



Aftershock's Fury

Author: *E.M. Shue*

Category: Erotic, Romance, New Adult, Mc

Description: Crue “Aftershock” Russell made a promise the day Harley was torn from her home and everything she knew. He vowed to protect her from their enemies, even if it meant walking away from her. She was too young then, too innocent, caught in the crossfire of a war she didn’t choose. Now she’s back. Twenty-three, all soft curves, wide doe eyes... and still in danger. Crue is done pretending he doesn’t want her.

Harlowe “Harley” Thatcher thought she’d left Alaska and the tragedy that shattered her world behind. Tucked thousands of miles away, she believed she was safe. But safety is an illusion. When old enemies resurface, she’s forced to return to the place she never thought she’d see again—and face the man she’s never been able to forget. The man who now makes her pulse race and her body ache for things she was too young to want back then.

When Harley is taken by the enemy, Aftershock’s rage is seismic. No one touches what’s his and walks away. He’ll burn down the world to get her back. But is it too late for them to finally find love? And after the dust settles, will there be anything left of the Granite Peak Grizzlies MC?

Total Pages (Source): 39

Page 1

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

PROLOGUE

I pull into the driveway and notice the house is dark, except for the porch light. That means Dad didn't wait up for me. But knowing him, he's probably still awake in his room, pretending not to hover.

This was the first weekend in forever that he let me go off and do something completely by myself. I kept glancing over my shoulder, expecting to see him there, keeping an eye on me. But he wasn't. It's not because he's one of those helicopter parents. He legitimately fears for my safety.

Ever since my mother was killed, he's trained me to fight, shoot, and protect myself. Before that, I was treated like a princess. Now I feel more like Aurora in hiding, fearing the curse will strike.

I'm twenty-two. I told my father I needed some space to be an adult, and I promised I'd be safe. I can't rely on him forever.

This past weekend, I drove to Frisco to attend the Motorcycles, Mobsters, and Mayhem author event. I've been an avid romantic suspense reader for years and follow several of the authors online. I love seeing how authentically the authors portray the MC world. This event gave me the opportunity to meet some of my favorites in person. I even discovered a few new authors whose books I'm going to read next.

I open the door to my small car and reach across the seat for my backpack. I'll grab my books in the morning after I get some rest. I look around as I've been taught.

Situational awareness is always a must for me. When I don't notice anything out of place, I get out and head toward the door. I enter the code on the keyless entry and step inside, arming the house again when I close the door.

I was only twelve when my life changed. My mother was murdered by an enemy gang trying to roll into my father's club's territory. They threatened me, and I was sent here. No one but my father came with me. I left behind my friends and family. I didn't even get to attend my mother's funeral.

"I'm home, Daddy," I call out when I see the warm glow of light beneath his door. "Love you. Goodnight." Without waiting for a response, I head to my room at the back of the house.

My backpack drops to the floor with a soft thud, and I collapse onto the bed. For a moment, my mind drifts to the life I had before we moved to Texas. I can almost smell the mountains, feel the crisp air blowing through the valley as the weather turned cold. I see a thin layer of snow dusting the peaks that surrounded us. I remember standing on the edge of the Matanuska River, staring up at Pioneer Peak, or riding with Daddy to the clubhouse in Sutton. I see my friends laughing, carefree.

A wave of homesickness slams into me, tightening my chest. I lie still, fighting back the tears.

I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I know, my door bursts open.

"Up. Now," Dad says, his voice low but firm. He presses his finger to his lips as his eyes lock on the window.

Two shadows move behind the curtain. Panic grips me, hard and fast.

"Just like we practiced," he whispers.

“I can help you fight,” I say, keeping my voice low. I’m so tired of hiding and living in fear. Maybe today is the day it finally ends. “Please, Daddy.”

“No. You have so much to live for.”

He grabs my arm and drags me into his office. My heart pounds as he opens the safe room and shoves me inside. His hand slides down the side of my face, lingering on my cheek. I lean into his touch, not ready to let go.

“Remember us. Be strong,” he says.

Before I can grab a hold of him, he steps back and hits a button. The lights flicker on, and the soft hum of the air system kicks in.

“I love you, Harlowe.”

The door shuts with a heavy thud, and the locks engage.

“I love you,” I scream, but he can’t hear me. The room is soundproof. I can’t hear what’s happening out there, and they can’t hear me.

I pound on the door anyway, my fists beating against the metal. My throat burns from shouting, and my hands ache.

“Daddy, no. Please. No. Daddy, I love you. I can help!”

Tears roll down my face. I hiccup as I sob and sink to the floor. This can’t be happening again. I already lost my mother, and now I’m about to lose the only family I really have left. I have a brother, but he hasn’t cared about me in a long time. Now, I won’t have anyone.

I stand and move to the monitor that started sending automated emails the moment Dad locked the door. There's no way out of this room without someone who has the code. Someone I don't even know.

On another screen, the cameras around the house flicker to life. I glance at them, looking away from the one preprogrammed to run my life now. It continues to send messages and transfers Dad's money into accounts only I can access.

From the moment we moved here, Dad and I practiced drills over and over. I wasn't allowed to tell anyone we were from Alaska. We don't even have pictures of our old life. The only traces of my home state live in my dreams.

Movement on the screen catches my eye, and I freeze as I watch my father take down one of the men. Three more storm into the house. Dad fights back, and I scream when one aims his gun and fires. Tears stream down my face as I watch him fall to the floor.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

They surround him and attack like a frenzied mob, beating and kicking him. Torturing him for answers. I know they want to know where I am. My dad just grins defiantly and spits in their faces.

One of the men pulls out a knife and drives it into Dad's neck. Blood flies everywhere when he frees the blade. I cry out, turning away from the screen. The images of my dad dying are burned into my mind and flash behind my eyelids.

I turn back to the monitor as something out of camera frame attracts their attention. Then, one by one, their bodies fall to the floor. A figure steps into view—small, maybe my height. The fluid way they move makes me think it's a woman.

My suspicions are confirmed when she stops in front of the camera and looks up. She gives me a two-finger wave, and something about her seems familiar.

She continues moving through the house, taking down the remaining men trying to breach the safe room. She pushes a button on the hidden panel outside, and her soft voice comes through the intercom. Only someone my father trusted would know how to use the system.

“Hello, I'm here to help you.”

I can't respond through the intercom, but then the phone on the counter rings. I look down at it and then to her. She's holding up her phone, shaking it and pointing at the camera.

I grab the burner phone and answer. “Hello?” My voice is ragged from screaming.

“Hello, Harlowe. I’m here to help.” She pauses and pulls her phone away from her ear. She looks at it before coming back on. “I’m supposed to tell you Low Low, Denahi sent me. He is also sending the code so I can open the door for you.”

“Rylan?” I haven’t spoken his name in years. Not only did I feel betrayed because he never called, but my father said it would be safer if no one knew about him. So I had to forget about him too.

“Yeah. Let me sweep the house, make sure these guys are all dead. Then I’ll get you out. I’m sorry I was late. I turned around and got here as fast as I could when your dad hit the panic alarm. When I let you out, pack your suitcases. Only take what is necessary. I have a vehicle waiting for us.”

“I don’t know what to say.” My voice quivers as I think of everything.

“I’ll take care of you until we send you to your brother.”

“I get to see Rylan?”

“Yeah.” She steps away, slipping the phone into her pocket and sliding an earbud into place. “This way, if you need to talk to me, I’m still here.”

“Who are you?”

“You can call me Persephone. Your brother has had me keeping an eye on you.”

“How did they find us?”

“I’m going to figure that out as soon as we get you to a safe house.”

She returns in under ten minutes. A soft beep sounds as she disengages the locks, and

the door swings open. She stands there—about my height but curvier, with striking blue-gray eyes.

She hands me a gun. “I know you’ve had training with these.”

I nod, unsure what to say, then slip it into the back of my jeans.

“Pack up,” she says. “We need to get out of here before more soldiers find you.”

“My dad.” I move past her to get to him, but she grabs my arm and holds it firmly.

“I’m sorry, but he’s already gone. I’m having his body collected before we torch the place.”

“Torch it?”

“Yes. We need them to not know whether you are dead or alive.”

CHAPTER

ONE

AFTERSHOCK

Page 3

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

It's been over a week since Kodiak, my club president, got the alert about his sister and father being attacked. Along with their cousin Loki, we all grew up together.

I pull out a picture of all of us standing around the four-wheeler ATV that Harlowe is sitting on. Her long auburn hair is braided down her back, and her light green eyes are dancing. Mud smudges her face from our riding. In the background, I can make out the dirt bike her father got her for her birthday. She's decked out in all her safety gear. Kodiak has his arm around her, and I'm leaning against her from behind. My face next to hers. She has her hand in mine, and Loki stands at the front, making a goofy face.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. Everything changed that day for me. I was sixteen, and it was Harlowe's twelfth birthday. I knew she was going to be mine someday. I was too old for her then, but I was willing to wait. I decided I needed to pull away so I wouldn't be tempted. But a week later, her mother and her aunt, Loki's mom, were murdered.

Anvil, Kodiak and Harlowe's father, immediately fled with Harlowe. There was a threat on her life, and he wasn't going to take any chances. We were never allowed to contact them, and they weren't allowed to reach out to us. They've been in hiding for ten years now.

In that time, my feelings for her haven't changed, but I don't know if hers have for me. Even at twelve, she was always following me around. Holding my hand and telling me she was going to marry me one day. I used to brush it off until that birthday, when a boy told everyone he was going to be her boyfriend. Her brother, cousin, and I made sure he wouldn't be.

Let's just say that boy is a grown man now, and to this day, he turns and runs in fear whenever he sees us. You don't have to hit someone to scare them. We just made sure he knew his body would never be found by humans.

I flip the picture over. I had it laminated before I left for the military to protect it. On the back is a photo I should never have taken, but I couldn't help myself. I'd just gotten out of the military after a brutal ambush. I saw things I'll never forget. And there she was, my beautiful Harlowe, unaware I was taking pictures of her from a distance.

"How do you have that?" Kodiak asks from behind me.

I lean forward in the chair in his office, the one I've been sitting in for days. I only leave to grab food or something to drink. I've postponed all my consultations and let my crew handle the jobs we still have going. All I do is sit here, waiting to hear if she's safe.

"I got it." I don't elaborate and slip the picture back into my wallet.

"Shock, you know we weren't supposed to seek them out. You could be why they were exposed."

"That photo was from when she was eighteen."

"Let me see it." He holds out his hand, and I hear the pain in his voice. He hasn't seen his baby sister in ten years.

I hand him the picture and watch as he traces his finger down it, just like I've done for years.

"She's beautiful. She looks like her mom." They are half-siblings, but Charisma had

always treated Kodiak like he was her own.

“Yeah.”

I want to tell him I bet she’s probably even sexier these days because she’s no longer hardcore into soccer and volleyball like she was back then. I imagine she has curves now, but I’m sure her brother doesn’t want to hear that.

“How did you find them? Did Vortex help you?”

“No. He only helped me by showing me how to do it without being tracked and how to make sure it was safe and secure. I set up my computer to alert me to every Harlowe that popped up. At first, I had hundreds to sift through. But then one day, one popped up, and I knew it was her.”

“How?” He looks at me, jaw tight.

I shake my head. He hated that I told him years ago she was meant to be mine. It wasn’t until after he settled his anger by hitting me several times that he gave up.

“Have you heard from your contact?” I ask.

He hands me back the picture, and I secure it in my wallet where I keep it with me all the time.

“I heard from the WOA. Harlowe is in hiding for now. They’ll send her this way once they believe it’s safe. They’ve hidden my father’s body until we decide when to announce his death.”

“Who are these WOA people?”

“A group I found through one of the Handmaidens.”

“Riddler helped you with this? I thought you just met her when she moved here.” I stand and stretch my aching body. I’ve been sleeping on the damn sofa, waiting to hear if Harlowe is safe.

“It was another president I met through a group out of Kentucky,” he answers. “Did my dad ever find out you saw her?” He nods toward me, and I can’t stop the chuckle.

“Yeah, he found out. Banged on the roof of the rental car. I had to pay for the dent.”

“You’re lucky that’s all he did.” Kodiak settles into his chair and starts going through the club’s books that Miner dropped off earlier. Not only do we run the bar, but we also have a chain of pot stores and several personal businesses. Then there’s the illegal money we make, which has to be laundered regularly through our other enterprises.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“He told me to leave and never come back until it was safe. But...” I pause, running my hands through my hair that’s grown longer. I’m currently sporting a full beard too, the typical Alaskan winter man scruff. It gives off the “don’t fuck with me” vibe I like. I don’t have to worry about bear bait thinking they can hook up with me. I don’t do them and never have.

“But?” He looks up and stares me down.

Kodiak has been my friend since we were boys, but that deep stare, with the scar through his eyebrow, makes him look formidable. I don’t cross him because he’s not only my president and best friend, he’s a fucking psycho. I’ve watched him kill with little remorse.

