her up the stairs. He had also looked furious, although that anger wasn't directed at her, but at the man who hurt her. Seeing that expression on his face secretly thrilled her, although Sadie would never tell anyone that, least of all him.

Don't be naive, a dark voice in her head whispered. After all, Silas might have agreed to take her out of pity or a twisted sense of responsibility.

Yet, the horrible truth remained that he had left the priesthood because of her—because he had helped her all those years ago, saving her from a boyfriend who had crossed boundaries, who failed to comprehend the meaning of the word “no.”

A bitter laugh escaped her lips. Why did Sadie find herself constantly entangled in these types of messes? Did she have a magnet that attracted the wrong kind of men? What was Sadie going to do now? She couldn't go back home. Hell, Sadie had nowhere else to go, especially if Silas eventually decided Sadie was more trouble than she was worth.

Emery swore he'd keep their little escape a secret, but she had no illusions—her old man was probably out looking for her right now. Her father couldn't care less about her well-being. All he'd be concerned with was the fact that without Sadie in the picture, the whole arranged marriage with Mason would be up in smoke. Her father only cared about paying off his debts.

She curled to her side. Sadie hit a new level of feeling utterly alone. She lost track of time, just wallowing in self-pity until a knock on the door startled her back to reality. It could be Silas, she thought, and that flicker of hope was enough to get her sitting up, even though every move made her wince. She frantically ran her fingers through her hair, wanting to look somewhat presentable.

God, she was so pathetic. Stressing about her looks at a time like this was ridiculous but once upon a time, she didn't just have a silly girl crush on Silas. She had been utterly obsessed with him and was pretty sure it wasn't one-sided.

Her heart hammered as Silas sauntered into the room, balancing a tray of what smelled like mouthwatering soup. The aroma alone triggered a low rumble from her stomach, a reminder that she couldn't even recall the last time she had a proper meal.

Silas—now just Priest, she corrected herself.

As she took a moment to scrutinize him more closely, the differences from the Silas she remembered struck her like a

revelation. The last time they crossed paths, she was taken aback to see him out of his priestly vestments and collar. Back then, his hair had been neatly trimmed and he wasn't this ... bulked up. Black ink now sleeved both his arms, and more tattoos peeked from beneath the collar of his shirt. His face had become harder, meaner. There was an unmistakable darker edge to him now.

The Father Silas she had known, the one who wouldn't harm a single soul, seemed like a distant memory. The biker standing before her now had the eyes of a killer. The realization hit her hard—this wasn't the same man she once knew. Despite the changes, she still found herself drawn to him more than ever.

“Good, you're awake. Hope you're hungry,” Priest said gruffly.

Sadie's eyes met his, and for a fleeting moment, she swore she glimpsed the considerate Silas she had known in the past.

He hesitated for a beat, holding a tray laden with steaming food. With deliberate care, he set the tray down on a nearby surface. Sadie couldn't help but watch his movements anxiously.

Instead of settling on the edge of the bed, as she had secretly hoped, Priest opted for the chair nearby. A pang of momentary disappointment hit Sadie, then it disappeared as he met her gaze with those iron-grey eyes she often dreamed about.

“I am hungry,” she admitted, her stomach grumbling in agreement.

Reaching for the bowl of soup, Sadie winced as her fingers trembled slightly while bringing it to her lips. The glance Priest shot her didn't escape her notice, his eyes darkening with rage. Determined not to appear completely helpless, she forced herself to steady her fingers before taking a sip. There, better. She wasn't about to let him think she couldn't handle herself.

“Finish it all up,” he instructed, his voice carrying a note of authority that sent an unexpected shiver of anticipation down her spine. “Doc will be here in a few minutes,” Priest informed her, diverting her attention.

“Doc?” Sadie asked, confused.

“An MC brother and our new in-house doctor. He lost his license two years ago, but he’s good at his job,” Priest explained.

Sadie nodded, absorbing the information. A knot of anxiety twisted in her stomach. She knew the inevitable questions were coming—why was she here, what had happened to her? She owed him answers, at the very least. No one else would extend a helping hand to a stranger they barely knew from the past.

Sadie took a few deep breaths, gathering her thoughts.

“You’re probably wondering how I ended up here,” she began, looking down at her hands.

“Never in a million years did I imagine seeing you in a place like this, Sadie,” he replied.

She swallowed, momentarily captivated by the way he said her name. It was as if he was savoring each syllable, rolling it off his tongue like he was enjoying fine whiskey.

“How did you even find me?” he asked, leaning against his chair.

Sadie finally met his eyes. Priest had helped her without hesitation, and withholding the truth was not an option. So, she told him everything—her arranged marriage to Mason Prescott, the mounting pressure from her father, and the desperation that led her to track down Father Nick.

“Father Nick gave me your address. He seemed reluctant to do so, but something I said must’ve convinced him,” she said. As the words spilled out, a wave of relief filled her. There. Everything was now out in the open. Sadie was emptied of all her secrets and it felt good.

There was a brief, contemplative silence, during which Sadie couldn't help but wonder about the thoughts traversing Priest's mind. Thankfully, he didn't keep her in suspense for long.

"Nick always had a soft heart for strays," Priest finally said. "And you..." he began, leaving the sentence hanging in the air.

"I've always been a pushover, I know that," she blurted, her temper getting the better of her. She pushed the bowl of soup aside and slowly drew her knees to her chest. She suppressed a wince.

"It's not wrong wanting to help your father," Priest remarked. "But sooner or later, one has to realize some people can't be helped."

Sadie swallowed. What Priest said held a measure of truth, one she'd known for a while but she could never find the courage to cut off ties from her father ... until now.

"Sadie, this fiancée of yours beat you black and blue. He'll do it again," Priest said.

"I know. That's why I ran. I didn't know where to go, so I thought of you. I know it's selfish, given everything you've done for me," she confessed.

"It is," Priest acknowledged.

The coldness in his words, coupled with the stillness in his body, momentarily made her forget the words she had intended to say next.

"But you're here now," he continued, his gaze thoughtful as he stroked his bearded chin.

Sadie's attention wandered, drawn to an old scar that marked a ragged line across his throat. In that distracted moment, she found herself tracing the scar tip to tip.

Her breath caught when Priest intercepted her fingers with his own, his touch rough and callused. The unexpected connection sent a spark right into her core.

“Don’t,” Priest warned, a low, cautionary note in his voice.

“Don’t what?” Sadie found herself asking, curiosity tinged with a hint of challenge.

He let out a low, sexy laugh that sent a jolt through her entire body. Sadie wondered if he could see her tightening nipples through the thin material of the shirt.

“You were always a brat,” he said.

Sadie wasn’t sure whether she should be offended or pleased by those words.

“When it comes to you, my control is nonexistent,” he admitted, setting her fingers down and giving them a warning squeeze.

Unnerved by the intensity of his stare, she couldn’t help but ask, “What’s going to happen now?”

“I’m glad you asked because I have a proposition for you,” he said.

Excitement hummed in Sadie’s veins as she faced Priest. She was well aware of the danger that surrounded him, and that she was crazy for making a deal with a man like him. Yet, in that moment, she felt an inexplicable surge of recklessness and boldness, a departure from her usual self.

Mason’s cruel handiwork, in a twisted way, had sparked a second awakening within her. Perhaps she had buried her true self under the persona of a good girl, so she could keep her promise to her mom—to watch over her dad. Now, with that burden lifted, she felt unshackled, free.

“Go on,” she said.

Sadie hoped she didn’t sound too eager or desperate. Who was she kidding? Priest held all the power here and they both knew it.

“I’ll keep you safe, but my help doesn’t come for free,” he said, voice grave.

“I don’t have any money,” were the first words she blurted.

Priest laughed, a sound that held a hint of cruelty in its undertone. Yet, even in that moment, she recognized a stark contrast to the malice she had experienced with Mason.

Sadie had hurt Priest before, she knew that. He had lost his faith, left the priesthood, and walked away from a life he once knew, all because of her. In any normal circumstance, he could have harbored resentment, hated her, and sought revenge. Yet, when Emery and she stumbled into his clubhouse seeking refuge, he didn’t turn her away. Deep down, despite their ugly history, she knew there was still some good in Priest.

“Money’s the last thing I want,” Priest replied.

He looked her up and down when he said those words. Sadie couldn’t help but flush. Even in such a state, he found her attractive?

“I do,” he said and she realized with shame that she had uttered that thought aloud.

“Sadie, I’ve always wanted you,” he said softly. “And now that you’re here, I plan on making you mine.”

Chapter Four

“Mine.” The word slipped from Priest’s lips without warning. A possessive declaration he had no intention of taking back.

Sadie widened her vivid cornflower-blue eyes. Despite the hell Sadie had been through, she curved her busted lip into a small smile. In that moment, the entire world seemed to light up. Sadie always seemed to magically find something good in a bad situation. That was one of the things Priest had always liked about her.

“I’d like that,” she murmured.

Even if Sadie wasn’t entirely herself right now, it didn’t matter to Priest. He reached out, his fingers gently tucking a stray strand of hair behind one ear. On the outside, Sadie always reminded him of a delicate flower, but deep down, Sadie was made of steel. That same nerve and courage brought her here, back to him.

“I accept your price, Priest,” Sadie said, her voice wonderfully soft yet firm.

A timely knock on the door signaled Doc’s entrance, his medical bag in hand. Priest made the introductions, aware of the curiosity that surrounded Sadie’s arrival.

“I’m aware. You caused quite the stir when you arrived, Sadie,” Doc remarked, setting his bag on a nearby table.

“I didn’t mean to. I just wanted to get to Silas—Priest. That was the only thing on my mind,” Sadie explained, sounding apologetic.

Priest reached for her hand, offering a reassuring squeeze. He hadn’t told Sadie one detail of their arrangement. That he planned on seeking retribution against the man who had hurt her.

As Doc conducted his examination, Priest’s thoughts drifted to this particular task. He sometimes grappled with his

inner conscience when dealing with certain targets. However, for this individual, he would take pleasure in his kill. He'd even make Mason Prescott squeal first before slitting his throat.

"You have a scary look on your face," Sadie's voice brought him back to reality.

"Oh, that?" Doc chuckled as he paused from his examination. "Priest always looks like that when he's looking forward to a hunt."

Sadie searched Priest's eyes, and a flicker of hesitation appeared on her face. Good.

The last thing Priest wanted was to scare her, but she needed to know, and eventually accept, the kind of man he had become. Five years ago, he left the priesthood not just to correct an injustice, but because he had grown weary of jumping through bureaucratic hoops and adhering to rigid rules. In the Death Seekers, they made their own law—and that lifestyle appealed to him.

"What's the verdict?" Priest asked Doc.

"No damage to her internal organs," Doc confirmed. "All she needs is some bed rest, and I'll prescribe painkillers just in case."

Priest exhaled a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. He'd been expecting the worst. He thought Sadie was acting like she was fine because she didn't want to burden him.

"Thank you, Doc," Priest said.

Doc efficiently packed his medical equipment, excusing himself and leaving Priest alone once more with Sadie.

"The bathroom is through that door if you want to wash up," Priest said, nodding toward the second door in his room. He paused, thinking. "Let me know if you need assistance," he added.

If she wasn't comfortable with him helping her, maybe he could get one of the women downstairs to help.

"I think I can manage a shower on my own," Sadie assured him.

"Then I'll leave you alone. You need your rest. Holler if you need anything. I'll post a prospect outside your door. He'll immediately look for me in case there's an emergency," Priest said.

"Thank you for everything," Sadie expressed her gratitude. "By the way, can I borrow your charger? I promised to text Emery with an update."

"Sure," he said.

After helping her charge her cellphone on a nearby socket, Priest left the room. If he lingered any longer, he knew the temptation to stay by her side would grow stronger. He didn't fully trust himself around Sadie, and part of him still entertained the notion that she might be a figment of his imagination.

Priest knew she didn't have to stay in his room. There were other spare rooms in the clubhouse for unexpected guests, but Priest wanted Sadie to feel safe.

What he could use right now was a drink or two. After flagging down a prospect to keep watch over his door, Priest returned to his familiar spot at the bar. Ignoring the hushed whispers that rippled through the room, he snorted into his beer. Priest had long learned not to take his MC brothers' idle chatter to heart. During downtime, with nothing to occupy their attention, they tended to gossip like hens in a barn.

"Bad night?" Rage, the club VP, took the stool next to his.

"Not too sure how I'd rate tonight," Priest admitted.

Sadie's chaotic arrival had disrupted the normal flow of his life. He wasn't sure if she was a good or bad omen. The fact she still had such an effect on him ought to bother him but it didn't.

Father Nick once predicted that the lines of his past and present would collide. He laughed right at Nick's face back then.

"Priest, who is this woman?" Rage asked, his voice and eyes grave.

Priest had worked with Rage long enough to know he was not speaking to his friend but the VP of the club.

"You saw?" Priest asked, fully aware he was momentarily delaying his response.

"We all saw," Rage affirmed. "I can tell she's important to you just from one look."

Priest chose not to correct Rage's assessment.

"I was close enough to hear what name she called you," Rage stated with a knowing look. "You knew her from the past?"

Priest met Rage's gaze. "Yeah, Sadie's the reason I quit the church," he admitted, taking a deliberate sip of his beer.

A momentary flash of anger flickered within him. He wasn't particularly in the mood for sharing tonight. Only Breaker knew his reasons for joining the MC. Priest never shared his secrets with anyone else.

Tonight, with Breaker absent, Rage seemed to be stepping into the president's shoes, attempting to discern if Sadie brought trouble. As Priest wrestled with the reluctance to disclose more, he reminded himself that he could trust Rage.

"And you quit the priesthood because ... you had an affair with her?" Rage asked carefully.

Priest couldn't help but laugh, the tension that had lingered from his earlier anger dissipating.

"Not at all," Priest replied, shaking his head. "Sadie came into my confessional box one Friday afternoon. Someone had done a number on her, and it was her boyfriend."

He paused, memories flooding back as his mind traveled to the past. Priest continued, “She came to me three more times, and I couldn’t take it anymore. I cornered the bastard right after Sunday Mass. He came from a wealthy family, you see. Thought himself untouchable.”

“Let me guess. A savage part of you that you never thought existed came out to play,” Rage remarked.

“I don’t need to tell you the rest,” Priest said.

A hint of unexpected pain surfaced as the memories lingered. Rage nodded in acknowledgement.

“The boyfriend’s family stepped in, got you fired from your post,” Rage commented.

“The priesthood is a calling, Rage, not a job. I left of my own accord,” Priest clarified, his gaze fixed on the label of his beer bottle. “I was angry for a long time—at the situation, at that asshole, at Sadie even.”

“But you still offered her your help, even though she found herself in a similar predicament?” Rage pressed.

Priest glowered at Rage, who raised both his hands in a placating gesture.

“I’m just trying to understand,” Rage said, “what she means to you.”

Priest took a moment to ponder his response. “She’s the one, Rage. The one that got away. Sadie’s meant to be mine. I knew it, even back then,” Priest admitted. “But after nearly killing her boyfriend, I realized there was a sleeping beast inside me. I decided she deserved better.”

Rage processed his words. He downed his own beer, before replying to Priest. “That was back then. And now?” Rage questioned.

“Now’s different,” Priest replied.

“You figured out what kind of trouble she’s in?” Rage finally asked.

“I did, and I’ll handle this problem on my own. The club doesn’t need to get involved,” Priest said.

Rage didn’t look like he had any intention of leaving. Priest sighed. He briefed Rage about Sadie’s predicament. Priest was careful not to divulge unnecessary details but he provided just enough information to assure his VP that he had the situation under control.

“You expect this fiancé of hers would be a problem?” Rage inquired. “His father’s the mayor after all.”

“Like I said, her problem is my problem,” Priest replied firmly.

“Then there’s nothing more I need to know,” Rage said, finishing his drink and rising from his seat. “Me, I’m heading back to my wife, but Priest? When you need us, don’t hesitate to ask. The club’s always here for you.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Priest said.

However, he had no intention of involving the club further in this particular matter. This mess belonged solely to him, and he was determined to see it through to the end.

Priest finished the last of his drink. Deciding to call it a night, he made his way back to his quarters. Gil looked half-awake when he arrived.

“Everything’s fine. She didn’t need anything,” Gil reported.

“All right, you may go,” he said.

As Priest stood alone in front of his door, he hesitated. With a moment of politeness, he knocked lightly. Then, he chuckled at the absurdity of it all. Why act all polite and gentlemanly when it was Sadie crashing in his room? Normally, Priest never second-guessed himself when it came to women. Then again, none of the women he’d been with were Sadie.

Shrugging off any lingering formality, Priest let himself into the room without waiting for a response. He

noticed that Sadie had left the lamp on. Maybe she was afraid to sleep in the dark.

Priest inhaled the familiar scent of leather and the subtle fragrance of Sadie's shampoo, *his* shampoo. That thought bought a smile to his face.

Deciding that he needed a shower to rid himself of the lingering scent of beer, Priest glanced at Sadie, sound asleep on his bed. He walked to the small bathroom, pulling off his leather cut, and let it hang on the back of the door. Priest usually slept in the nude, but tonight he opted for a pair of boxers. As the warm water cascaded down his body, he couldn't help but think about the unexpected turn the night had taken.

Exiting the bathroom, Priest found himself faced with a dilemma. Where would he sleep? The armchair seemed uncomfortable, and he knew he'd wake up with a backache if he chose that option. The floor, though not ideal, seemed the more practical choice. As he brought down the comforter from his closet, he noticed Sadie stirring on the bed, her eyelids fluttering open.

"Hey, what are you doing all the way over there?" Sadie murmured. Her eyes, still heavy with sleep, fixed on Priest as he laid the comforter on the floor.

Priest approached the bed, a soft smile on his face. He leaned over, placing a gentle kiss on Sadie's cheek. "Not tonight," he told her.

"Some other night then?" she asked, her voice laced with hope.

The vulnerability in her eyes tugged at something deep within Priest—a surge of possessiveness and desire. He couldn't deny the connection that had always existed between them, and now he finally had the chance to act on those feelings.

"Some other night," he agreed.