“He made me swear I’d always protect her.”

“He knew he couldn’t trust the club. He’s always known.”

“But how? That would mean we have someone among us who is a traitor.” I growl the words, pissed that someone would turn their back on the brotherhood. We are more than a family. You have to trust that the man next to you has your back. We don’t speak of what happens, not even to the old ladies.

“For now, keep this between you and me. As for Harley and the attack, only the current officers know what happened. I don’t want any of the general members, prospects, or lifers finding out.”

“Got it.”

“What are your jobs looking like?”

Kodiak is a general contractor and uses my ironworks business for his projects. We basically have a whole crew here capable of building anything. Granite Peak Contractors is one of our legit businesses. We specialize in barndominium-style houses. With the harsh Alaskan winters and the strong winds of the Mat-Su Valley, we are in high demand. Our buildings not only hold up well, but they retain heat efficiently, especially since one of our brothers runs a heating business and installs in-floor heating during construction. We're not cheap, but we deliver exactly what our customers want.

“Good. Filling up, along with the schedule of builds you sent me. I'm going to be looking for a couple new workers. What about you?”

“I need to get some general laborers. I'm thinking about seeing if GB wants to get his pretty little hands dirty.”

GB, short for Golden Boy, is a prospect we've got. His mom was a former state politician, so he's clean and doesn't like to get his hands too dirty. For a while, we wondered if he was a plant sent to find our illegal side. Turned out it was just rebellion against his mother and her expectations. He's going with me on a run in a couple weeks. He's already proven he's willing to break the law with us.

We both chuckle, and I stick around to go over some plans with him for the upcoming build season. If the weather keeps holding steady with no precipitation, we'll be able to start early or pick up some extra work.

“You know you're going to have to give her time. When she gets here, she'll stay with me,” Kodiak says.

“What?” My voice drops as I turn to look at him. I lean down, pressing my hands on

his desk. “The fuck you talking about? You said you understood she was mine and wouldn’t interfere.”

“Date her. Get to know her. She was young when you last saw her.”

“You won’t stop me.”

He rises from his chair, that scarred eyebrow lifting as his jaw locks.

“Hey, for all you know, Shock, she could already have a boyfriend.”

I swing around at the sound of Loki’s voice and spot him standing in the doorway with a wicked grin on his face. His nickname fits him. He’s all about stirring shit up.

“Take that fucking back, Loki.” I stomp toward him. But before I can reach him, Icarus and Wing grab me by the arms, holding me back. Sparky and Romeo step between us, facing Loki, ready to stop him.

“Why should I? I’m stating the obvious, asshole. She’s fucking twenty-two years old and has been in college. I know you didn’t go, but think about what you were like back then. I know exactly what I was like. Fucking every woman I could who wasn’t bear bait.”

“I fucking remember. But you and I both know I don’t fuck around, and I know she wouldn’t either.”

“You say that, but she doesn’t even know us anymore. She’s been sheltered. She probably doesn’t even ride anymore. She probably blames us for her mother’s death. I admit I blamed the club for a bit after my mother died.”

He did. It was surprising when he finally decided to patch in. It was like a switch

flipped, and suddenly he wasn't angry anymore. The Black Devils didn't just take his mom and his aunt. They took his father too, then his uncle and cousin. Out of all of us, he's lost the most. When he heard Anvil was dead, he put his fist through a wall.

My father raised him after he was left with no one. He's a brother through the club, but he's also my brother in every sense of the word. He and I rarely fight. I can put up with his pranks and usually laugh them off. I pull back from Icarus and Wing. Both of them are as big or bigger than me. Icarus is six foot five and muscular. The only man taller or bigger is Kodiak, by about three inches and a lot of mass. That's one of the reasons he's called Kodiak. He's as big as a fucking bear.

"I'm going home." I push past everyone but stop in the doorway and turn to face Kodiak. "I'll give her time but only for so long. Then she's mine."

"Thank you." His voice is gruff, thick with held-back emotion.

I get it. He hasn't seen his sister in a decade, and his father died before he could see the man Kodiak has become. My father was president for a long time, keeping the seat warm until Kodiak finally showed both the dominance and the propensity to lead, then he stepped down and passed the torch.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

I walk through the back of the clubhouse and step into the bar, which is being cleaned and prepped for business. Patrons are only allowed on the second floor, where our private rooms are, if they're invited. The back of the house, as we call it, is where the clubhouse, offices, and church are located. It's private, and only patched members are allowed back there.

My boots thud across the wooden floor, and I glance over as a bear bait checks me out. I shake my head and keep walking. It's been like this for years. They try to get my attention, but I don't allow them in. There's only one woman I want warming my bed.

I swing my leg over my bike and scan the area. The sky is bright but overcast. We're gaining more daylight, but the Marchweather is holding on like winter did. Barely any snow, just rain, slick ice, and windy days. The gusts hit hurricane force, and we only had to make repairs on one job. That's on the owners. They didn't listen to our recommendations and thought they knew better. I slip my ball cap into a saddlebag and grab my helmet.

I take off, heading toward Wasilla and my place off Pittman Road, where it sits tucked near the Little Susitna River, far from civilization and deep in the sticks. It's peaceful. Just how I like it.

The farther I get from town, the thinner traffic gets. I open up the throttle, leaning hard into the corners, fast and tight. When I finally pull down my long private driveway, I spot my father's truck parked alongside the three-car garage.

I hit the remote, and the two-car bay opens. I roll in, parking next to my truck and my

other bike. Out back in the shop, I've got my side-by-side and off-road machines.

Sliding off the seat, I hook my helmet over the handlebars and unzip my leather jacket. I know why he's here and what he's about to ask. I pull my ball cap from the saddlebag, twist it backward on my head, and let my longer hair spill out the sides in a mess.

"Well?" he asks as I approach him.

I want to groan. He's just like me, worried about her and waiting for news.

"Kodiak heard from his people. They have her at a secure location. They'll send her this way in a month or two."

"A month or two?" His jaw tightens. "What if she's found again? Do they know yet how she was found in the first place?"

"They're looking into a few things." I won't break Kodiak's trust by telling my dad what we suspect. "She's safe with them. They've secured Anvil's body."

I slip off my cut and leather jacket, hang them on a hook in the garage, then follow him into the house.

Anvil and my father had been friends for years. They came to Alaska together, hoping to get away from the trouble they caused back in Oregon, where they grew up. They founded the Granite Peak Grizzlies with Loki's father, Viking.

"I'm going to shower," I say, heading across the hall to the primary suite.

Dad veers left, disappearing into the kitchen.

I sit on the bench just inside the bedroom door and remove my boots. My belt is next, tossed onto the bed along with my wallet and chain.

I yank my T-shirt over my head, and the long chain around my neck falls to my chest. There's a dog tag attached to it with Harlowe's name engraved deep into the metal. She gave it to me on my sixteenth birthday, said it would let other women know I was taken. Except for my time in the military, I've never taken it off.

By the time I reach the shower, bypassing the oversized oval tub, I'm ready for the jets to beat the tension out of my back.

As the warm water hits me, I wrap my hand around my cock. Every part of this house was built with Harlowe in mind. I can't stop the need to get myself off now that I know she's safe and will be here soon. I close my eyes and picture her firm breasts. Her hair down to her waist. Her hips flare slightly, giving her a heart-shaped ass.

I look down my body and can almost see her on her knees in front of me. Her beautiful light green eyes looking up at me as she takes me deep and swallows around the head.

I come hard, then wash myself off.

Twenty minutes later, I step out of my room barefoot and shirtless, sweatpants hanging low on my hips. My dad is sitting at the bar with a beer and a bowl of moose stew in front of him. I serve myself a bowl and grab a beer from the fridge.

"Kodiak called while you were in the shower. He told me what you two suspect. I agree. Anvil and I thought the same thing back then. Only the voting members knew Charisma and Clarice were heading to Anchorage that day. They were supposed to take Harley with them, but she wanted to stay and hang out with you and Kodiak."

That day rolls through my mind. I'd already decided I was going to put distance between us. That's when Kodiak found out how much I cared for her. She'd been talking on the phone with a friend about going to the Palmer pool that weekend, and I barked that she didn't need to parade around in a swimsuit. Her feelings were hurt, and Kodiak punched me so hard I was knocked unconscious.

I came to with him hugging her, telling her I was an asshole and to ignore me. I rolled to my feet and told them I had to get out of there.

I wasn't there when they told her Charisma died because I was an asshole. I got to say goodbye to her, and she clung to me, whispering she'd be back. But we both knew it was a lie. She couldn't return.

The only reason we're letting her come back now is because the WOA protecting her convinced Kodiak it's time to face the past and kill the people after her. She's trained, and they are confident she'll be safe.

I don't know what Aaronov wants with her, but I'll kill him if he touches a hair on her head. It's taken everything in me not to drive the forty minutes to his house in Anchorage and reap my vengeance for all the pain he's caused her. But the WOA and Kodiak want Aaronov to believe she's either dead or disappeared again. They don't want him catching wind that she's coming back.

CHAPTER

Page 6

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

TWO

HARLOWE

I watch out the window as the plane circles, preparing to land in Anchorage. My palms are sweaty, and my heart thumps hard in my chest. I feel faint, and my stomach rolls. Fezzik, my service dog, lifts his head and whines, pressing into my legs. Persephone got him for me after I started having panic attacks following what happened in Texas. It's been over two months since she saved my life and my father was taken from me.

I replay every moment of that day in my head, over and over, trying to figure out where I screwed up, where I might have shown my hand.

How did they find me?

Persephone has assured me again and again that it wasn't anything I did. She was watching over me, keeping track of everything, and noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

She's been digging through Daddy's phone. He received a call right before the attack. We don't know if it was the killer taunting him or someone trying to warn him. He was only partially prepared. But it was enough to get me into hiding.

While Persephone had me in hiding, I started seeing a counselor who suggested a service dog to help with the PTSD. That's when I began working with Fezzik. He's a huge mastiff-lab mix, loyal, protective, and loves me.

Persephone taught me how to work with him, and she had me training every day. At this point, I'm pretty sure I could load and fire a handgun blindfolded with everything she's drilled into me. We sparred together too. I'm not as good as she is, but she was impressed. I've been working out a lot, building both muscle and endurance.

Coming to Alaska is a two-fold mission. I'm here to confront my brother, who should've found a way to talk to me over the years. But more than that, I'm here to kill the man who took my parents from me.

Part of me wants to see Crue too. He was my everything before we left. I had the biggest crush on him. I wanted to marry him when I got older. But all of that changed.

Fezzik whines again and presses into my legs. I rub his head as I stare out the window, watching the plane touch down on the soil of my home, the place I never thought I'd return to.

I remain in my seat, looking out across the tarmac. In the distance, I can see parts of Anchorage. The mountains surround it like a bowl, pressing the city toward the inlet. A road north leads to my real home—the Mat-Su Valley.

I was born in Anchorage and raised in Sutton until I was twelve. It's a tiny town outside Palmer.

I remember the motorcycle club was always there. I was proud to be the club princess. I loved following my brother and his friends around. My cousin Aksel was always around too. His father, Viking, was big and burly, and I loved his accent. He was married to my mom's little sister.

Then there was Crue's dad, Cyclops. He always called me Sweet Princess and said I was the daughter he was never given.

I missed all of them so much. And now I'm here, and I don't know how they'll react to me, or how I'll react when I see them.

Fezzik and I step off the jetway and into Anchorage International Airport. I glance around, taking it all in. It's a big airport for Alaska, but nothing like the one I left this morning in Las Vegas.

I was in hiding in the City of Sin, but I never got to go out. My world was a large penthouse with its own gym and a sweeping view of the city. Persephone, who never told me her real name but whom I nicknamed Seph, became my friend. She wasn't always there, but when she was, I relished the companionship. When she got me Fezzik, it helped. But I was still lonely for human contact.

As we make our way down to baggage claim, people give me a wide birth because of Fezzik and maybe my resting bitch face. I continue to look around, trying to find something familiar in my surroundings. No one knew I was flying in at this time. Watching the families and lovers reunite makes me sad and heartbroken. My chest aches to have someone waiting for me. I know the plan though. I had to arrive without any fanfare.

I collect the two pieces of luggage containing some of my clothes and cosmetics. Seph saved my books from the signing and off my shelves, along with several other personal belongings, and will have them shipped to me over the next few weeks.

Using one of the luggage carts, I hold on to Fezzik's harness as we head out to the long-term parking area. I click the fob in my pocket, and my eyes light up when I see the beautiful four-door Chevy Silverado pickup in slate gray. After loading my suitcases under the tonneau cover, I open the back door to let Fezzik jump in, then I climb up into the cab. I always wanted a truck.

We pull out, and I slip the credit card into the slot to pay for parking. The May

weather is bright and sunny. I slip on my sunglasses as we head out. Driving through Anchorage, I'm shocked by how much it has grown in the ten years I've been gone. But seeing the number of homeless camps in the trees is shocking to me. I don't understand how they survive in the winter, but I also don't understand how they are able to be so widespread. In some areas, it looks like tent cities from Anchorage's old days, when it was settled by fur traders and gold miners. I remember those lessons from school and the pictures.