"Give me another kiss, this time on the mouth," she said.

“Brat,” he said. Cupping her cheek gently, he slanted his mouth over hers. God, she tasted as sweet as he imagined. He pulled away after, for both their sakes.

“Bastard,” she muttered, clearly wanting more.

Priest only chuckled, before laying on his comforter. Soon enough, Sadie’s soft snores filled the room. Priest doubted he’d get any sleep tonight.

Chapter Five

Sadie furiously wiped down a dirty table in the corner of the MC clubhouse. The atmosphere was thick with the scent of leather, gasoline, and the faint trace of cigarette smoke. Sadie still hadn't gotten used to the smell but she told herself she eventually would.

"Hey, Sadie, missed a spot!" one of the club whores, Katie, who was always around, pointed out.

Laughter erupted among the women as Sadie paused. Sadie clenched her teeth. Frustration rose to the surface, but she ignored the teasing. Sadie figured she could repay Priest by helping around the clubhouse. That was all. Besides, she had more pressing matters on her mind than paying attention to bullies.

It had been a week since Priest offered her his protection. He had been nothing but patient. Priest had refrained from making any advances toward her, much to Sadie's secret disappointment. She suspected he was giving her the time and space needed to heal, which she appreciated, but she wished he'd see she wasn't fragile anymore.

By some miracle, Mason hadn't managed to locate her. Emery held down the fort, and had already deflected questions from a couple of men working for Mason's powerful father. Sadie knew they wouldn't be able to shake Emery down. Emery was loyal to the bone, the only family member she could rely on.

"Hey, Sadie, I hear the women's toilet is clogged again," Katie called out.

Sadie spun on her heel, ready to give Katie a piece of her mind when someone else intervened.

"Don't you bitches have better things to do?" Cassie's voice cut through the air like a knife.

Katie shot her a glare, but that was as far as she dared to go. Cassie wasn't just Rage's old lady, she was also

Breaker's daughter. She carried considerable clout within the club. As the only friend Sadie had made within the club, Cassie had also taken it upon herself to watch over the new addition to their ranks.

Cassie approached Sadie and placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. There was concern on Cassie's features as she looked at Sadie.

"Don't let those bitches get to you," Cassie told her.

"Usually, I just ignore them," Sadie replied with a forced smile.

"They're just bitter because you're special to Priest," Cassie pointed out, her tone matter-of-fact.

Cassie sounded certain about that fact, but Sadie had her doubts.

"It doesn't feel that way," Sadie admitted. "I don't mean to sound ungrateful," she hurriedly added, realizing how spoiled she sounded.

Suddenly, a wave of dizziness washed over her. The room spun, and Sadie instinctively reached for the table to steady herself. Concern deepened in Cassie's eyes.

"Hey, sit down," Cassie urged, quickly pulling out a chair and joining Sadie at the table.

Sadie settled into the chair, and they lapsed into silence until the dizziness subsided.

"You shouldn't be working. You should be in bed, resting. You just recovered from your injuries, after all," Cassie chided gently.

"I'm sick of being confined in bed, and I'm completely recovered. I just want to be a little useful to Priest. I can't be a freeloader forever," Sadie confessed.

Cassie reached over and gently touched Sadie's hand. "Priest doesn't see it that way. Besides, ever since you've arrived, he's been different," Cassie pointed out.

"Different how?" Sadie asked, genuinely curious.

“Happier. He’s usually so gloomy, especially after a difficult job,” Cassie explained.

Sadie bit her lower lip, processing Cassie’s words.

“Regarding what I said earlier, I feel indebted to Priest, but there are times when it just feels...” Sadie trailed off, gathering her thoughts. “That he’s moving too slow. I’m starting to wonder if he’s lost interest.”

Cassie’s laugh caught her off guard. Sadie frowned, wondering if Cassie knew something she didn’t.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to laugh, it’s just you got it all wrong,” Cassie said.

“Then explain it to me,” Sadie insisted.

“I think Priest’s making slow and careful moves because he doesn’t want to pressure you. Five years have passed since he saw you, right?” Cassie asked.

Sadie nodded. “He’s worried about making a mistake ... I think,” Cassie said.

“I understand now,” Sadie said. Maybe she was the one who needed to make the first move?

“Hey, Sadie, if things don’t work out with Priest, I’m available,” said Shadow, who was drinking at a nearby table.

Sadie didn’t miss the dirty look Katie and her gang threw her. She was about to tell Shadow she was only interested in one man, but an almost animalistic growl made her forget her next words.

Priest stomped up to Shadow. Judging by his windswept hair and the smell of gasoline still clinging to him, it looked like he just came back from a job.

Sadie did remember the feel of his lips on her cheek earlier that morning. Without warning, Priest punched Shadow in the face.

“Mine, back off,” Priest said, baring his teeth at his MC brother.

Sadie's heart thudded in her chest. She had been here long enough to know fights broke out for the craziest reasons. The last thing she wanted right now was for a brawl to occur because of one misunderstanding.

Shadow groaned, rubbing at his cheek. The bar fell silent as the sudden eruption of violence caught everyone off guard.

"Get out of here before I do something worse," Priest told Shadow coldly.

The clatter of glasses and distant murmurs resumed only after Priest's warning.

Shadow, nursing his jaw, shot Sadie a disgruntled look before making a hasty retreat. As he stumbled away, Priest turned his attention back to Sadie, his eyes ablaze with a possessive intensity that made her heart race.

"Sorry about that," Priest muttered, seemingly unfazed by the commotion he caused. "Some of these guys can't take a hint."

Sadie, caught between shock and amusement, managed a small smile. "It's okay. I appreciate the ... protectiveness."

Priest grunted, his eyes softening as he reached out to gently touch her cheek. "I told you, you're mine. Anyone who so much as looks at you wrong is asking for a beating."

Sadie's heart melted hearing those words. Then Priest had to ruin the moment by eyeing her waitress uniform— tight tank top, short-shorts, and apron. Then he spotted the dishrag on the table and narrowed his eyes.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Priest demanded.

"Priest, she just—" Cassie began but Priest raised a warning finger.

"This conversation doesn't involve you. Scram," Priest said.

Cassie gave him the finger, before vacating her seat.

“You didn’t have to be rude to her,” Sadie said.

“You should be resting,” Priest snapped. “Not playing dress-up and—”

“Dress-up?” Sadie asked, suddenly pissed. “Do you think that’s what I’m doing?”

“No,” Priest instantly said, rubbing his jaw. He looked stumped.

Sadie crossed her arms, the anger still simmering beneath the surface.

“It’s called work, Priest. I’m trying to contribute, remember? I can’t sit around like a damsel in distress forever,” she pointed out.

Priest looked unhappy about her words but he didn’t contradict her. Points to him.

“I get that, Sadie, but you just recovered from injuries. You need to take it easy,” he said.

“I’m not made of glass, you know,” Sadie retorted. “And I’m not about to let anyone, including you, dictate what I can or can’t do.”

Priest sighed, looking frustrated. “Just be careful, okay? I don’t want you getting hurt again,” Priest pointed out.

Hearing how much he cared, Sadie softened. “I’ll be careful. Now, are you going to sit there and lecture me, or can I finish my shift?” she asked.

He grunted. “Fine, finish your shift. But then, I’m taking you back to bed,” he said.

“In bed?” Sadie asked.

He smirked, and the raw need in his eyes made her heart race. “Since you claim you’re fine, I have a mind to treat myself to a reward.”

Sadie swallowed, unable to tear her gaze from his. “Okay,” she whispered. “I’d like that.”

“I’m looking forward to tonight,” he said.

Sadie rose to her feet. Priest did the same, but before letting her go, he yanked her close to him without warning. Sadie let out a soft gasp.

Then he cupped her chin and brushed his mouth against hers. He wasn't gentle or nice and that was exactly what Sadie wanted. She didn't even care that Katie and the other club whores were watching. At that moment, nothing else mattered but Priest's hungry lips on hers, his hands on her body. He even gave her nipple a squeeze through the fabric of her shirt. Sadie let out an embarrassing groan.

"What time does your shift end?" Priest asked, breath warm against her ear.

"Midnight," she answered.

"Then at exactly 12:05, I expect to find you in my bed, waiting and naked," he whispered.

Hearing his order sent a thrill down her spine. "I can do that," she said.

"Good girl," he said, before pulling away.

Sadie maneuvered between the tables, taking orders, and delivering plates with practiced ease. Waitressing was like riding a bike to her. It was also one of her jobs but it became a challenge with Priest's intense gaze fixed on her.

He occupied a table at the back and he followed her every move, his presence both distracting and oddly reassuring. Word must've spread among the MC brothers after Priest's altercation with Shadow. The bikers, usually bold and loud, now kept a respectful distance. No sly remarks, no suggestive glances aimed at Sadie.

She stole occasional glances at Priest. It was both frustrating and endearing. As much as she wanted to focus on her job, Priest proved impossible to ignore. Sadie would have a talk with him after this shift, she decided. She checked the clock behind the bar and was glad her shift was finally over. She looked over her shoulder but Priest wasn't at his usual spot.

“Don’t worry about it,” the bartender, Mick, said. “Saw him heading to Breaker’s office. He told me to tell you to head on upstairs.”

Sadie nodded, taking off her apron. Her heart beating with excitement and trepidation, she excused herself and headed back to his room.

Once inside, Sadie debated taking a quick shower. Priest was still talking to Breaker. She had time. Sadie hopped in the bathroom and after she was done toweling herself dry, she didn’t bother with clothes. She planned on following his instructions to the letter. Eying his bed, she wondered how she should pose herself. To her shame, she even tried a few positions that seemed sexy.

In the end, Priest walked in while she was simply sitting on the edge of the bed. Priest shut the door behind him, his gaze gleaming when he saw her there.

“I couldn’t decide on a position,” she admitted.

“You’re sexy as hell,” he said, taking off his jacket. “Lie on the bed.”

Relieved she hadn’t disappointed him yet, Sadie scooted upward until her head hit the pillow.

Priest stood in front of her, hastily peeling off his shirt. She licked her lips, admiring the black ink gracing his muscled chest and abs. Sadie crooked a finger at him and that got a laugh out of him. He sounded so carefree and looked more relaxed than she had ever seen him.

“Be patient, Angel,” he told her.

There it was again. His special nickname for her. Sadie wasn’t sure of it at first, because the word “angel” didn’t really describe her. Still, she decided she liked hearing it from Priest’s lips.

He then unbuckled his belt, held it, and walked to where she was. “Raise your hands above your head,” he said.

Priest must’ve seen the hesitation on her face, because he brushed his fingers against her cheek, the gesture so tender

and sweet she realized she had nothing to fear from him at all.

“Do you trust me, Angel?” Priest asked.

“Yes, absolutely,” Sadie answered automatically.

“Good. Know that I’ll never ever hurt you. That the moment you tell me to stop, that you’re not comfortable with something, I’ll halt,” he said.

Sadie nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Priest used the belt to tie her wrists to the bedposts. She was surprised to discover the leather surprisingly soft and supple, like deerskin.

Then Priest climbed on top of her, keeping his weight off her.

“I want to take my time enjoying and worshipping every beautiful inch of you, Angel,” Priest said, lowering his mouth to hers.

The moment he uttered those words, Sadie was a goner.

Chapter Six

Sadie moaned as Priest left a trail of burning kisses down the side of her face, her neck. She assumed he would get right to business, but Sadie guessed wrong.

He sucked the hollow of her throat and when it came to her breasts, he paused, eying them and licking his lips. Need thrummed through every nerve in her body. Sadie tightened her hold on the belt as Priest closed his mouth on her right nipple. He licked and sucked.

She momentarily tensed when he set his teeth to the sensitive bud and left his mark there. Sadie panted as he also marked her left tit. Then Priest proceeded with his exploration, finally parting her legs.

Priest traced her pussy lips, paying close attention to her clit. Sadie gasped as he focused on the swollen bud, moving in circles until the pressure building inside her burst. She came, panting, mind completely blown, and Priest hadn't even gotten to the best part.

He scooted upward, giving her a mind-blowing kiss on the mouth. She could feel his cock, full and hard against her belly, the tip licking pre-cum. He swore softly all of a sudden.

"What's wrong?" she asked, afraid she'd disappointed him somehow.

"Protection," he said.

"I trust you, Silas, with everything I am," she whispered. "And I'm clean."

"I'm clean too, had myself tested just a month ago," he said.

"Then what are you waiting for?" Sadie asked.

Priest grinned. "You really are something, Sadie White."

He positioned his dick at her entrance, then entered her slow and steady. A needy whimper slipped out of her lips. He

felt so big, so full inside her. Eventually, he was finally balls-deep in her.

“Breathe,” he told her.

Sadie did as he asked and felt better. “Ride me, Priest,” she whispered.

“Your wish is my command, Angel,” he told her.

He didn’t rush. Priest began with a gradual rhythm, eventually picking up the pace when she started begging him to go faster. He reduced them both to panting, needy animals. Sadie silently marveled at how perfectly they fit together.

This wasn’t just sex. It was a melding of hearts. Each time she met his thrust, it felt like she was touching a vulnerable and intimate part of Priest’s soul.

Priest pulled out and the next time he drove inside her, he found her sweet spot. Sadie gasped, as he kept hitting the same area over and over again. The next time he plowed into her, her mind shattered. The room fell from her line of sight. Only the two of them mattered. Sadie came, screaming out his name.

Priest entered her a few more times, before pulling out and collapsing next to her. He freed her wrists and gathered her close.

Sadie nestled next to Priest, cocooned in a sense of utter contentment. Wrapped in his embrace, she felt not only sated but also safe and protected. Cherished.

This was the first time she ever felt this way. As she gazed into his eyes, she wondered if he felt the same, or was Sadie only a distraction? He finally had her. Would he soon get bored with her?

“Do you think so little of me?” Priest asked.

He gently tucked away a stray strand of hair that had fallen across her face. A flush crept up Sadie’s cheeks as the realization hit her—again, she had uttered her thoughts out loud.

“No,” she stammered, attempting to gather her thoughts. “It’s just, I won’t blame you if—”

Sadie didn’t finish her line of thought. Priest, sensing her hesitation, reached out and placed a gentle finger against her lips, silencing her words. Then, in a tender and unexpected gesture, he leaned in and kissed her.

As their lips met, Sadie’s doubts melted away, momentarily forgotten in the warmth of the embrace.

“You’re mine, Sadie. I’m never letting you go,” Priest said.

She smiled at that. Priest kissed her again. “Now sleep. It’s been a long day,” he told her. “You must be exhausted, wiping tables and serving drinks all night.”

Sadie couldn’t help but smile at Priest’s gentle words. He kissed her once more, a tender reassurance that lingered in the air.

“Regarding that, I have a bone to pick with you,” she declared.

Priest raised an intrigued eyebrow. “Oh?” he asked. Sadie took that as an invitation to share her thoughts.

“Yeah, all night long I couldn’t focus on my job because you’re a distraction,” she pointed out.

“I’m a what?” Priest feigned innocence, a bemused expression on his face that only served to mildly irritate her.

In response, she lightly elbowed him in the ribs, but he responded with a chuckle.

“You hover,” she insisted. “I could use less hovering.”

“But who’s going to watch your back when I’m not around?” Priest asked.

“I can take care of myself,” Sadie asserted, though the words faltered as she realized the truth.

Five years ago, she sought refuge with him, escaping her troubles, just as she had done recently with Mason. As if

sensing the internal struggle, Priest gently cupped Sadie's face. He seemed to consider her and her words for a few moments.

"I can't have you work at the clubhouse," Priest finally admitted.

Was it wrong she found the possessiveness in his voice kind of hot?

Priest continued, "It would drive me insane, thinking about any of my MC brothers hitting on you."

Sadie took a moment to process his words, vividly recalling how Priest had dealt with Shadow earlier. She understood the complex dynamics within the motorcycle club, and the last thing she wanted was to put Priest in a difficult position.

While she believed most of the bikers had good intentions, the clubhouse was undoubtedly a dangerous environment to work in.

"Then we have to compromise, or this won't work at all," Sadie asserted. She was surprised by her own courage in addressing the issue head-on.

Priest regarded her with a steady gaze, inviting her to elaborate.

"I want to be useful, Priest. To contribute," she continued, determined to express herself. "Your girlfriend's not a freeloader. I can stand on my own two feet."

A teasing smile touched Priest's lips. "What did you just refer to yourself as?" Priest asked.

Sadie groaned. "Be serious, please," she said.

"I am. I hear you, Sadie. Fine, then what's your plan?"

Priest's openness to her opinions resonated with her, a stark contrast to some of the men she had encountered in the past who would automatically dismiss her ideas.

"I can get a job in town, something safer?" Sadie suggested. "I took odd jobs over the years, but the one I liked most was being a barista."

Priest considered her proposal, nodding in agreement.

“I think there are a couple of stores in town hiring,” he said, looking thoughtful. “A barista, huh?”

As they settled in for the night, the conversation shifted to lighter topics. They spoke about Sadie’s past jobs, the moments she cherished, and the challenges she faced. In the end, they also delved into deeper subjects, including her complicated relationship with her father and the experiences that shaped her over the years.

As they continued talking, sharing fragments of their lives, Sadie felt a sense of contentment and happiness settling within her. Eventually, fatigue claimed her, and Sadie drifted to sleep.

“Sadie,” Emery’s voice interrupted, pulling her attention away from the animated conversation she’d been having.

Emery and her had kept in close contact ever since he brought her to Hanging Grove, to Priest. She had been on her lunch break when she received his text message, indicating that he needed to talk.

Sadie realized she might have dominated the conversation, sharing details about her new job at a cafe in town and her relationship with Priest.

“Sorry, I got off topic,” she said. Sadie sensed there was more on Emery’s mind.

“It’s fine. It’s strange, you know,” Emery commented.

“What is?” she asked.

“I’ve never heard you sound so ... upbeat and happy. I’m glad things are working out with your man and your new job,” Emery said. Even though she couldn’t see his face, Sadie could sense he meant every word.

“Sadie, a large group of customers just walked in, and I could use your help!” Tad, her manager, called out, disrupting their conversation.