We hit the highway and start moving out of the city through the smaller communities. My maps app warns me of construction ahead, reducing the highway to one lane in each direction. I decide to pull over at Mirror Lake and let Fezzik out for a walk. I open the safe Persephone told me she was having installed, pull out the gun, and slip it into my pocket. My safety is a top priority.

Fezzik and I walk around the area. People wander nearby, but I don't pay them much attention. I try to keep myself hidden and unnoticed. Fezzik catches the attention of another dog, so I move him away before it can get too close. We reach the water's edge, and I look up at Bear Mountain reflected in the lake. That's how Mirror Lake got its name. I don't want Fezzik playing in the water. Wet dog smell would cover up the fresh new vehicle scent.

We hang out for a bit before I turn us back toward the truck, and we head out again. Sitting in the construction traffic reminds me of when I was a kid. Daddy used to say that Alaska had two seasons—winter and road construction. I miss him so much. The pain of his loss is still hard for me to bear, even after talking to Persephone's friend, Diana. She tried to help me, but I couldn't open up about his death. I remember watching each bullet as it struck him. I remember them torturing him.

Driving across the Palmer Hay Flats, I look around at the surrounding mountains. Snow still covers them from the middle all the way to the top. It's a beauty that's hard to explain and a sight I missed every day I lived in Texas.

As soon as we get into Wasilla, I stop at a local grocery store to grab some supplies, then head to a pet store to get things for Fezzik. After checking into our pet-friendly hotel, we make our way to our room. I lie on the bed for a bit with Fezzik stretched out next to me. It's calming, but I can't stop thinking about what I'm going to do tonight. The plan is to meet my brother tomorrow at a neutral location. I'm supposed to call him and set up the meeting.

Before I left Vegas, I decided I would scope out my brother first to see if I actually wanted to contact him. Persephone assured me again and again that Rylan wants to see me and that he's missed me. But in all the years I was gone, he never once reached out. Actions speak louder than words.

CHAPTER

Page 7

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

THREE

HARLOWE

The sun is still up at nine thirty when I lead Fezzik out to my truck. I don't want to leave him alone in the hotel room, and I might need him. I spent a lot of time getting myself ready, making sure I look good. I doubt anyone will recognize me. The last time anyone who matters saw me, I was twelve. Now I'm a grown woman with curves and boobs.

I styled my hair in two long, loose Dutch braids down each side of my head, twisting the ends up into a bun at the back. My makeup is minimal, just enough to highlight my features. My lips are painted a soft brownish pink, and my cheekbones are defined with a touch of shimmer. But the outfit is the key.

I've never been to an MC bar before, but I remember what the girls in college wore when they went out, so I emulated that look. Daddy never let me go to bars, so this is a first for me. I'm wearing a black cropped tank top that shows off my cut abs, a product of all my hard work. My full C-cup breasts swell over the top just enough to catch attention. My jeans fit like they were painted on, with ripped knees completely exposed. Tan high-heeled boots that look like work boots and a waist-length leather jacket complete the outfit.

I open the back door and help Fezzik inside before climbing into the driver's seat. My ID, credit card, and some cash are tucked into the inside pocket of my jacket.

I want to fit in but also stand out enough to be a distraction. I don't want to cause a

scene, though. It takes me about twenty minutes in the light traffic to get from downtown Wasilla to the northern part of Meadow Lakes near the Big Lake turnoff.

Rock music pounds through the walls of the bar, and the parking lot is full. I forget that it doesn't get dark here in the spring like it did back in Texas. I roll Fezzik's window down all the way so if there's an issue, he can jump out.

Stepping out of the truck, I notice the men watching me. Several wear Granite Peak Grizzlies Motorcycle Club patched vests, while others wear vests or don't. The bar caters to MC members and other bikers.

I move through them as if I belong, my head held high as I step onto the porch. I click the fob to lock my truck and set the alarm.

Pushing through the doors, the smell of reefer hits me hard. I know smoking isn't allowed in bars, but people must be vaping. There's also the smell of stale beer and sweaty bodies. These scents unsettle me and set my nerves on edge. I squeeze my hands into fists, feeling my nails dig into my palms, then I take a deep breath and move across the crowded room. I head for the bar where one of the bartenders looks familiar. I avoid him and sit where a woman is serving drinks.

Shit, I don't even know what to order when she asks me. I've tried different beers with my father, but they aren't my favorite. I spot a woman near me with a White Claw and point at it. "I'll take one of those."

"Got it, girly." She reaches down and grabs the drink. She pops the top and hands it to me. I take a swig and feel the warmth spread through my body. For dinner, I DoorDashed some food but mostly picked at it, so I'll have to be careful with how much I drink.

For hours, I sit off to the side of the bar, watching people mingle, dance, and shoot

pool. I've turned down several offers because I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to check them out. Only the patched members head toward the back of the building. No one else. The bathrooms are down a different hallway.

"Hey, Red. How about I get you something a little stronger?" a deep voice says beside me.

I turn to see a fairly good-looking guy standing there. He's young, maybe my age or a bit older. His brown hair is shaggy, and he has a barely-there beard and mustache, like he hasn't shaved in a couple of days. He's wearing a vest that marks him as a prospect.

"You're new here." His observation skills are stellar.

"Nope. I'm good. Thank you, though," I say, trying to brush him off.

He raises his hand, and the male bartender I thought looked familiar walks up. I know him. His name flashes through my mind, and I silently pray he doesn't recognize me. If he does, this little recon mission will be a bust.

"What up, GB?" His voice is deep, and memories of his father flash through my mind.

My cousin Aksel is almost a complete replica of him, even his voice. I don't see much of my aunty in him. His dark brown hair is curly, and I can just make out hints of auburn that match my hair color. He got that from his mom.

"Hello, gorgeous," he says to me with a smile before turning back to the guy.

Something in his smile makes me question his nonchalant attitude. He must recognize me.

“Get us a couple shots of tequila,” GB says.

I’m about to stop him when Aksel turns to me. He looks past me, his eyes scanning over my head. I want to follow his gaze, but that might draw attention. So I sit still, praying he’s not trying to flag down my brother. I’ve already scanned the room more than once and haven’t spotted him.

“Gorgeous, do you want to do a body shot with GB here?” Aksel’s voice washes over me, and I feel the blush creep in. My belly tightens. “Don’t chicken out. You’ll hurt his feelings,” he adds with a chuckle.

I sit up straighter on the stool. Oh no, he didn’t. If he knew it was me, there’s no way he’d be encouraging a body shot.

“I’m game,” I say, needing to prove I’m not scared.

Aksel’s low chuckle as he moves around gathering lemons, salt, and two shots of tequila makes me question my decision.

GB is vibrating with excitement next to me. I turn toward him and find him focused on my cleavage. He’s practically drooling.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

Shit, what did I get myself into?

I'm about to put a stop to this when the atmosphere around me changes, distracting me.

The shot glasses land on the bar in front of us.

Aftershock

We step out of the office and make our way to the bar. I'm in the lead and notice Loki trying to catch my eye. There's something sinister in his grin, and when his eyes focus on the chick in front of him, my body stills.

Her long hair is in braids twisted into a bun. I make out the hints of red in her hair, and my long legs are in motion as I watch GB. He leans forward, and she tilts her chin back, exposing her graceful neck. From this angle, and the way my body is responding, I know who she is. Loki does too. Kodiak has moved to my side but hasn't figured it out yet. He's going to kill GB if I don't first.

GB places a hand on her waist and starts pulling her toward him, salt at the ready in his other hand.

I grab his wrist and bend it back, twisting it to the breaking point. If either of us shifts just right, it'll snap.

"Get your hands off my girl," I growl loud enough to make everyone stop. The music scratches to a halt.

Loki laughs from behind the bar, but I don't take my eyes off her. I'm completely focused on those beautiful pale seafoam green eyes. They widen in shock at my words, but when those eyes move over my face, her lips curl into a slight smile. Full, kissable, fuckable lips that I'll be hard-pressed not to shove my cock across soon. She licks her bottom lip and pulls it between her teeth, and I groan.

"Starlight," I say softly, using her nickname.

Her eyes go liquid in front of me. I gave her that nickname years ago. The green in her eyes reminded me of the Aurora Borealis one night. Since then, she's been my starlight, guiding me like the North Star.

"Shock, let him go," Kodiak barks from behind me. "She's just some chick." He chuckles but chokes to a stop when I turn and focus my eyes on him.

"Some chick?" I repeat, flexing my hand slightly as GB's wrist nears the danger point. "It's Harlowe," I growl.

Gasps ripple through the room.

Fuck, what have I done? First, I shocked the crowd by claiming her, and now I've identified her. But I had to make it known she was mine. A deep-seated need to claim her burned inside me.

"Let him go, Crue," she says softly.

Her voice has a slight accent it didn't have before, but it calms me and gets me to do what others have been unable to do. I let go of GB. Only when I focus on her do I finally hear GB begging me not to break his arm. I drop it, and he falls backward.

Moving closer to her, I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her into my body with

her back to my chest. She fits perfectly, like the other piece of my puzzle. My hand slides across her warm skin, and I realize it's exposed. I want to cover it so no man sees those sculpted abs of hers. I look down at her neck.

"Aftershock," Kodiak barks, but my eyes zero in on where GB was about to lick.

I lean my head down, making her shiver when my lips brush the shell of her ear. My cock punches against my zipper, and she squirms against me. My hand tightens against her abs, pulling her even closer.

"Did he touch you more than what I saw, Starlight?" I demand.

She shakes her head, looking over her shoulder up at me.

"I wouldn't have let him actually touch her, Shock. I saw you coming," Loki says, and both me and Kodiak swing our heads toward him.

"Loki, you instigated this?" Kodiak asks.

Harlowe shifts in my arms, trying to push away. But I won't give her the space she wants.

"He didn't. I could have said no, and I didn't," Harlowe says, but it doesn't stop me from staring Loki down. "Crue, stop it. You too, Rylan." Hearing her use our real names puts a stop to the stare-down. "Aksel was just playing around, and I didn't stop it."

Her voice is so sweet and breathy. I can't wait to hear her moaning my name.

"You knew who I was?" she asks Loki.

He smirks at her. “It took me a moment, but I did.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Low Low, what are you doing here?”

Her body stiffens, then she shifts, and her heel slams into the top of my boot. It hurts a little and surprises me enough to make me let go. She steps away from me and turns to face me before moving back again, running right into Gunny. I reach for her to pull her away, but she pushes back further.

“I was told you knew I was coming,” she says to Kodiak, the hurt clear in her voice. “Forget it.” She turns and rushes from the room, but Kodiak’s booming voice stops her. She pulls something from her pocket, and I watch her clench it tightly.

“Harlowe, stop.” She does, but suddenly there’s a commotion at the entrance and a large dog barrels into the bar. It goes straight to Harlowe’s side and stops. The dog positions itself directly in front of her, shielding her body. It’s huge, black with a tan brindle pattern across its coat. Some kind of mastiff mix. That explains what she pulled from her pocket. Somehow, she called him to her side.

Kodiak moves toward her, and the dog shifts, curling his lip and growling to warn us he’s going to protect her. His deep growl resonates around the room, which is entranced by what’s happening right in front of them.

“Good boy,” I tell him as I move to flank Kodiak. “You’re a very good boy for protecting your mistress. I’m not going to hurt her.” I speak to him as if he understands me. His ears perk up, but he doesn’t move. He relaxes as soon as she rubs her hand along his head.

“Fezzik, aposýromai,” Harlowe says. The big dog leans into her body and settles. She

looks at me briefly before her gaze shifts to her brother. I want to demand she keep her eyes on me. “Rylan, I came here tonight not to cause problems. I just wanted to see you. It’s been so long.”

“Stop,” he orders, holding up a hand. “This doesn’t need to be aired out here.” He gestures around the bar.

She glances at the room, realizing everyone is watching us. “I’ll see you tomorrow, then.”

“No, wait. Let’s talk about this. Come this way.” He motions toward the back where our clubhouse is located.

She nods and reaches down to grab the harness strapped around the dog’s body. That’s when I notice the vest marking him as a service animal.

My eyes move to Harlowe, watching the sway of her hips in those high-as-fuck heeled boots, then trailing over the rest of her. She’s not physically hurt, but when I think about everything she’s been through these past few months, it hits me. Shit, my girl has some PTSD from the attack.

I move up beside her as we walk, placing my hand on the small of her back. She trembles and turns to look up at me through those dark lashes of hers. Her light eyes framed by the dark fringe are mesmerizing.

Kodiak leads us to our secure room for church. Harlowe must understand the significance of what’s going on because she pauses in the doorway.

“What did you say to your dog?” I ask, curious what language he’s trained in.