Quickly refocusing on Emery, Sadie asked, “What was it you wanted to talk about?”

Emery hesitated for a moment before abruptly saying, “You know what? Forget it. I’m good, Sadie.”

“Emery,” she warned.

“It’s just that apart from the mayor’s men dropping by my place again, your dad’s been coming by as well, but I got it handled,” Emery quickly explained. “Anyway, I gotta go. My lunch break’s almost over.”

Before Sadie could press further, Emery abruptly ended the call. She stared at her cellphone for a few moments, an uneasy feeling settling in the pit of her stomach. The mention of the mayor’s men and her father’s visits left lingering questions. What was he not telling her? Was the situation back home more serious than she had initially thought?

The nagging thought lingered, casting a shadow over her shift at the cafe. Sadie had assumed that once she left, Mason would move on to find another unsuspecting bride, though she could never wish such an awful fate on anyone. However, it seemed her assumptions were wrong. The mayor’s men were still relentlessly pursuing Emery for clues about her whereabouts.

Throughout her shift, the same troubling questions circled her mind. Should she bring this up to Priest? The weight of her concerns pressed upon her, and with each passing moment, the decision loomed larger.

As closing time approached, the familiar rumble of a motorcycle engine outside the cafe disrupted Sadie’s thoughts. Looking up, her troubles momentarily forgotten, she caught sight of her man dismounting his Harley.

The sight of him never failed to captivate her, and a brief respite from her worries came with the simple joy of

seeing him. Priest met her gaze, and a sexy, possessive smile played on his lips, as if he could sense her thoughts about him. It reminded her of their plans for the night—a dinner date at an actual restaurant.

No, Sadie decided. Emery had assured her he had everything under control, and she trusted him without question. She resolved to share her concerns with Priest only if the situation worsened. Perhaps she was merely entertaining the worst-case scenario in her mind.

As Priest entered the cafe, Sadie told him, “Give me five minutes to change.”

“Sure,” he replied, but before she could retreat, he tugged her close for a kiss that left her momentarily breathless. “Missed you,” he confessed.

“Same here,” Sadie whispered before excusing herself to the employees’ locker room.

She swiftly changed out of her waitress uniform and into the sleek black strapless dress she had acquired after Priest asked her out. After Priest asked her out, she immediately asked Cassie to accompany her on a shopping trip. This dress was the result. Upon emerging, Sadie noticed the hungry gaze Priest cast her way.

“You look beautiful,” he murmured, holding out his arm like a true gentleman. Seeing Priest’s reaction certainly justified the price tag of this dress, she thought.

“You don’t look so bad yourself,” she quipped with a playful smile.

“Ready?” he asked.

“I am,” Sadie replied.

After being on her feet the whole day, Sadie was ready to let loose and enjoy herself with her man tonight. They walked out of the cafe. Priest grabbed his spare helmet from the compartment under his motorcycle and handed it to her.

“Put this on,” he said.

Gratefully, Sadie took the helmet, securing it in place before climbing onto the back of the motorcycle behind Priest. The engine roared to life, and they were off.

Despite the thrill of the ride, Sadie couldn't shake the nagging concern about Emery. She made a mental note to give him another call tomorrow. Sadie just wanted to ensure everything was truly under control as he claimed.

Chapter Seven

Priest was abruptly woken from his sleep by the sound of Sadie coughing and vomiting. Frowning, he quickly got out of bed. When he tried the bathroom door, he found it locked.

“Sadie? What’s wrong?” he asked, worried. After a brief pause, she eventually unlocked the door and flashed him a tired smile.

“My stomach probably didn’t agree with something last night,” she admitted.

He had a feeling she was trying to downplay the situation. Priest’s irritation flared as he remembered the lobster they had at the restaurant. With the hefty tab he had paid, he felt inclined to pay the establishment a visit and check if their produce was really fresh.

“The lobster felt a little off,” he grumbled.

Sadie touched his arm. “It’s fine, Priest. I’m sure it’ll go away in a few hours,” she assured him.

Priest had an important transport job lined up for the day. The motorcycle club dealt in weapons, and he and Rage were tasked with supervising a large transport to an allied MC down south.

“Promise me you’ll stay in today?” Priest asked, his eyes searching Sadie’s.

“I can’t just take a day off, Priest. I’m new, and they’re counting on me,” Sadie argued back.

Priest maintained his steady look. “If you’re really not feeling well, you should stay home,” he insisted.

The silent standoff continued for a few moments until Sadie sighed in defeat.

“Fine, if I’m still feeling this way in a few hours, I’ll call my boss,” Sadie said.

Sensing her relenting, Priest brought her close and tenderly kissed her forehead. "I'll be home late tonight," he reminded her.

"Right," Sadie said.

Priest was always transparent about his activities. While he didn't keep her in the dark regarding his responsibilities in the MC, he kept the more detailed and gory parts from her.

"Be careful out there," she told him, tracing the stubble on his jaw.

"Always am," he reassured her, leaving the unspoken truth hanging. Now that she was in his life, he took extra precautions.

After tucking Sadie back into bed, Priest made his way downstairs to the bar and eating area. He fixed himself a breakfast of toast, eggs, and black coffee, all the while scrolling through rental listings on his cellphone. The idea of finding a place in town had been on his mind lately. Would Sadie be content with an apartment, or would she prefer a small house? Although they hadn't discussed it yet, Priest liked to be prepared. If things continued on course, raising a child in an MC clubhouse didn't feel right to him.

"Looking for apartments in town?" asked Rage, joining him at his table. "I didn't know Sadie and you were at that stage already."

"We're getting there," Priest replied. He hesitated, then added, "We're not on the same page yet."

He recalled Sadie's distracted demeanor from the night before but had dismissed it as nerves about their date. Now, as he sifted through rental options, he began to wonder if there was something she might be keeping from him, or if he was simply overthinking the matter.

"You don't sound certain," Rage remarked.

Priest closed the browser on his cellphone and shot a glare in Rage's direction. Rage raised both hands in mock defeat.

“Just saying, both of you need to be sure so you won’t regret anything,” Rage commented as they finished the remainder of breakfast in silence.

“You ready for today, Priest? I need to know if your head’s in the game,” Rage asked.

“You know I always am,” Priest responded dryly. “I can separate business from personal. You know me.”

“Yeah, but when it comes to Sadie...” Rage trailed off, leaving the sentence unfinished.

“Don’t finish that thought,” Priest warned sharply.

Rage thankfully didn’t press the matter further. Before leaving the clubhouse with Rage and their crew, Priest took a moment to send a text message to Cassie, asking her to check on Sadie if she had time.

Cassie immediately responded with a simple: **Will do.** Satisfied that Sadie would have someone looking out for her, Priest refocused on the job ahead.

Sadie checked her cellphone once again and groaned. Emery still hadn’t checked in with her. The distant rumble of motorcycle engines outside the clubhouse caught her attention.

Getting up from the bed, she walked to the window and spotted Priest’s figure along with his MC brothers. They rode in a straight line out of the compound.

Despite intending to discuss her worries about Emery with Priest that morning, she found herself suddenly vomiting. Priest also had an important task today, and the last thing she wanted was to disturb him with her concerns.

“Maybe Emery woke up late or forgot to charge his cellphone,” she told herself, attempting to dispel the rising worry.

After all, she had just spoken to him yesterday. For all she knew, everything was fine back home, and she was merely being extra paranoid.

A knock sounded on the door. "Come in," she called out.

Cassie appeared, carrying a tray with bowls of fruit and oatmeal, along with two steaming mugs of coffee.

"I figured you could have something to eat," she said with a warm smile.

"You're a lifesaver, Cassie," Sadie said.

"Why are you up? Shouldn't you be in bed?" Cassie asked.

Sadie rolled her eyes. "Priest exaggerates. I'm fine, just threw up earlier. Let's sit down, eat breakfast together," she suggested.

Sadie initially thought all she could stomach was the black coffee, but to her surprise, hunger suddenly struck. She ate all her fruit and finished her oatmeal, a realization dawning on her.

"That's odd," she remarked to Cassie.

"What is?" Cassie inquired.

"Earlier, I thought I wouldn't have an appetite," Sadie admitted.

She then shared with Cassie the details about the lobster from the night before and her suspicion of food poisoning. Cassie gave her a thoughtful look.

"Huh," Cassie mused, prompting Sadie to ask, "What? Don't leave me in suspense."

"Was Priest fine, though?" Cassie questioned.

"Yeah, he was his usual self this morning," Sadie answered.

Cassie then took her hands gently, and Sadie felt a sudden surge of worry. "What, then?" she asked.

In a matter of seconds, Sadie pieced two and two together, her heart thudding against her chest. “No,” she whispered. The gravity of the situation hit her.

“You don’t want to be pregnant?” Cassie asked, sounding sympathetic.

“No ... that’s...” Sadie faltered, her thoughts swirling with conflicting emotions.

If she had to be honest with herself, she sometimes fantasized about it. Priest was everything to her, and Sadie couldn’t imagine being with anyone else. She wanted to build a home with him, raise a family together, the works.

Yet, to have a baby right now, when things weren’t settled back home and with Mason and his father still looking for her, that didn’t sit right.

“I want Priest’s baby,” she whispered, her voice barely audible. “But not now.”

“Hey,” Cassie said, enveloping her in a comforting hug. “I get it. You’re scared, especially with that bastard still out there, but Sadie, you’re in the safest place in the world right now. Priest, this whole MC, and I won’t let anything happen to you or your baby.”

Relief washed over Sadie at those words. Then, to lighten the heavy atmosphere, Sadie let out a nervous laugh.

“I’m not even sure yet,” she confessed to Cassie, who released her from the hug and gave her shoulder a comforting pat.

“Don’t worry. Wait right here. I’ll ask one of the girls if they have a spare pregnancy test lying around,” Cassie assured her.

Sadie reluctantly nodded, watching as Cassie left the room. Alone, Sadie realized she needed to calm down. Her mind raced with thoughts and possibilities.

Initially, she debated texting Priest but decided against it. There was no point in giving him the news if she wasn’t

even sure yet. Taking a deep breath, she tried to steady her nerves.

It felt like an eternity, but Cassie returned less than fifteen minutes later.

“Got it,” Cassie said, handing Sadie the pregnancy test box. “I’ll wait right here.”

Not trusting herself to speak, Sadie nodded and retreated to the bathroom. The moments waiting for the test felt agonizing. Once she was done, she opened the door.

“Well?” Cassie asked eagerly.

“Still waiting,” Sadie replied, feeling anxious. “Do these things take time or—”

She didn’t finish her sentence as the results surfaced. Her heart leapt in her throat. Cassie leaned over her shoulder and let out a squeal of delight.

“Sadie, I’m so happy for you and Priest,” Cassie said, embracing her once again.

Sadie wished she could share Cassie’s enthusiasm, but her mind rewound to darker times—Mason’s furious face, her escape with Emery after Mason’s brutal attack. They were still out there, searching for her, and once they found her, there was no telling what they’d do to her and her unborn baby. Sure, she had Priest and the MC, but were they fine with Sadie dragging them into her personal mess?

“Are you going to tell Priest now or later?” Cassie inquired.

“Later,” Sadie decided. “I don’t want Priest to get distracted. They have an important delivery today, don’t they?”

Cassie nodded. “They do.” Sadie thanked her for breakfast.

Sensing that Sadie needed some time alone, Cassie nodded and gathered the tray, plates, and cups.

“I’ll be in the clubhouse all day. Text me if you need anything,” Cassie said.

“Thanks, Cassie. I appreciate it,” Sadie said.

Feeling slightly dizzy, Sadie chose to lie down for a few moments, attempting to collect her thoughts.

It wasn’t long before her cellphone started ringing, jolting her from her momentary respite. Priest had mentioned he’d contact her if anything serious happened. Worried, she snatched her phone and answered automatically. “Priest?” She reminded herself to tell him the news when he got back, not now.

There was no answer on the other end. Sadie looked at the number on the screen and was relieved to see the call was from Emery.

“Emery? Thank God you called, I was worried,” she said.

“Sadie. So, Emery was lying. He was in contact with you all this time.”

Dread filled her insides upon hearing her father’s voice. The realization that Mason and her father might be closing in on her sent a chill down her spine, complicating an already challenging situation.

Sadie sucked in a breath, her voice tight with tension. “Dad? Where’s Emery and what are you doing with his cellphone?” she demanded, a surge of anxiety coursing through her.

“You put us both in a pickle, Pumpkin. Gene’s men came by his place, and this time didn’t settle for lies,” her father said, his words sending a chill down her spine.

Gene? Gene Prescott? Since when was her father on a first-name basis with the mayor? Sadie shook her head, trying to process the information.

She didn’t even feel betrayed because she always knew deep down that her father didn’t really give a damn about her. But Emery—God. He was in danger because of her.

“What does Mason want?” Sadie asked, momentarily surprised by the steel in her voice.

Being with Priest and living in the MC had toughened her up a little, but was it enough to save Emery?

“You know the answer to that, Sadie,” her father answered grimly. “Come back to us, baby. Things will get sorted out.”

He added, “And I know you’re shacking up with that defrocked priest. Don’t bring him unless you want his body to end up in the sewer. I’ll text you the details.”

Chapter Eight

“Don’t believe me?” her father asked, his voice holding a menacing edge.

A tense silence hung on the other end for a few moments. Then, Sadie heard her father speaking to someone.

The next thing she knew, an ear-piercing scream came through the phone. Emery! Her heart pounded with fear and helplessness. How could her father allow something like this to happen to family?

“Did that finally convince you to come home?” her father asked a moment later, his tone still cold and demanding.

“You know it did,” she whispered.

“Then see you soon, Sadie,” he said, the line going dead.

Feeling numb, Sadie took a quick shower, the water doing little to wash away the dread that clung to her.

Dressed and devoid of any emotion, she felt like a ghost as she left the clubhouse. Thankfully, no one was there to stop her.

In the parking lot now, Sadie slid behind the wheel of her newly purchased secondhand car. She remembered being so happy, buying this little Chevy, and Priest celebrating with her.

Speaking of Priest, he needed to know. She tried calling him, but there was no answer. He was probably focused on his job. Sadie’s hands shook as she sent Priest a text, her fingers typing out the painful truth. She told him what she was planning to do. Sadie kept no lies from her man.

Her father had made it clear that the longer she waited, the worse it became for Emery. She wasn’t too worried about keeping secrets from Priest.

It seemed her father didn’t know Priest was part of an MC. He and Mason probably just assumed Sadie ran off to

Priest, and they were living together.

Sadie only hoped ... what? That Priest would read her message and arrive in time to help her save Emery?

She debated telling Cassie about her plans, then ultimately decided she didn't want to drag her new friend into danger. This was a personal problem, after all. Cassie had already done so much for her, and involving her in the dangerous dynamics of her past felt like an unfair burden.

After taking a few calming breaths, Sadie started the engine and headed for her hometown. The road stretched ahead, and she was too scared and nervous to bother turning the radio on. All she kept thinking about was Emery and what Mason would do to her once she arrived.

The weight of impending danger hung heavy in the air, and she didn't believe for a second that Mason would keep his word about letting Emery go in exchange for her. The fear gnawed at her, but amidst the anxiety, a spark of determination flickered within her.

The last thing Mason and the mayor's goons would expect was Priest.

Time passed by in a blur as Sadie drove through the town. The sight of the welcome sign tightened her stomach into knots. When Emery and she left this hellhole weeks ago, she thought she'd never return.

"Guess I was wrong," she whispered.

Entering a familiar residential street that she had escaped only recently, Sadie parked her car on the street opposite Mason's house. The air inside her car suddenly felt stifling despite the air conditioning.

"If Priest were here, he'd tell me that I got this," she whispered, shutting her eyes for a few moments to steady herself.

Once she was a lot calmer, Sadie reached into her glove compartment and retrieved the tiny gun—a recent gift from Priest. Tucking it into her purse, she took a deep breath and exited the car.

As she approached Mason's house, two men in suits stood by the front door, unmistakably the mayor's men. The excessive security for someone like her struck her as absurd, and a bitter laugh threatened to escape. However, she couldn't find it in herself to laugh. Instead, a nauseating feeling took over.

"Get it together for Emery," she reminded herself.

Her cellphone started ringing, and seeing Priest's name on the screen, she hesitated. He must be so angry with her right now. It seemed so long ago that she and Cassie ate breakfast, and Cassie persuaded her to take a pregnancy test.

God, Priest didn't even know about the baby. He'd be doubly mad if he knew. She answered the call, because she couldn't just ignore it. If things turned south, then this could be her last conversation with him.

"Where are you?" was the first thing Priest asked her. She was glad he was always so practical.

"Mason's place. I texted you his address. Priest, I'm so sorry, but I have to put this down. Security is watching me closely," she whispered.

"I'll be there soon," was Priest's abrupt answer.

He ended the call. If Priest was someone else, she would've doubted if he'd keep his promise but Sadie never second-guessed him.

The rap of knuckles on the car window made her jump in her seat. Her father was standing outside and he didn't look happy.

Sadie got out of the car. "Who were you calling?" her father demanded. He didn't even bother asking how she was or how she was doing.

Her father continued, "I hope it's not that priest. Silas, wasn't it? He'll be dead the moment he steps foot here. The mayor's men will make sure of it."

"I was just saying my goodbyes. He was wondering why I left our apartment suddenly," Sadie lied, managing to

squeeze out one fake tear.

Her father grabbed her arm suddenly. “None of this would’ve happened if you didn’t run in the first place,” he hissed in her ear.

Sadie angrily shoved him away. She was done taking any crap from him. Sadie had done so her entire life. He’d never been much of a parent to her. He only saw her as an ATM. She understood that now. Momentarily surprised by her actions, he released her.

“Fuck you,” she told him. “You never did learn to clean up your own messes. If Mason ends up killing Emery and me, that’s two lives on your conscience. You’re going to hell, Dad.”

She breezed past his shocked face. Sadie never spoke back to him that way before, and it was liberating.

“But Mason says he loves you,” her father sputtered.

“Keep telling yourself that,” she told him, walking to the front door of Mason’s house.