“I told him to stand down in Greek.” She continues to stand there, not wanting to go

into the room. “I’m not allowed in here,” she says in that breathy voice of hers.

“You are now,” Kodiak says as he makes his way to the head of the table.

She finally steps into the room. Members file in behind us, but men like GB stand outside the door.

“Who is she?” GB asks Loki.

He smiles with that devious fucking grin of his. “She’s the princess.” Loki laughs before stepping into the room and closing the door.

Several of the members shift in their seats after hearing what he said. Kodiak stays where he is, and I remain beside Harlowe with Loki on her other side.

“As I told you all before, Anvil was murdered and my sister, Harlowe, was heading this way. Most of you know there’s a price on her head. Until further notice, she’ll have a two-man team with her at all times, along with either Loki, Aftershock, or me.”

“Stop,” Harlowe says, doing the unthinkable and interrupting him.

Here I thought Anvil had been teaching her the rules, but now I wonder.

“I know I’m not supposed to speak. I know I shouldn’t interrupt you, but this is my life too.”

CHAPTER

FOUR

HARLOWE

I pull away from Crue, even though every part of me protests. There's something about him that calms me and causes my body to respond in ways it never has before. I didn't date in high school or college. Guys used to call me an ice queen. I just never felt the butterflies that have been erupting in my stomach since the moment he called me his. But I can't let these newfound feelings interfere with my plan.

I move to the edge of the long table, pressing my hand to it as I lean forward, making sure Rylan knows I'm serious. I look him in the eye, not afraid of him at all.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“I’m trained better than most of these men,” I say. “I’ve been taking care of myself for a long time. Daddy made sure I could protect him and myself. The only reason I didn’t help him fight was because he shoved me into the safe room before I had the chance. I can shoot. I’m not afraid to kill if I have to.”

I stand up to my full height. With the four-inch heels, I’m nearly five ten.

“I’m getting a job and finishing my degree. I’ve studied too hard to throw that away. Daddy wouldn’t have wanted me to give it up. Besides, where have you been the last ten years? Oh yeah, here, partying.” I wave my hand around the room.

I watch as the brow, which I don’t remember having a scar through it, drops and Rylan slowly stands from his chair. He’s so much bigger than I remember. So is Crue, but Rylan is even taller. He’s got to be almost a foot taller than me in my heels.

“You’re lucky, sister, that you are the princess. You’re very lucky I’ve become a calmer man. For ten years, I’ve been away from my family, unsure of where they were, and fighting the man who put a price on their heads. I’ve been here building an empire that our father never lived to see. His MC is not only feared but one of the richest in the area. I mean legally rich too, as in money reported to the tax men every year. I don’t party. This bar makes our organization money.”

He moves around the table toward me. Men push their chairs forward, afraid of him, and that’s when I no longer see my big brother but a determined, angry man.

“I’ve missed you very much,” he says, stunning me. “I didn’t get to be there to pound the boys I knew must have been chasing after your ass.”

We both turn when we hear the deep grumble, and I realize it's Crue.

"You promised me, Shock," my brother says.

"I know." He steps back, and I'm bereft for some reason.

"I'll let you get a job and go to school, but you will have my men on you until I put Aaronov in the ground."

"No." I shake my head. "I'll put him in the ground. I watched his men torture our father." Tears build up behind my eyes, and I blink them away. "I watched what they did to him. I watched them cut his throat. I saw them put that bullet between his eyes when he refused to give them access to me. I will watch the life drain from his eyes for that. Only then will I finally rest."

I hear the rustling as the men sit up straighter at my words. Even though my father hasn't led these men in years, he's still respected. Hearing how he died, along with what I witnessed, doesn't sit well with them.

Crue steps close to me and places his hand on my shoulder. But I'm so far in my head that I don't think. I react.

Gripping his hand, I spin and flip him onto his back onto the floor.

"Holy fuck, that was hot," one of the guys says.

Crue is up and on him in a flash. He grabs him and slams him against the wall.

"Hold on, Aftershock. Don't blow up on me because your girl is hot as fuck kicking your ass." The man has long hair, a full beard, and wears glasses pushed up to the top of his head, holding his hair back. He's the epitome of a biker—until you notice the

nerdy glasses. It's a complete contradiction.

"Vortex, remember she is mine." Crue turns to look at me, then walks over. "If I hadn't promised your brother, you'd already be over my shoulder and on your way to my room." He steps back, and I turn to Rylan.

"Rylan, please."

"Compromise," he says. "You'll take the guards, and I'll decide on the rest later."

"Deal." I hold out my hand to shake his, but he wraps his large, callused hand around mine and pulls me into his body.

"Welcome home, Low Low," he says.

I sink into the hug as tears flow from my eyes. Fezzik shifts and presses into my side. I hear shuffling around us, but I ignore it. I just feel the love from my brother and the pain of losing our father.

The memories I locked up for years flash behind my eyes of him being the best big brother a little sister could ask for.

"It's okay. I got you now." His arms tighten around me, and I don't know how long we stand like that.

When I finally pull away, Crue hands me some tissue, and I blow my nose and then take another to carefully wipe my eyes.

"This whole time, I thought you didn't care," I say to Rylan.

"I care. Father said I wasn't allowed to see you or contact you, that Aaronov would

find you if I did.”

“He never told me that.”

Page 11

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“It’s okay. Come on. Let me take you home.” He takes my hand, and I look over to Crue. I pause for a moment, not sure what to say or do.

“I’ll be over to see you soon. Spend time with your brother.”

“I left my stuff at a hotel. And what about Fezzik?”

“He’ll come with us. Let’s go get your stuff. You aren’t staying at a hotel,” Rylan says as he leads me and Fezzik from the room.

When we step across the threshold, all the other guys are standing there, waiting.

“Cuz, welcome home,” Aksel says and pulls me into his arms. I sink into this hug too, glad to finally have the family I’ve missed so much.

“Low Low, I need your room key. Which hotel are you at? I’m sending a couple of prospects to grab your things and bring them to my place.”

“My suitcases are still packed, along with Fezzik’s things.” I pause for a moment, thinking about what he said. He’s taking me to his place. I’m not leaving my truck here. “My truck is outside. I’ll meet you at your place.”

“No. We’ll have someone follow in it.”

“Uh, no! No one is driving my brand-new truck but me. I’ll follow you.” I hand him my room key. “I’m at the Best Western.”

Rylan turns and addresses his men.

“Did I hear you say your dog’s name is Fezzik?” Loki asks me.

“Yes.” I can’t hide the smile. A few people know what the name is from.

“That was our mothers’ favorite movie.” I hear the wistfulness in his voice.

“I remember. How is your dad?” I can’t wait to see him or Crue’s dad.

“Well,” he starts, then takes a deep breath and lowers his head for a moment before looking at me. “He died.”

“Oh my God.” I pull Loki into my arms. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay. It happened shortly after you left. He couldn’t stand living without Mom.”

“No. He wouldn’t have left you.” I know deep in my soul that his father wouldn’t have done that.

“It’s true. He rode his bike off a cliff.”

I shake my head, convinced he’s wrong. “I just can’t believe it.”

“Where is she?” A deep voice I remember rumbles through the room.

I look up to see his tall figure pushing through the men. His dark hair is brushed back just as I remember. He’s still extremely handsome.

“Princess.” Cy’s voice holds so much emotion. Pain, loss, and hurt. I fall into his arms, tears welling again. “Baby girl, I’m here now. I got you.”

“He missed you so much,” I say.

“I missed him too.” Cy is Crue’s father and was my father’s best friend.

“Do you think I can get a hug now, Starlight?” Crue’s voice comes from beside us, and I pull away and turn to him.

When he held me earlier, my legs turned to jelly. I almost moaned when I felt his cock against my ass.

I bite my lip and nod as he pulls me into his arms. His scent engulfs my senses, overwhelming me for a moment. He smells like mountain air after a rainstorm, the leather of his cut, and something that has always been Crue.

It takes everything in me to step back when we finally part.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“I’ll be there soon. Don’t give up on me.” He chucks my chin and then walks away from me. I’m upset and about to holler at him that I don’t want to wait when his father starts laughing.

“That boy is ready to take you home and never let you go.” Cy chuckles and turns away from me.

“What?” I look between him and where Crue headed.

“Okay, boys, load up,” Rylan says as he leads me through a different door.

We step outside, and the sun has finally gone down. The parking lot is lit by overhead lights. From the sound of it, the party is in full swing inside the bar. Then the roar of several bikes starting up draws my attention to the side of the clubhouse.

“I don’t need an escort. I’ve been doing things by myself for a few months. Daddy always said I’d have to be tough to make it in this world. I can do more than other girls can.” I stop walking, and Fezzik sits at my side.

“Yes, you do,” my brother says, his voice firm and leaving no room for argument. “Aaronov isn’t going to try taking you out up close. The asshole is a coward. He uses long-distance shots or runs people off the road. That’s how he killed Mom and Aunt Clarice.”

It warms my heart that he still thinks of her as his mom. His biological mother was long gone by the time Daddy and my mom got together, but Rylan had warmed up to her and called her Mom. She loved him just as much as she loved me. The only

difference she ever acknowledged between us was that I was a girl.

“Okay.” I give in.

He helps me into my truck after we load up Fezzik, and I watch as he walks to his bike. Another motorcycle pulls up to my driver’s side, and I turn to see Crue’s blue eyes staring back at me in the darkness.

Crue’s eyes have always fascinated me. They’re blue, but around the pupil is a ring of brown that fades into a lighter blue before deepening into a dark blue outer rim. His dad got the road name Cyclops because he has one dark blue eye and one pale gray.

I start up my truck as Rylan knocks on the hood. We take off, and I follow him north toward Houston. A few miles down Big Lake Road, he takes a right, and we follow a two-lane road back until he turns again at a small fire station. I know it won’t take me long to remember how to get here. I’ve always had a good sense of direction.

We pass a dark lake lined with houses before he turns down a long driveway. The bikes follow behind us until we pull up in front of a large red house with an attached three-car garage. One of the garage doors is extra tall. Rylan points to the side, and I park at the end of the building beside the tall door.

Crue opens my door before I even have a chance to turn off the truck. He holds out his hand, and I take it as I grab the gun I set on the seat before we left the bar. I slip it into the back of my jeans as he opens the back door for Fezzik.

“Do you want to have lunch in a few days?” he asks, his deep voice sending a shiver through me. I pull my leather jacket tighter, not just because the night air has cooled but because every time he speaks in that tone, I want to rub against him like a cat and purr.

“I don’t know yet. I want to start looking for a job tomorrow and stop by the campus to see if they have any summer classes that will let me finish my degree. I only had a couple more months left before I would’ve been done.”

I hate that I missed graduating from the college I was studying at, but I’m glad to finally be back home. I’ve been working toward a degree in English literature and creative writing. I already have a couple of manuscripts I want to send to agents as queries. I want the degree, though, because my father was so proud of me for going after it.

“I’ll see you in a few days, then.”

“Okay.”

Crue returns to his bike, and I watch as he and his father take off. I want to stop him, and I almost do, but I can’t. I have to move forward with my plan for revenge, and I don’t want him to get hurt in the process.

“Come on,” Rylan says, leading me to the front door. “Your bags should be here soon enough.”

My brother opens the large double doors, and I follow him inside. I pause to take in the black leather sofa, the giant screen television above the huge rock fireplace, and even some of the mounts—moose and Dall Sheep with full curl horns. The kitchen is on the right, open to the living room, with a large granite bar in the middle.

He walks past a door and points. “That goes to the basement. Just a pool table and the safe room. I’ll show you later.” I nod, and he takes another step. “Your bathroom.” I peek into the small but adequate space.

Across from it, he opens a door. “Spare room.” I start to enter, but he stops me. “No,

you have the next one.”

He moves down the hall past a laundry room with a door that must lead to the garage, then opens a door on the left. “You’re in here, and I’m right there if you need me.” He points at a door straight in front of us.

I step through the door he said was mine.

Spinning around the room, I take it all in. A large cedar log bed dominates the space, topped with a black and red comforter that depicts a wolf. The carpeted floor looks soft and inviting. I can’t wait to sink my toes into its plushness. The room is sparsely decorated, but everything looks new.

“Did you just do this?”

“Yeah, I had a couple of baits help me. They said they knew what you’d like.”

I shake my head. “What is a bait?”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

He chuckles softly. “Don’t worry. It was just a couple of girls who hang around the club.”

“A couple of sweet butts decorated my room like this?”

“They actually wanted to make it all pink and girly, but Shock said this would be more you.”

“Yeah, it is. I’m not a girly girl.” I wave my hand up and down my body.

After the guys drop off my things, I get Fezzik settled into his bed and change into my pajamas. Rylan said he’d show me more of the house in the morning. I climb into bed thinking about everything that happened this evening.

But as I drift off, I think of the man who called me his. The man who makes me feel like a delicate woman and safe for the first time in a very long time. I dream of his wild-colored eyes and dark hair. The scrape of his beard against my skin, and his narrow hips as they power into my body. I dream of him all night long.