One of the men frisked her, but didn’t give her tiny purse a second look. Maybe he didn’t think a gun could fit in there. Relief washed over her as she let herself inside, but that relief was momentary as another of the mayor’s men stopped her in her tracks.

“Miss White, this way,” he said.

Not trusting herself to speak, Sadie nodded. He led her to the living room, where Mason and his father were discussing business matters. The mayor gave her an uninterested look, then sighed.

She thought she would be more intimidated by Mason, but she wasn’t. All she saw was a childish bully, who always got his way thanks to his father. She’d been around real men, hard men. Mason wouldn’t survive a single second in Priest’s MC.

“I’ll be in the yard answering phone calls while you discuss your wedding plans with your runaway bride,” the

mayor told his son.

The security guy who escorted Sadie lingered in the room. Maybe the mayor gave him orders to watch Mason and her closely. That wasn't good news. She was hoping Mason and her could talk in private.

"I need privacy," Mason snapped to the bodyguard. Relief filled her, although Sadie didn't show it.

"She's just one defenseless bitch. Do you think I'm incapable of handling her on my own?" Mason asked the guard when the guy didn't budge.

The guard hesitated, then exited the living room, leaving Sadie utterly alone with a monster. His words rankled her.

Mason didn't really believe she could be a threat, but that was a good thing, she told herself, clutching the purse. *Don't be too obvious*, she reminded herself and tried to loosen up. She would keep her only trump card close, until the very last second.

"What wedding?" she asked. "We're still going through with this farce? You're unbelievable."

"Of course, all the arrangements were made, even before you left, remember?" He cracked his knuckles.

Sadie kept her expression neutral. Showing any weakness would only excite Mason. He frowned at her, then sneered.

"That's why my father made me promise to keep you intact ... just until the wedding at least, but after that..." Mason left the ominous words hanging in the air.

Sadie said nothing, because there would be no wedding or honeymoon. There was only one man she was going to be with and it wasn't Mason Prescott.

First, she had to extract herself from this mess first. Where were they keeping Emery? Upstairs in the attic? The basement?

"And Emery?" she asked.

Mason scowled, closing the distance between them. Every instinct in Sadie's body urged her to back away, but that was what the old Sadie would do. The new Sadie stood her ground and refused to let this bastard intimidate her. Mason snapped his fingers in front of her face. She flinched.

"You should worry about yourself first," Mason said.

"Should I?" Her mind raced.

What was his next move? Mason did mention he couldn't do what he wanted to her until the wedding, but she knew better. Mason could still hit her in places a wedding gown would hide. That awful realization made her stomach lurch and Sadie reassured herself it wouldn't come to that.

"What's wrong with you? You look out of it. I hope you're not high on anything, Sadie," he warned, cupping her cheek.

Sadie slapped his hand away, and he laughed. So he liked her spirited, didn't he? Sadie could keep talking and hopefully distract Mason long enough until Priest arrived.

"There's fight in you," he observed, looking thoughtful. "There wasn't before. What changed?"

Sadie moved closer until their faces were nearly touching. She didn't know what she was doing. Not really, but egging Mason on seemed to be working. Nearby, she could hear the hum of motorcycle engines. Not just one, but many. Trust Priest to bring the cavalry. She smiled, and Mason seemed too stunned by her transformation to react.

"I changed," she said, then executed the maneuver Priest taught her.

She kneed him in the groin, making him back away and groan in pain.

"You're going to regret that," he said, gritting his teeth, curling both his hands into fists.

"No, I won't," she said. She pulled her little handgun from her purse and pointed it steadily at him. He had the audacity to laugh at her.

“Idiot. My father’s men would come running in here the moment you fired that gun,” Mason said with a scoff.

The roar of motorcycles grew louder. Sadie could hear commotion in the house. She fired, and Mason started cursing her as he stumbled backward.

“You shot my leg,” he yelled, looking at the doorway, but Security appeared.

“No help’s coming, Mason. It’s just you and me now,” she said.

Letting out an animalistic howl, Mason lunged at her.

Ever since he left Sadie that morning, Priest had a bad feeling in his gut. Their business had been concluded, and they were about to get to their motorcycles when Priest saw Sadie’s text message.

At first, he was angry at her for being so reckless, then realized he didn’t choose her as his woman because she was content to be at home while others did the dirty work. Of course, it would only be natural for Sadie to leave all caution behind to save her cousin. He didn’t like it one bit, so he was relieved she answered his call. Once their call ended, he debated what to do next. Rage halted his motorcycle next to Priest.

“What’s up?” Rage asked him.

Priest took a deep breath and looked into his VP’s eyes.

“You once told me that if I needed help, you guys would have my back,” he began.

“Always, brother,” Rage said.” This about your woman?”

Priest nodded and quickly gave Rage a breakdown of what happened. Rage nodded curtly.

“Then we just need to make one more stop before heading home,” Rage said.

“Thank you, Rage,” Priest said.

“We’ll get her back, Priest,” Rage said.

Priest appreciated the backup because, from what Sadie told him, the mayor and his son probably had a security team with them at all times. While he’d like nothing better than to gun down anyone who hurt his woman, he could recognize when he needed help.

“Let’s ride,” he told Rage and the other members of their crew, who Rage updated about their mission.

Priest didn’t know what to expect when he and his crew dismounted their motorcycles in front of Mason Prescott’s fancy home. They split their crew in half.

Rage ordered the second team to go around the house, to the backyard, to cut off any possible escape while Priest and his men stomped through the front gates.

The two security guys at the front door tried to stop them, but Priest and his crew shot them down. They agreed to aim for the less lethal spots, to simply incapacitate them because these men were just doing their jobs. Of course, if they refused to stay down, that was another matter entirely.

Gunshots echoed from somewhere in the back of the house.

“Priest!” a voice croaked out from somewhere in the house.

Sadie! Priest ran to the source of the sound and found Mason and Sadie on the floor. Rage filled him as he saw Mason had his fingers around Sadie’s neck.

Blood gushed from Mason’s left pant leg. Someone had shot him in the leg, probably Sadie. Pride and anger filled him as he ripped Mason off his woman. He shoved Mason against the closest wall.

Mason looked at him angrily, then fear filled his eyes when Priest pulled out his gun while keeping him pinned to

the wall. There was no recognition in Mason's eyes, although he and his family used to frequent Sunday service during the days he was assigned at St. Patrick's.

"Priest, watch out!" Sadie yelled.

A security guard appeared with a gun pointed at Priest. Priest had to let go of Mason and ducked just in time. The sound of gunfire echoed through the room as bullets whizzed past.

"Sadie, get down!" he yelled, hoping she heard him through the noise and chaos. He heard a body drop to the ground and hoped it was Sadie.

Priest quickly took cover behind a nearby piece of furniture, returning fire at the security guard. A loud thump echoed through the room. Peering out cautiously, Priest saw the guard lying on the floor, incapacitated. However, Sadie and Mason were nowhere in sight.

Cursing under his breath, Priest desperately scanned the space for signs of their departure. Spotting droplets of blood on the floor, he remembered Mason's gunshot wound in his leg and followed the trail.

As he moved through the hallways, he passed the lifeless bodies of the guards. In the chaos, he bumped into Shadow and urgently asked if he had seen Mason and Sadie. Shadow, overwhelmed by the situation, apologized and said he hadn't seen them.

Determined, Priest continued to follow the trail of blood, leading him to the backyard.

Priest found Mason holding Sadie at gunpoint, and he froze in his tracks. Fear he'd never known filled him to the core. It couldn't end this way. Sadie and him had just found their way back to each other after all these years. They had a future planned. Priest intended on making Sadie his old lady, getting a house together, and maybe even having little ones down the line.

"Put the gun down, tough guy," Mason threatened, his eyes narrowing.

Sadie shook her head at Priest, silently urging him not to comply. Their gazes locked, the unspoken understanding passing between them. Reluctantly, Priest lowered his weapon. In that tense moment, Mason swiftly turned the gun on Priest. However, before he could make a move, Sadie seized the opportunity. With a swift and well-aimed kick at Mason's injured leg, he gasped, momentarily loosening his hold on her.

Taking advantage of the distraction, Sadie dropped to the ground just as Priest, quick on his feet, scooped his gun back up and fired. He didn't miss. The bullet went through Mason's skull and he toppled over.

Relieved, Sadie got up from the ground and rushed over to Priest. She sobbed against his chest while Priest stroked her hair, offering comfort and reassurance.

"Everything's all right now," he whispered to her, planting tender kisses on her forehead.

As they clung to each other, Priest's gaze shifted to the lifeless body a few feet away, an elderly man in an expensive suit with features resembling Mason. It seemed the mayor had also been caught in the crossfire earlier. Good. They wouldn't need to worry about Mason or his father causing any more trouble.

"Emery!" Sadie suddenly exclaimed, parting from Priest.

"We'll find him. My MC brothers are searching the house," he assured Sadie.

They headed back inside. After a thorough search, they eventually found Shadow and Emery in one piece, albeit bruised, near each other.

Sadie rushed up to her cousin, and the two embraced tightly. Priest caught Rage's gaze across the room and they exchanged nods.

It seemed like it was all in a good day's work for the MC, though he planned on sitting Sadie down and giving her a lecture about being more careful and less reckless. However,

that could be reserved for later, Priest decided, as Sadie parted from her cousin and gave him a warm smile.

Chapter Nine

By the time they returned to the MC clubhouse, Sadie had dozed off behind him. Priest shook her gently awake.

“We’re here already?” Sadie asked, dismounting from his motorcycle. She handed her helmet back to him and rubbed at her eyes.

“We’re home,” Priest confirmed, kissing her on the mouth.

“Emery?” she asked him.

“Shadow took him to Hanging Grove Medical. We’ll see him first thing in the morning,” he told her.

“Good,” she said, sounding relieved.

He led her by the hand back to their quarters, because Sadie looked ready to fall asleep on her feet.

“There’s something we need to discuss,” Sadie said once she slipped into their bed.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“When I threw up this morning...” Sadie began.

“Right, you weren’t feeling well,” Priest said. “How are you doing right now?”

“That’s what I was about to tell you,” she said. Sadie seemed nervous as she fiddled with the edge of the blanket.

“Go on, I’m listening,” Priest said, wondering if this was something important.

Sadie took a deep breath. “I’m pregnant,” she confessed. The air in the room seemed to change as Priest processed her words.

He sat down beside her.

“Pregnant?” he repeated, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. “Are you sure?”

Sadie nodded, her anxiety giving way to a small smile. “Cassie helped me get a pregnancy test, and, well, it came out positive.”

A surge of emotions flooded Priest—happiness, excitement, and a touch of nervousness. He pulled Sadie into a tight embrace.

“That’s incredible news, Sadie. We’re going to be parents,” Priest said.

“Yeah,” Sadie replied, a mixture of emotions crossing her face. “Now that Mason’s gone and my father’s gone missing, everything will be fine, won’t it?”

Priest brushed a strand of hair from Sadie’s face, his expression serious.

“Sadie, I’ll do everything in my power to keep our family safe. Nothing and no one will harm you or our baby. I promise,” Priest reassured her.

And if her bastard of a father did turn up in their lives again, then Priest was going to bury him six foot deep in a place no one would ever find him. Priest decided not to tell Sadie that. She’d already been through so much today.

Long after Sadie had fallen asleep, Priest remained awake. They were going to have a kid together. Priest still couldn’t believe it, that he’d father a child with the woman he loved.

Things had to change, Priest realized. First thing tomorrow, he’d tell her they should start looking for a new place to live. He wanted her to give her a house, everything she could ever want. With that decision made, Priest kissed her cheek and went to sleep.

The following day, Priest and Sadie decided to visit Emery in the hospital. As they entered the room, they were relieved to see him looking much better than before.

Emery managed a weak smile. He seemed grateful to have visitors.

“How are you feeling, Emery?” Sadie asked, pulling a chair closer to the bed.

“Better each day. Thanks for checking in on me,” Emery replied.

Sadie squeezed his hand. “Of course, Em. We’re family. How’s your recovery going?”

“The doctors say I’ll be back on my feet in no time,” Emery said. “And once I am, I’ve been thinking about what comes next.”

“What are you planning?” Sadie asked, curious.

Emery looked at both of them with a glint of excitement in his eyes. “I want to travel, see the world. I’ve spent enough time stuck in one place. And after what I’ve been through, it’s time to live a little, you know?”

Priest and Sadie exchanged smiles.

“That sounds like a great plan, Emery,” Priest said.

“Yeah, and if you need any recommendations or help planning, I’m here for you,” Sadie added.

“I appreciate that, Sadie,” Emery said.

Priest excused himself to fetch some coffee, and Sadie and Emery found themselves alone in the hospital room.

“So, enough about me. How are you holding up?” Emery asked Sadie.

Sadie managed a smile, grateful for the chance to share a moment with her cousin. “I’m okay, Emery. Priest has been my rock through all of it. And there’s something else I wanted to tell you,” Sadie said.

Emery, looking intrigued, leaned in a bit. “What is it, Sadie?” he asked.

Taking a deep breath, Sadie revealed the news that had been on her mind. “I’m pregnant, Emery. Priest and I are

going to have a baby,” she said.

A warm, genuine smile spread across Emery’s face. “That’s incredible news, Sadie! Congratulations!”

“Thank you, Em. It means a lot to have your support. I know we’ve been through so much lately, but there’s something about bringing new life into the world that makes everything feel hopeful,” Sadie said.

Emery reached out and gently squeezed her hand. “You and Priest will be amazing parents. I’m genuinely happy for both of you,” Emery said.

After leaving the hospital, Sadie and Priest decided to grab breakfast at a nearby diner. As they sat in a cozy booth, Sadie noticed a contemplative look on Priest’s face.

“Is there something on your mind?” she inquired, her eyes filled with concern.

Priest took a sip of his coffee, then looked directly into her eyes.

“Sadie, I think it’s time for us to start looking for a place of our own. The clubhouse isn’t the best environment to raise a child,” Priest said.

Sadie felt a surge of emotions at his words. She was happy Priest was thinking about their future. It was also a practical solution. The MC was an integral part of Priest’s life and she’d never ask him to walk away from it. It would be nice if Priest could separate his home life from his MC life.

“That’s a great idea,” she admitted. “As much as I’ve come to love the MC, I want the best for our child. A stable home, a place where he or she can grow up without worrying about the club’s business.”

Priest reached across the table, taking her hand in his. “Then it’s set,” he said.

One Year Later

Sadie's cellphone vibrated under her pillow, and as she groaned and checked it, a heartwarming sight greeted her eyes. Priest lay beside her, their baby boy, Tyler, nestled against him. As much as Sadie wanted to linger in that cozy scene, she had to get up.

Balancing motherhood and her career, Sadie had taken classes at a culinary school and now worked as an apprentice to a pastry chef.

With it being her workday and Priest's day off, he had happily taken on the role of spending the entire day with Tyler.

Sadie showered, kissed her two favorite guys. Before heading out for work, Sadie checked the mailbox and saw two items addressed to her. One was a postcard from her father, which she noticed was sent from Puerto Rico. She shredded that one up and opened the letter from Emery.

She smiled, reading his adventures in Southeast Asia. After that, Sadie headed to work, a bake shop that had recently opened in Hanging Grove. The owner was a well-renowned pastry chef and as luck would have it, he hired her after one interview.

As she busied herself prepping desserts for the day, a pang of missing them both already tugged at her heart. The thought of Priest and Tyler having their own father-son day brought a smile to her face, though.

Work and running the shop with her boss preoccupied the rest of Sadie's mind. Once it was closing time, she couldn't wait to return to the apartment.

The moment she entered the door, a delightful aroma greeted her senses. Priest was in the kitchen, preparing dinner, even though she had told him she could handle it.

Smiling, she entered the kitchen, finding Tyler in his day cot, giggling at the sight of her. Sadie scooped him up, showering kisses on his chubby face.

"Something smells good," she remarked to Priest.

The aroma of Priest's pasta sauce filled the air as Sadie hugged him from behind. Giving the sauce a final swirl, Priest turned around and met her lips with a tender kiss.

"I noticed the apartment's cleaner now than when I left this morning," Sadie remarked, a smile playing on her lips.

"I had some extra time after putting Tyler to bed for his afternoon nap," Priest explained.

"Someone's getting lucky tonight," she teased him.

Priest chuckled, the sound sending a pleasant shiver down her spine.

"I always get what I want every night," he replied with a playful wink. "You."

"I love you so much, Priest," Sadie confessed.

"Back at you, Angel," he responded without hesitation.

The End

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BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER

BENDING IRON

Fallen Saints MC, 5

Winter Sloane

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Sample Chapter

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

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

heavy like shackles. David only showered her with gifts when he felt guilty about hurting her.

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

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

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

Amber was a born and bred city girl. Small towns freaked her out, or maybe she read too many thrillers which were often set in small towns. Either way, David would never think to look for her in Redemption. It would just be a pit stop. A place to lay low for a few weeks before moving on to greener pastures. Hopefully, by then, David would have forgotten all about her. In a month or two, David would have a new girl on his arm. She didn't envy that woman. Amber pitied her because she would have to live through the same nightmare Amber did.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

off the bus.

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

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

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

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

“Sorry for the delay,” Mary said.

“This town seems charming,” she murmured.

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

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

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

Amber stared at her. Mary had sounded so matter-of-fact, like a town controlled by a bunch of rough bikers was a perfectly acceptable thing. Mary walked her to the reception area.

“What about the local authorities?” she asked.

Mary paused, as if she regretted saying anything at all. “Some folks here would say the MC taking control of the town

is the best thing that ever happened to Redemption. Before they came along, Redemption was riddled with gangs and drug dealers.”

“But you believe otherwise?” she asked.

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

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

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

Despite the generously sized room and all the opened windows—Amber counted three total—she began to feel a little claustrophobic. The walls seemed to close down on her, and she needed to get some air. She planned on taking it easy today. Soak in the bath, stay in, order room service, and eat dinner on the bed in her bathrobe. Those plans went out the window right this instant. What Amber needed was a drink or two. God. She could practically taste the cold beer in her mouth.

She hadn’t been able to drink for months.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Amber,” she said. “Yeah, I’m just passing by.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

End of sample chapter

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