When I wake the next morning, it takes me a second to realize where I am and that I’m alone. Fezzik isn’t in his bed or mine. I throw on a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie as the cool air makes me shiver. It’s colder here than it was in Vegas, or even home in Texas.

I head to the bathroom first and go through my morning ritual. I step out and find Fezzik lying on the floor, staring up at my brother in the kitchen.

“Shit. Burned another one, buddy. Don’t tell her.”

I pop my hip against the coffee bar and can’t stop the laugh. “No, the smell of burning food gave it away.” I move over to where he’s standing and peer into the frying pan filled with burnt eggs and French toast. “Step back. I got this.” I take over, and before long, I’ve got French toast, eggs, bacon, and sausage all ready.

“This looks good,” he says.

“Should be. I know how to cook. But obviously you don’t.” We both laugh at that and dig in.

I take a sip of my coffee as someone knocks at the door. Rylan opens a drawer in the island we’re seated at and pulls out a gun. He walks toward the door just as another knock sounds, followed by the door opening. Rylan raises the gun and takes aim.

“Hold up, Prez, it’s me.” Loki walks in with his hands up, chuckling. “Don’t shoot. Think of all the bear baits that will be disappointed.”

I cringe at the term bear bait, and images of Crue with them sours my stomach.

“I need to get dressed and ready.” I get up and head for my room.

I change into a pair of black jeans and a black long-sleeved shirt that is open at the cleavage, with strings of fabric holding it closed. The black strap of my bra is just barely visible. I grab a floral jacket that will keep me warm but isn’t too heavy. Then I load everything I took out last night for my trip to the bar back into my leather purse. After slipping on my heeled black boots, I fluff out my long, wavy hair. My resume is in a folder inside my bag, and I grab it before stepping out to find Loki and another brother talking to Rylan.

“Kodiak, are you sure about this?” Loki asks, and his tone tells me he’s not happy about whatever decision my brother has made.

“It’s what she wants.”

My heels click against the hardwood floor as I walk toward them. Three pairs of eyes focus on me. I haven’t met the third guy yet, but I recognize him from last night. He has long, wavy dirty blond hair framing his face. Women must go crazy for him. He’s tall, with intense eyes and a sexy smile.

“I’m Romeo,” he says, holding out his hand. Even his voice is sexy.

I shake my head.

“Of course. Romeo. I’m Harley.” I give him the nickname my father had all his men call me when I was younger.

“Princess,” he says, correcting me.

I shake my head again, this time out of frustration.

“Okay. I have an appointment on campus in a couple of hours, and there’s a new bakery and coffee shop advertising for someone to help as a barista and assistant baker. I’ve emailed the owner a few times and want to stop by to see her. She specializes in French pastries.”

“Got it. Let’s head out. GB is waiting outside. Aftershock will help this afternoon.”

I give my brother a hug before stepping back to look at him. “He’s Loki, and he’s Romeo.” I point to the men. “I get their road names. But you’re Kodiak, and Crue is Shock, or Aftershock. What do those mean?”

“Aftershock is what happens after an earthquake. Crue can rattle shit as bad as one. Your brother... Well, just think of what a Kodiak is.” Romeo laughs.

“My brother mauls people to death, and Crue shakes the hell out of them?”

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Something like that,” Rylan says. “Good luck. I’ll be on a jobsite this morning and won’t be home until late. You’ll have prospects and one of these guys with you until I get home.”

“Not Aftershock?”

The men shake their heads at me using his road name. I don’t understand why, but I ignore them. If he doesn’t want to spend time with me, I guess I’m okay with that. Even if he said he’d be around.

“Come on, Fezzik. Let’s get out of here.”

“Low Low, listen. He has things to do.”

“I don’t care.” I raise my brows and shake my head in denial. I don’t want Rylan or any of his brothers to know Crue got to me.

CHAPTER

FIVE

AFTERSHOCK

I watch her through the glass windows of the bakery as she helps customers. It’s been two weeks since she’s been back. She started school but won’t be able to graduate until December. Some of her credits didn’t transfer, so she’ll have to take a class or two in the fall.

She helps the owner, a tall, willowy woman who dresses like she's from the sixties. Today, she's wearing tight black pants that stop at mid-calf and a black-and-white crop top. She has a little girl, and from what I've heard from the prospects, Harley is in love with her.

Harlowe looks out the window and sees me. I've been keeping my distance, and it's been hard. I'm giving her and Kodiak the time they need to reconnect, but having her this close and doing nothing is killing me. Today, I've decided it's time to talk to Kodiak.

Loki pulls up next to me and gets off his bike.

"Harley doing good today?" he asks.

"Yeah, she's been in the back baking unless a customer comes in. I've got one prospect at the rear entrance and the other over there." I point to the end of the strip mall where GB is posted. I hate when he's assigned to her detail, so I keep him as far away as possible. The next time I hear he asks her out, I'll break his fucking arm and face. I've made it clear what she is to me, but he keeps pushing the limits.

"She getting off early today?" Loki checks his watch.

"She has an afternoon class, then she'll be back here to help with closing."

"I heard she has dinner plans," he says casually.

My head whips toward him.

"Excuse the fuck out of me. What do you mean she has dinner plans?" I start to move off my bike, but he holds up a hand to stop me.

“It’s all good. I’m taking her over to Palmer to have dinner at the brew house.”

I turn back to watch her and find her talking to a guy I didn’t see enter.

“Who is she talking to now?”

“Oh, he’s safe,” Loki says. “He walks over from the gym to chat her up. She turns him down every time he asks her out.”

“I’m fucking done with this bullshit.”

I swing off my bike and stomp toward the bakery. I pull open the door with a hard tug. The bell dings as she looks up to see me coming. The guy doesn’t turn around until he realizes she’s still staring at me. I want her eyes on me and only me. I’m a jealous man and don’t like her looking at or talking to any other man. I hate that I’m like this, but it’s the way it is with her.

I walk up to the counter and glare at him. “Excuse me,” I say.

The guy steps back, and I move closer, pulling her forward by the back of her neck. I lean into her, and she leans toward me. Our lips touch in a soft, warm kiss. I want to consume her, but I know I won’t stop if I do.

Harlowe’s breath hitches as I pull away. Her eyes slowly flutter open, then focus on me again, swirling with color, the green deepening with passion.

“Starlight, I’ll pick you up tomorrow at your brother’s. We’ll go for a ride and a picnic.”

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Okay,” she says breathlessly, nodding as a smile tugs at her lips.

I release her and step back.

“Damn, that was hot,” a throaty voice says. I look over to see her boss standing at the kitchen entrance.

“Momma, who’s that?” her daughter asks softly from her arms.

“I don’t know, Oly.”

“I’m Aftershock. She’s mine.” I point to Harlowe, then turn to glare at the gym rat. He isn’t even as big as I am. I could bench press twice what he can. His eyes harden before he turns and walks out.

“Shock, what time?” Harlowe asks.

Her using my road name pisses me off. I reach for her hand and direct her along the counter until she’s standing in front of me with nothing between us.

“Starlight, you call me Crue, never Aftershock,” I growl against her lips. Every time mine brush hers, I get closer to losing control.

She licks her bottom lip, and her tongue touches my lips. My control snaps.

I pull her into my body with one arm, my other hand sliding to the back of her head, messing up her bun as I tip her head back and take her lips in a deep, dominating kiss.

My tongue touches hers, and I groan as she wraps around me. She was made to be mine, and I was made for her.

Our lips and tongues dance over each other. My cock hardens in my jeans, and her erect nipples press into my chest where my vest slid open from her hands.

I finally pull back, and her lips are swollen, her eyes dreamy.

“Perfect, Starlight.”

“Crue, what time?” she asks again.

“I’ll be there at ten so we can set out early. Dress warm.”

“Okay.”

“Get Kodiak to watch Fezzik.”

“I will.”

I turn away before I’m tempted to throw her over my shoulder and take her out to my bike. Tomorrow is Saturday, and since the bakery is closed every other Saturday, she’ll be all mine, wrapped around my body on my bike.

I’m almost to the door when she stops me in my tracks.

“What changed your mind about dating me?”

I don’t turn around because I know I’m not that strong.

“You’ve had enough time to get to know your brother. It’s my turn now.”

I open the door and walk out to my bike, adjusting myself before throwing a long leg over the seat and putting my helmet on. I have a jobsite I need to be at. I take off, thinking about her being mine soon.

Harlowe

I watch him leave. My body still hums from his kiss and claiming.

“You know I’ve seen the guys outside watching you, but I had no idea you were dating one of them.” Marnie’s voice breaks me from my thoughts.

I can’t hide the smile when I turn around. A flush warms my skin. “I wasn’t. But I guess I am now.”

“Dang, girl. All it took was Jerry coming over and talking to you. I need a kiss like that to remind me that not all men are assholes.”

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“I’ve never been kissed like that before.”

“What? Girl,” she says, dragging out the word. “I’ve gotta admit, I’ve never been kissed like that either.” We both laugh as Oly comes from the back with a cupcake in her hand.

“I hungry, Momma.”

“Nope. You need real lunch. Come on.” Marnie picks her up and heads to the back to make her a grilled cheese sandwich.

I ask for one too, using her fresh bread, before I have to head to class. Instead, she surprises me with a croque monsieur, a French-style grilled cheese. The sandwich is layered with two types of cheese, ham, and creamy béchamel sauce. It’s ooey, gooey, and I love it.

Fezzik is stretched out on the floor by the back door.

In the two weeks since I started working here, I’ve fallen for Marnie and Olympia. They moved to Alaska a couple of months ago, but Marnie won’t tell me where they lived before. She is sweet and kind, and she even lets me bring Fezzik to work. I’ve offered to babysit so she can go out on dates, but she won’t take me up on it. She is asked out more than I am, and she always tells them she’s flattered but not interested.

After I eat and wipe down the tables, I walk back and clock out. “I’ll be back at five to help you close.”

“You know you don’t have to do that.” Marnie moves to the large decorating table and stands next to Oly, who is playing with her kid’s baking set.

“I do. You’re my friend. I want to help you.” I shrug as I open the door and take Fezzik’s harness.

I head to the University of Alaska Mat-Su Campus. I need to take a couple of writing classes, and they’re requiring a speech course to cover a couple of credits that didn’t transfer over.

I step out of the shower and open the door a sliver to make sure I’m still alone. I just got home from helping Marnie close. I’ve been trying to talk Rylan into letting me find my own apartment, but he insists I’m not taking up any space and it’s better for me to stay with him. I want my own privacy, though.

When I don’t hear anyone, I head down the hall with only a towel wrapped around my body and another around my hair.

“Are you trying to get me killed?” a male voice says, and I scream as I grip my towel and yell for Fezzik.

“It’s me Sparky,” the gravelly voice says, and I turn to look over my shoulder.

“Fuck. Why didn’t you make noise so I knew you were here? I would have told you to turn away.”

“Princess, I just got here. I’m only here until Loki gets done with his job or Kodiak shows up.”

“You know Rylan won’t kill you for seeing me. He’ll just punch you for holding a conversation with me while I drip and stand in a towel.” I laugh.

“I’m not scared of Prez hitting me. I’m scared of Aftershock finding out and killing me. They’d never find my body, and my momma would hate that.” He moves to the sofa and sits down. “But I’ve gotta say, nice legs, Princess.”

“Fuck off.” I turn and head for my bedroom.

“The ass holding those stems is pretty sweet too. Shock is a lucky fucker. Nice tattoo.”

“I’m going to tell him if you don’t shut up.”

I got the tattoo recently, and most people will never see it.

He grabs his chest. “You’re hurting my feelings, Princess.”

I slam my door closed, cutting off the sound of him chuckling, and get dressed for dinner with Loki.

When I come out next, I’m wearing a white lacy skort romper. The sheer sleeves and deep V-cut front expose just enough cleavage, and the style of my bra makes it look like I’m not wearing one at all. A gold necklace Daddy gave me twists and rests between my breasts. I finish the look with black knee-high boots, the heels clicking as I step out the door.

My hair is down in loose waves, with a French braid running down one side. I stop at the bathroom to check myself out in the mirror. Yep. I look good.

Loki thinks he’s the only one who can play jokes. I’m going to get the final laugh tonight.

I step into the living room, and every eye turns to me. Sparky and Loki are here,

along with Gunny, Wing, and Icarus. Gunny and I have become friends, bonding over conversations about PTSD and how Fezzik helps me cope.

“What the fuck are you wearing, Princess.” Icarus shakes his head and groans.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Someone call for backup and Aftershock,” Gunny says with a chuckle. “Where are you going?”

“Mat Su’s Taproom,” Loki answers. “Shit, cuz, are you trying to get men killed?”

I ignore them all and head into the kitchen where Rylan hides his whisky. I pull out the bottle and a shot glass. After pouring myself a drink, I throw it back, feeling the burn slide down my throat and the calm wash over my nerves. I’m not used to exposing this much of myself, but I want to have fun. I turn, put the whiskey back in its hiding spot, and place the shot glass in the sink.

“Oh, dear God, he’s going to kill someone before the night’s through. Who the fuck tattooed your ass, Princess?” Icarus says as he walks up behind me.

Loki comes over and takes a look.

“Nice. Wait, is that?” He straightens and looks at me.

“Yep, lyrics to Mom’s favorite song. Daddy wouldn’t have been happy when I got it done, but he liked the idea when I told him I was going to do it. He also said any man close enough to read it better put a ring on it.” I joke with Loki.

“Fuck no,” Icarus says.

“I’m ready to go. I want to have fun, and this is what I’m wearing.”

“Are you sure, Harley? This is...” Loki waves a hand up and down my body.

“Yep. Let’s go.” I head for the door and tell Fezzik to stay when he tries to follow.

As we walk outside, Rylan pulls up. His eyes bug out at my outfit, but I don’t care. I’m a grown woman, and sometimes we dress like this.

I climb into the passenger seat of Loki’s truck, and we drive across the valley to the small community of Palmer. It sits in the shadow of Pioneer Peak, one of the most photographed mountains in Alaska. Palmer is close to where we lived before Sutton.

They turned the old Mat Maid Creamery into a brewery. When we park, several motorcycles pull up next to us, and I look at my cousin.

“You just couldn’t do this by yourself?”

“Nope. I needed backup. I promised Shock you’d be taken care of tonight.”

“I’m not his yet. I can do whatever I want.”

He scoffs and walks around the truck to help me out. The other guys join us. It’s the same guys who were already at the house, plus Vortex, Miner, and Romeo.

“I’m a lucky girl to have this many escorts.” I giggle, loving how nervous they’re all acting.

We get a large table, and they maneuver me into the corner. I don’t like it, so I move to another seat and cross my legs. I have good legs thanks to all the sports I used to play and the constant workouts I did while in isolation. I have actual cuts in my abs now, and my calves and thighs are tight and toned.

“Hello, sweet girl.”

I look up to see Cy standing there.

“They called you too? They can’t handle having a little sister.”

“Girl, you know what you’re doing, don’t you?”

“Fuck, yeah.” I giggle, and Cy sits down next to me, shaking his head.

“Shock can’t get his property patch on her quick enough if this is what we are going to deal with.” Romeo laughs.

I take a sip of my beer. I’m not usually a fan, but the blueberry one is surprisingly good. We order food, and after a while, I get up to use the restroom.

As I step out, a man is waiting. Something feels off. He reaches for me, but I’m prepared. I hunch my shoulders so he can’t grab my neck and tuck my head forward to keep it from slamming into the wall when he pushes me.

“There’s a price on your head, Princess. Dead or Alive, preferably alive because they want to have fun with you,” the man says.

I cover his hand on my shoulder and wrap my other hand around his wrist. I pull at his fingertips, putting all my strength into it when one starts to give. He rears back to punch me, but I release his wrist and raise my arm to block the hit.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Guys,” I shout as I continue to pull on his finger until it breaks.

The man screams, and I shove him away from me. He kicks out, tripping me when I turn to flee. My hands go out to catch myself, but I’m caught in a pair of arms before I hit the floor. I look up to see Cy holding me. The other guys rush past us, taking off after my attacker.

“I’m going to have to call him now.”

“No.” I shake my head. Tears flood my vision as realization hits of what almost happened to me.

“Sweet girl, he’ll be pissed if he finds out you were attacked and I didn’t tell him.”

“Fine.”

He helps me out to the front of the brewery. Police sirens wail in the distance, growing closer. Cy puts me on the back of his bike, and we take off before the cops can stop and question me. I know why we’re running, but it still bothers me.

He heads north out of Palmer toward Palmer Fishhook Road. Cy turns down a two-lane winding road. We finally stop at a house I don’t recognize off Church Road. The style reminds me of Rylan’s, with the three-car garage and the third being oversized. This house has more windows in front and is larger than my brother’s place.

The front door opens, and Crue rushes outside.

“On your bike, Dad? In that outfit? I should fucking kick your ass too.”

He plucks me off the back and carries me into the house without waiting for a response. I bury my face in his neck, still rattled and scared. I’ve never had to fight off an attack before.

CHAPTER

SIX

AFTERSHOCK

My heart is pounding, adrenaline rushing through my body. When my dad called and said there was a situation and that he was bringing Harlowe to me, I panicked.

But the call from Loki telling me she had been attacked was even worse. All I could think about was the possibility of having to send her away again. I know now that I can’t live without her. If it came to it, I would leave everything behind.

When my father finally pulled up, I saw my girl holding on for dear life. Even from a distance, I could see the tears streaking down her face. I didn’t really notice what she was wearing until I set her on the kitchen island.

Her shorts are so short that if she bent over, you’d see her shapely ass. Then there’s the fact I can see the fullness of her breasts beneath her top. I want to rail at her for what she’s wearing, but then I feel her trembling.

I pull my father’s helmet off her head and wrap my arms around her. She clings to me like a spider monkey, even wrapping her legs around my hips. Her core is over my cock, and that dirty part of my mind wants to slip it out and slide into her heat. But I have to care for her.

She finally settles down, and she's quiet. I lift her chin to look at me and see the mark on the side of her face.

"That fucker hit you?"

"No, I blocked it," she says so quietly I barely hear her.

My father walks in and pours her a shot of whiskey. "Here, sweet girl, take a swig." He hands it to her, and she takes a small sip.

"Harlowe," Kodiak yells as soon as he comes in.

Fezzik is beside him and rushes to her. As soon as he nuzzles against her foot, she pushes me back. I don't want her to go, but I know she needs him.

She unzips her boots before kicking them off. I help her down. She sits on the floor, and Fezzik pushes into her body between her legs. She wraps her arms around him, and I sit down beside them, wrapping both of them in my arms. I can't let her go yet.

I hear my father telling Kodiak what happened, but I focus on my girl and getting her to calm down.

"You're safe, Starlight," I whisper into her ear, and she nods. "I won't let anything happen to you." She turns in my arms, letting go of Fezzik.

"Please don't send me away," she says.

Kodiak and my father come over and join us.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“We aren’t sending you away. We are ending this. I’ve got Vortex heading back to the clubhouse to review the footage from the brewery.”

“I thought I could handle it. I was prepared, but I’ve never had to defend myself for real. He said they wanted me dead or alive, preferably alive so they could have fun with me.” She trembles again, and both Fezzik and I push into her body, surrounding her.

“We need to consider sending her into hiding, though,” my father says, and I look up at him.

“Please no. I’ll do whatever you say. I have a new life here. Marnie and Oly depend on me. I have school. I’m just getting to know Crue again. Please.” Her tears start flowing again.

Before we can answer her, there is a knock on the door. All the guys who were with her tonight walk in. I want to slug Loki, but he’s blaming himself enough already.

“How did someone know you were taking her there? Who did you tell?” I ask as I lift Harlowe off the floor.

I walk over to the large sectional sofa and settle on the chaise with her between my legs. Fezzik jumps up next to us. My dad grabs a blanket to cover her exposed skin and to help with the chill still lingering after riding on the bike. It does bother me that she was riding behind my father, but I know she had to get here somehow and away from the police. We can’t have them involved. They would make it harder for us to get our revenge. Plus, they’d probably brush it off and say it was just some guy

admiring what she was wearing.

Once I have her settled, both Loki and Kodiak come sit near her too.

When she first arrived back in Alaska, she would say she had no one. She doesn't realize how much family she truly has.

"How did he get away from all of you?"

"He ran for the emergency exit. There was a car waiting outside the door. I got the plate number and gave it to Vortex," Gunny says in his deep, gravelly voice. "Sorry, Princess. I should have escorted you to the restroom."

"We'll discuss that later. From now on, she'll be with me."

"No, Shock, she is coming home with me." Kodiak shakes his head.

I'm not going to change my mind. I could have lost her tonight, and it would have been my fault for not having the balls to go see her.

"No, she isn't. I shouldn't have let you make me make that promise." I shift from behind her and stand up. Kodiak does too, and we square off.

"I've been without her for years. I get to spend time with her before you take over her life," Kodiak says. "Besides, she should have a say. You don't even know if she feels the same way about you."

I press into him, ready to prove I'm the man for her.

"Stop," she says and stands on the sofa, making us have to look up at her. Fezzik growls, letting us know he's there to protect her. "Rylan, it's my life. I do get a say.

So much has been decided for me through the years. It's time I start making my own choices. Daddy wouldn't let me have a normal young life, going out to parties or hanging with friends. It's my time."

She turns to me and brushes her hand down my face. "Crue, I deserve to be swept off my feet. You should want to date me and show me how much fun we can have together. Not this claiming."

Her eyes leave mine to look at the others in the room, and she takes a deep breath before biting her top lip. "I wore this outfit tonight not only to piss you all off but because I wanted to prove a point. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I know he didn't attack me because of what I was wearing but because of who I am. I appreciate all of you putting your life on the line for me. But I deserve a life too."

She moves off the sofa, and I itch to pull her into me again. But she's right. I've had years to know she's mine. She didn't. She was always on her own, and until recently, she didn't know we were all ordered to stay away.

It kills me to watch her walk out the door. Loki and Gunner take her and Fezzik to Kodiak's. They have an escort with them. She'll ride in Loki's truck since everyone else is on bikes and knows not to put her on the back of one.

I wait until the door closes, and that's when the real meeting begins.

"Well?" I sit on the edge of the sofa, already missing her.

"Vortex got them on camera in Anchorage heading toward Aaronov's place in Bear Valley."

"Well, fuck. It's not hard to figure out she's back if he's tracking her name. But how did he know about tonight?"

“Loki came to the clubhouse and said he was taking her out, but only members were present at the time,” Romeo offers.

“You’re telling me a brother of ours is betraying us?” Wing barks.

“We suspected it years ago too,” my dad says. “When Charisma and Clarice were killed. I’ve always suspected there was something behind Viking’s death as well.”

“So it would be an older member? Or someone who is a legacy?”

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

We don't give legacies breaks. I worked hard to prove I was worthy to be a Grizzly, but I worked even harder to prove I could be the VP. Now to hear one of us has turned their back on the brotherhood. Has betrayed us to the point our former president and his old lady were murdered. Along with our former SAA and his old lady, leaving their son an orphan.

"What would they gain from killing the ladies?" I ask the obvious. "As a member, they would have had everything already. There is a tie to Aaronov, and not something minimal. Maybe they owe him a serious amount of money or have a severe addiction, and that's what Aaronov is holding over their head. Or worse." I pause, hating this idea. "There could be another deeper connection." What if it was a bear bait, and Aaronov is their old man?

"Doesn't matter what their excuse is. They are dead for betraying us all," Wing, our road captain, says.

The rules set up are firm. You betray the brotherhood, you don't live to do it again.

My dad stands up. "Just a moment."

He walks in the direction of the other bedrooms, and we all wait until he returns.

A few minutes later, he rejoins us, carrying a cardboard storage box. He sets it down on the coffee table and looks over at Kodiak. "I've been doing my own investigation for years now. Loki's parents and Charisma weren't the only mysterious deaths. There have been several original brothers who have passed too."

He pulls out a file. “This contains information on the original chapter members. Only five of us are left now. That’s not good odds. I’ve had my theories, and here they are. Give this to Vortex and have him go through it.” He hands the file to Kodiak, who flips it open and starts skimming the pages.

“Fuck, I forgot about some of these guys. I’ll take the box.”

“I think we need to consider the princess goes on lockdown until this is taken care of,” Miner says, and I swing my head toward him.

“No. She can still go out and do things but with more guards. I can’t do that to her. She’s lost so much already. Her freedom won’t be one.”

“That means tomorrow you will have a detail with you too,” Kodiak adds. “I’m not going to jeopardize my sister’s life any more than it already has.”

“Okay.” I give in. We can still go on a date with prospects following behind us. “I want at least one officer with her too. No more full patches until we find out who this is. We know it’s none of us.”

“Always.” Kodiak agrees, and the other officers all nod.

CHAPTER

SEVEN

HARLOWE

Coming home alone and scared last night was hard, but today I’m looking forward to spending the day with Crue. I know things are going to change for my security, but I’m glad I won’t have to go into hiding or give up my job and school.

I roll over in bed as the sun shines through the edges of my blackout curtains.

I need to get ready. I grab my cell phone off the nightstand.

Crue

Good morning, Starlight, can't wait to spend time with you today.

I smile at the sweet text and then roll to my back as I respond back to him.

Me

Should I wear a skirt? :P Just joking. How about jeans, boots, and layers?

Crue

I could tell you what I'm thinking you should wear. Besides, I didn't get a look at that tattoo on the back of your thigh and butt cheek. I'll kill the man if I ever meet him.

A laugh bursts from my lips.

Me

Was a friend of Seph's. A girl. Don't worry. She isn't my type, although she's beautiful. You might like her. She told me to call her Aphrodite.

Page 21

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

Crue

You are the only one I care about.

Me

You say the sweetest things. Well, I better get myself beautiful before you get here.

Crue

Impossible. You are already beautiful.

His sweet words make me want to change my mind about my plan last night. But I want to experience the things I haven't had a chance to since my father was always very protective of me.

I press the phone to my chest with a sigh. Between Crue and Fezzik, I managed to keep from fully panicking last night.

By the time he gets to the house, I'm dressed in black jeans, a black graphic tee, a sweatshirt, and my heavier leather jacket over it all. I've got on my mid-calf, buckle-style biker boots. I pulled my hair into a tight French braid along my scalp and nape, then continued the braid down the length so it's secure and will fit under my helmet.

When he knocks on the door, I almost jump up and freak out, but the funny looks on Kodiak's and Romeo's faces keep me rooted to the sofa, where Fezzik lies at my feet. He's kept close since last night. I wish I'd had him with me. If I'd pressed the panic

button, he would have been all over my attacker, and we might have had some leverage against Aaronov. But I left him home, and the man got away. The fact that he escaped so easily proves I could have been taken before anyone realized.

Shaking off the thoughts, I smile at Crue as his eyes focus on me. He's carrying a box and walks straight toward me. His long legs are incased in black jeans. The chain on his wallet slaps against his hip as he moves. His strides are long and purposeful.

My gaze trails upward. He's wearing a T-shirt under a half-buttoned red flannel shirt and then his cut. His muscular arms strain the sleeves, and I remember how those arms feel around me.

His dark hair is brushed back from his face, and his beard and mustache are freshly trimmed. A backward ball cap sits on his head, with a curl of hair slipping through the opening.

He has beautiful, mysterious eyes that seem to look right through me, as if he's seeing into my soul. When I'm in the room, his focus never wavers. It's intense, unlike anything I've ever felt before, and it causes me to shift slightly.

I tip my head back to look up at him. He runs his hand along my face, and I lean into his touch.

"Hello, Starlight."

"Hello, Crue." I let out a soft sigh and catch my bottom lip between my teeth.

"Don't do that. Unless you want me to kiss the fuck out of you in front of your brother and Romeo."

"Please don't do that." My brother chuckles.

I look down at the package in his hands. It has a big red bow on it.

“Is that for me?” I change the subject.

“Yep,” he says.

I love presents. I always have.

“I know you like presents.”

I smile up at him as I sit back down on the sofa and pull the box from his hand. He laughs and sits down next to me. I pull off the bow and lift the lid. Inside is a long strip of leather with snaps along the edges.

“It’s to hold your hair together when you’re on the back of my bike.”

It’s black, with white lily of the valley flowers stitched into it.

“I love it.” I twist around and hand it to him. “Can you snap it on?”

“Sure, baby.”

His hand drags my long braid back and carefully snaps the leather cuff around it. It also holds it against my back so it won’t move around. I pull back the tissue paper and uncover a pair of leather chaps, the same lily of the valley flowers stitched down the legs. I lift them out and admire them. I’ve never been given anything so pretty.

Page 22

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

I used to ride back in Texas, and while I haven't gotten a bike here yet, I'll still be able to wear them when I'm with him. These gifts are proof he wants me to be with him for a long time to get use out of them.

Standing up, I flick them out and proceed to buckle them around my waist before leaning down to zip up the backs to cover my jeans.

"They'll offer more protection for your legs than the jeans and will also keep you warm."

"I love them. You didn't have to." I jump at him.

He catches me and pulls me against him. His big hands hold my ass where the chaps are open. If we didn't have an audience, I'd wrap my legs around him. I kiss his lips softly, and he returns the kiss but with way more gusto. His tongue slides between my lips, and I open for him.

"Enough," my brother barks, and we pull apart, both of us panting for air.

"Holy fuck." I sigh and watch as Crue's lips tip up in a smile.

"You can say that again, Starlight." His deep, gruff voice vibrates through his chest to mine, causing my core to spasm.

"Holy fuck," I say again with a smile.

He smacks my ass. "Don't cuss."

He sets me down, and I stare up at him in shock.

“Did you just spank me and tell me not to cuss? I don’t fucking think so.”

I turn away from him and walk down the hall. I’m not going out with some over-the-top asshole who thinks he can tell me what I can and can’t say.

“Harlowe, get your ass back here,” he says from right behind me.

I stop and swing around, ready to deck him.

“No. I’m not going out with an asshole who won’t let me speak.”

“Sorry, Kodiak,” Crue says before he picks me up and throws me over his shoulder.

He carries me to my bedroom and kicks the door closed before Fezzik can follow along behind us.

“Put me down. Right now,” I demand as he drops me on the bed. Before I can scurry away, he’s on me and cages my body in.

“Listen up, baby. I love your sassy mouth and can’t wait until you talk dirty to me while I’m fucking your brains out. But you need to watch your mouth so that Oly doesn’t repeat after you.” He reaches between our bodies and cups my sex. “When I get my bare cock into this pussy, I’m going to put my baby in it so that you can never leave me. I don’t want our kiddos to have our dirty mouths.”

I pause at his words, and my eyes flare wide.

Holy fuck. Did he just say that?

“Crue, did you just say you want to knock me up?”

“Yes, I do, Starlight. As soon as I get my ring on your finger and my property patch on your back, you’ll be mine completely.”

I shake my head, unsure I really heard him. He leans down and kisses me. My thoughts scatter as his tongue dominates my mouth and his lips consume me. When he pulls away, I open my eyes and stare up at him over my body.

“Okay.” It’s all I can say. I’ve always wanted a family to replace the one I thought I lost but now have back. He knows exactly what I want.

“In that order, Starlight. I’m going to put my ring on your finger, my property patch on your back, maybe tattoo my name on your ass.” He moves his hand and pulls my hips against his cock. “Then I’m taking you bare so I can put my baby in your belly.”

“Okay.” I think he fried my brain.

He pushes off the bed and holds out a hand to help me up.

We walk out of the room and head right outside to his bike. His black Harley is mostly matte flat black, except for the glossy tank. He has the high handlebars called ape hangers. On the seat, two helmets rest side by side. One is his bucket style, and the other is a sleek, modular one painted with swirling northern lights in green, blue and pink.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

He picks up the helmet and moves to put it on me.

“I can do that. Why do I have a full face helmet?”

“Because I want to protect you completely.” He smirks before I allow him to put the helmet on me. I look up when he cinches the straps under my chin. “You have Bluetooth so we can talk as we go along.”

“Thank you.”

He closes the front opening, enclosing my face behind the shield. Crue slips on his helmet next. I spot the mic and earpiece built into it. Climbing onto his bike, he holds out his hand for me. Once I’m settled behind him, he pulls me closer, his hand resting on my thigh. The engine roars to life, and I lean against the backrest bar.

“You good?” His voice comes through the helmet.

“Yep, let’s go. Where are you taking me?”

“How would you like to go up to Hatcher’s Pass? We can’t go across to Willow yet, but we can go up to the mine and check it out.”

“Sounds like fun. Let’s go.”

I practically bounce in my seat as he turns us around, and we take off down the driveway. He heads out, and we turn onto Parks Highway, heading south into Wasilla. Music plays through the Bluetooth, but I’m enjoying holding tight to him as

he weaves through the Saturday traffic.

He turns onto Main Street, and I'm excited. He's taking Wasilla Fishhook Road out. The two-lane road winds through neighborhoods, and I look around at how much has changed in the ten years I've been gone. Some of the fields I remember are now dotted with houses. I'm fascinated by the two-track trail running alongside the road, reserved for four-wheelers and off-road vehicles that aren't allowed on the paved roads.

It's striking how, here in Alaska, you can have a brand-new expensive framed house right next to an original log cabin that looks like it's been standing since pioneer days. He takes the corners, and I lean with him as we move deeper into the Alaskan wild. The trees shade us from the sun as we get farther along.

As we pass Seldon Road, which has a gas station and corner store that weren't there when I was a kid, I spot cars and trucks. Some are hauling machines or four-wheelers on trailers, others with hikers, all enjoying the beautiful, warm June day.

"You know, if you head that way on Seldon, go to Church, then out to Pittman, you can get to my house." He points to our left.

"No. I didn't know that."

I love that he's pointing out facts like that to me.

"There's a gated community back there." He points to our right a little while later.

"I remember when I was little, Daddy used to take us on day trips, just exploring back here or even heading up the Glenn for fun."

"Yeah, I occasionally like to get away and do that too. We should take a trip to

Seward or Kenai one of these weekends.”

“I’d love that.”

His hand returns to my thigh and gives it a squeeze. A little bit later he points, and I look over to see a moose lying in the shade. I smile behind my helmet, loving that the moose doesn’t care that we are right here. We are invading his space, not the other way around.

Finally, we reach the end of Wasilla Fishhook, and he hangs a left onto Willow Fishhook Road, heading toward Hatcher’s Pass. This area has really grown. Small roadside café, gas stations, and even more expensive houses line the route as we get closer. We ride alongside the rushing river, and I can’t stop myself. I hold open my arms, wishing I could feel the wind and chill of the air against my face. Crue chuckles and rubs a hand along my knee. I wrap my arms around him again, resting my helmet against his back as I watch the white water next to us.

Traffic has picked up as people head down the valley and tourists pull out of the pull-offs. We pass the old boarded-up boarding house and take a sharp left into the pass. The gate, which is sometimes closed in winter due to avalanches, is, of course, open. I feel a change in the air that energizes me. There are several tight turns and corners. Hikers are parked along the roadside, but Crue has only one thought and keeps heading up to the large parking lot. He pulls into a spot among the other weekend visitors, kicks down the stand, and shuts off the bike.

Crue holds out his hand, and I take it as I climb off. My legs are shaky, and he makes sure I’m steady before he dismounts and takes me in his arms. He pulls off his helmet, then works on getting mine off. As soon as the wind and chill in the air hits my face, I tremble.

“Here, babe.” He slips his heavy leather jacket off and puts it around my shoulders.

My body is still acclimated to the Texas heat and not the chill in the high mountains of Alaska.

I turn to look back at the road we climbed, taking in the view. I spot the Knik Arm in the distance. It's absolutely breathtaking.

Taking a deep breath, I recall every memory and moment I spent here with my dad and mom. Tears spring to my eyes, and Crue pulls me into his arms.

"I knew bringing you here would bring up memories. But I thought it would be okay."

Aftershock

I look into her tear-filled eyes, and my heart clenches. I want to tell her the words I shouldn't. They're so true, but I hold them back. Instead, I slide my hand along her cool cheek and lean down to kiss her softly.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“I remember us coming up here so many times when we were kids,” she says.

“You were a kid. I was a teenager. A teenager who shouldn’t have watched you so closely.”

“You never crossed that line.”

“I know.”

I grab my backpack from the back of the bike and open it. Inside, there’s a small cooler with a couple bottles of water and some sandwiches.

“There isn’t really a good place to eat up here,” I say. “But I thought we could take a little break, stretch, and get your legs back before we head out.”

I watch her as she looks around us, clocking the moment she notices my brothers and the prospects. Some had followed behind, others were in the lead. I wasn’t going to risk her safety again. But I needed this time with her. Tonight, I have something else in mind. After what happened at the brewery, I had to change what I originally had planned.

I pull out two bottles of water and hand her one. She takes a long drink after I open it for her. She walks a small circle around our area, taking it all in. I give her space because I know she needs it. Her father and mother loved bringing her up here. I remember the hikes and berry picking at the end of summer.

When I pull out the sandwiches, she turns to look at me. The moment she realizes the

bread is from the bakery, a smile brightens her face. The weight of old memories fades away. I plan to give her new ones—ones for us and the family we will have.

I hand her a sandwich, and she opens it.

“Oh my God! How did you remember?” She takes a big bite and moans. “I haven’t had one of these in so long. I think Daddy made me one for my high school graduation. But once I was in college, I was so busy I didn’t even think about taking the time to have one.”

The orange marmalade sandwich with butter on fresh bread was her favorite growing up, because she loved Paddington Bear. She used to have a stuffed version of him, but it got left behind when they had to leave. I know she will be surprised when she sees him again.

I move closer to her. “I remember everything about you, Harlowe.”

She looks up at me with tears shining in her eyes. I lean down and kiss her softly again. I want to consume her, but not here, not with all these people around. Her taste of sweet cherries bursts across my senses, mingling with the lingering marmalade, and I groan, wanting more of her.

“Thank you,” she says softly, leaning into me, her hands full of water and food.

“Always, Starlight.” I kiss her forehead and step back. “Want a bite?” I offer her my roast beef sandwich, packed with protein.

Her lips pinch, and her eyes dance as she shakes her head and takes another bite of her own meal. We stand there, chatting quietly, as we finish our small picnic. I take the trash to one of the bear-proof cans and turn back to see her standing by my bike. She’s calm and centered, taking in her surroundings.

“Ready to head out?” I ask her when I approach.

“Yes.”

We get back on the bike, and I signal the guys to break up again. I head back the way we came. At one point, I pull over so we can get a picture by the river. Instead of going through Wasilla, I turn down Seldon and make my way back to my house that way. I love the feel of her behind me, wrapped around me. Her legs cradle my hips, and I can’t stop the thoughts of finally making her mine. I promised to give her hearts and roses, and that’s my intent.

When we pull up to my house, the guys break off, and I click the remote to open the garage. My dad went his own way this evening, leaving me the house to myself with my girl for a while before the next part of our date. I help her off the bike and remove her helmet. She stretches and flexes her back. I can’t stop myself, I pull her into my body and take her lips in a deep kiss. I want to put everything I’m feeling and what I want to do to her into this kiss. When we finally part, she’s breathless and I’m hard as a rock.

“Come on, let me show you around before I change my mind about giving you time.”

Taking her hand in mine, I lead her around the house, showing her everything except the master suite. That will happen soon enough, just not right now.

“Why do you have so many bedrooms?” she asks after I show her the other three.

“Well, one is for Dad until we get his place done out back. Then I plan to fill the rest up with our kids, Starlight.”

She shivers, and I push her against the wall of the hall. “Do you want kids still, beautiful?”

“I do.”

“I can’t wait until you say that statement and it means more than the question you just answered,” I confess to her.

After grilling steak and baked potatoes in the outdoor kitchen on my back deck, I just want to keep her here and cuddle. But I made a couple of promises. I’d give her time, and the guys want a second chance. I glance at her outfit, glad she’s not dressed as sexy as she might like for our next stop, but I want to give her the chance to change anyway.

“I have another place I’d like to take you, but I don’t know if I need to take you home first and allow you to change. What do you think?”

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Where to?” She smirks and cocks a hip.

I want to pull her down into my lap and ravish her when she looks at me with those flirty eyes.

“The bar and clubhouse. The guys wanted another chance to have drinks with you.”

She looks down at her jeans and long-sleeved T-shirt. She took off her sweatshirt earlier. “I could wear this...unless you want me in that outfit again?”

“Nope, I’m good with what you’re wearing.” I shake my head.

We clean up together like we’ve done this a hundred times before. Then we head out to the bar. I decide to take my truck, knowing she’ll be having a few drinks.

CHAPTER

EIGHT

HARLOWE

We pull up to the bar. I haven’t been back here since the night I arrived. Crue comes around to let me out, and we walk in hand in hand. People stop and stare at us. So many women are watching me, causing a wave of self-consciousness to hit me. I now wish I had said to take me home so I could change.

Crue leads me to a table tucked along the far side of the bar. Several of the officers

are sitting there, along with his dad and a couple of older patched members.

“Hey, gorgeous.” Gunny stands and kisses my cheek, drawing a rumble from Crue.

The other guys from last night get up and hug me too. My brother is sitting at the head of the table with Fezzik lying at his feet. As soon as Fezzik hears my voice, he comes over to me, and I’m happy to have him close right now.

Crue sits next to my brother and pulls me down onto his lap. The guys order me a drink, and before long, I’m laughing and having fun, just like I did last night before all hell broke loose.

Throughout the night, several women approach the table, trying to distract the guys’ attention from me. Each one is turned down. But when one walks over, sliding her hand along Crue’s shoulders before moving on to my brother, I stand up. I’ve had enough of this. These women are pushing the limit touching Crue while I’m sitting in his lap, then turning their attention to my brother like it means nothing.

Rylan isn’t fazed, though. He calmly takes her hand off him.

“Precious, I’m not interested. Haven’t been in a long time, and you know that. Back off,” Rylan tells her.

“Fucking bear bait is on point tonight,” one of the guys says.

“I’ll be back. I need to use the restroom,” I say.

“Let me lead you to the one in the club section,” Crue says and stands.

He takes my hand, and we weave through the crowds to the back of the house. I enter the restroom and immediately want to leave. The girl my brother just rebuffed is

standing at the mirror. Ignoring her, I walk into a stall and proceed about my business.

When I'm done, she's still standing there.

"You know, I've had Kodiak and Shock, along with all the others. You aren't special. You'll be one of us soon enough. Just another girl they'll call bear bait." Her tone is bitter, and her lips are pinched. I wash my hands, never taking my eyes off her.

I dry my hands and turn to her. "The good thing is, I'm not interested in Kodiak. He's my brother. As for Shock, I'm here now, and you're not. I'll never be you because I'm the princess."

It's the first time I've used that title. I've never really thought of myself that way, but right now, I'm glad I have it. It sets us apart. I don't want to be bear bait to Crue. I want to be his everything. I doubt he tells the girls what he tells me, but it still stings knowing he slept with this woman.

I step out, and she follows behind me.

"Fucking, Precious, you know you aren't supposed to come back here. How did you get past the prospect?" Crue barks at her.

"I'm on my way to his room for the night," she coos as she walks past us, shaking her butt in her tiny skirt.

"What did she say to you?" Crue looks at me, and I shake my head. I don't want to appear needy or clingy.

"Nothing I didn't already know." I move past him, but Crue pushes me against the wall and cages in my body.

Page 26

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“I’ve never had her, Starlight. I’m not innocent, but I don’t shit where I eat. I know better than to be with club chicks. My father taught me better than that. I’m not going to say I didn’t when I was younger, though.”

I trail my fingers through his beard and up into his hair, pulling his head down to mine. “Kiss me,” I order him, and he smirks right before he takes my lips in a deep kiss.

“Should’ve fucking known you were back here making out.” Sparky chuckles from nearby. “Kodiak is looking for you.”

“Coming,” Crue says before he releases my body.

I have never been with another man, so I don’t know if I’m doing things right. But I do know that I like what Crue does to me.

Aftershock

We pull up to her brother’s house, and she giggles again. When the guys found out she’d never been drunk, they proceeded to get her tipsy. I’m not mad, but the whole way to her brother’s place, she’s been talking sexy to me, and I’m almost at my wit’s end.

I come around to her side, knowing her brother is still at the bar, giving us some time to ourselves. I let Fezzik out of the back before I open her door and unbuckle her.

“I like this fuzzy feeling. No wonder people like to drink.”

As soon as I have her in my arms, she wraps around me and starts kissing my neck. I'm a fucking saint for not pressing her against the truck and fucking her brains out.

We enter the house, and I set her down. "Go get in your pajamas, and then I'll help you into bed."

"Okay." She skips down the hall.

I move to the kitchen to get her a glass of water and some acetaminophen to help with the headache she'll have in the morning.

When she doesn't return, I decide to check on her. I knock on her door but hear nothing. I open it a crack and find her lying on the bed, still fully clothed. I take off her boots and help settle her under the covers before leaving the water and pills on the nightstand. Fezzik is lying in the corner on his large dog bed.

"Well, I guess no goodnight kiss." I chuckle before walking out and leaving her for the night.

The next morning, I pull up to her brother's house, wanting to see what her plans are for the day and if she wants to go with me to look at some jobsites. I stuck around last night until Kodiak came home.

I knock on the door, and Kodiak lets me in.

"Low Low," he hollers.

I look down the hall, waiting for her to appear. Fezzik comes out of the room first, then my girl follows. She must have gotten up during the night because she's wearing a T-shirt I haven't seen in years. It's a Salty Dawg Saloon shirt from Homer that my dad got me on a trip we took before my sixteenth birthday. It's black and threadbare

from years of wear. Even as a teenager, I was a big guy, so the shirt hangs loose on her. She's also wearing shorts, though I only catch a glimpse of them because they're so tiny. Her hair falls around her in tangles, and she's rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"What are you screaming about so early?"

"Fuck this shit," I growl and walk toward her.

"What the fuck are you wearing, Harlowe?" Kodiak barks at her, but her eyes are focused on me.

"That's my shirt," I say.

"Fuck," Kodiak says, and I'm on her.

"Sorry, man." I lower my shoulder to her stomach, then lift her and toss her over it as I stalk back to her room.

"Hey, wait! What's going on?" Harlowe questions, but she has now sealed her fate. By wearing that shirt, she made it clear she wants me too.

I drop her on the bed and watch as her tits jiggle behind the fabric. "Whose shirt are you wearing, Harlowe?" I need to know if she knows before I lose my shit.

"Um..." She glances down at the shirt, and I watch the blush spread beneath the collar.

I reach down and whip the shirt off her body. I'm mesmerized by her beautiful, round, firm breasts. Her nipples are diamond hard as she looks up at me.

“This shirt. Where did you get it, Harlowe?”

Page 27

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

She pulls her bottom lip between her perfect, cute teeth, and I'm done. I slip off my vest and throw it toward the chair in the corner. Then my T-shirt flies across the room next before I drop onto her body. Her breasts heave against my chest, and I spurt a little cum from my cock.

"Tell me, Starlight. Tell me what we both know so I can take care of your ache."

She swallows and then looks up at me. "I took it from your bag the night my mom died. It's yours."

"Fuck yeah, it's mine."

I kiss her long and deep before moving down her neck. I need her breasts in my mouth. I lick and suck each of her breasts, treating them the same, and love them up. She's moaning and writhing beneath me.

"Fucker, you take my sister's virginity, and I'll kill you." Kodiak pounds on the door.

"I won't." I groan because I suspected, wished, and hoped, but I wasn't sure until he said those words.

Taking a swollen nipple into my mouth, I suck it deep, suckling on it just like our children will someday. I pull off with a pop, and she moans again.

"Tell me, Starlight. Did you save yourself for me?"

She nods her head. Her sexy eyes are dilated, and she's begging me to take her. Fuck,

I want her, but I can't right now.

I slide further down her body and off the side of the bed. I just need a little taste, I tell myself as I grip her shorts and pull them off, along with her tiny thong. Leaning back, I take in her pretty pussy with only a thin landing strip of hair. The evidence of her desire is glistening along her lips. I bend forward and nuzzle my face against her.

"I only need a little taste to tide me over until I can take you."

My tongue slides through her wetness, then I kiss her pussy the way I kiss her mouth. She arches off the bed and cries out. Her brother is going to bust that door in if I make her do that again. But I can't stop myself. I need to make her come.

I lick and suck on her like a starved man, all while avoiding her clit. I watch it emerge from its hood, and then I give it attention. I gently lick it, and her moans grow louder.

"Please, Crue. Please I need it," she begs.

I suck it deep as she screams and comes apart for me. When I'm done cleaning her up with my tongue, I wipe her essence from my lips and beard. I lean back on my haunches and watch as her body comes down from the orgasm.

"I want inside that body so bad, but we are going to wait. I'm going to give you time, but you are mine. Never doubt that."

I rise to my feet and look down at her. She's sexy as fuck, and I'm a crazy man for what I'm about to do. I roll her over and bite her flesh over that sexy tattoo.

"Mine," I growl before snatching my shirt and cut off the floor. "Get dressed, Harlowe, we have plans today." I walk toward the door.

“You’re leaving?” She sits up, and now her eyes are filled with a different fire.

“Yep, baby. When I take that pussy, you’ll be in our bed at our house, not in your brother’s. Besides, I want you to scream and moan, and he’ll come unglued if I make you do that here.” I chuckle as I walk out of the room, slamming the door.

“But—”

I don’t hear the rest of what she says, just something hitting the door hard. I imagine it’s one of her boots.

I’m crazy, but I’m also honorable. I’m going to give her the time she needs to get used to us before I take her innocence.

CHAPTER

NINE

HARLOWE

I pull up to the apartment complex where Marnie and Oly live. Looking around, I know that if she had a guy who cared for her, he wouldn’t want her here. It’s not bad, but it’s not the best area. It’s also really unkept. The redwood paint is chipped and faded. The sidewalk and parking lot are full of cracks and frost heaves.

What makes it worse are the curtains fluttering in the apartment below hers. She’s told me about the guy who lives there. He’s asked her out numerous times and gives her the creeps. I wonder if I can ask one of the guys to come by to shake him up, but I don’t want to interfere. It’s taken Marnie a long time to open up to me. I’ve been working for her for almost two months.

I'm guessing she picked this place because it's close to the bakery. Her car isn't exactly the most reliable. The older Jeep Grand Cherokee looks great from the outside, but the worn interior and its hundred-thousand-plus miles tell a different story.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

Just as I'm about to jump out and head inside, the door to their second-floor apartment opens. They come down. Marnie is holding Oly's hand while trying to carry everything and the kitchen sink that she thinks we'll need for our day at the lake.

It's the Fourth of July, and I'm taking the girls to Big Lake for a couple of hours before we head to my brother's place for a barbecue and some time at his lake too. I climb down from my truck and rush over to help her. I reach for the bags, but she points to Oly.

"Can you take Miss Priss, please?"

I lift her up into my arms. "Oh, Miss Prissy, are we having a day?" I ask the three-year-old. She's such a cutie. I'm completely in love with her. Her long, dark hair is twisted into a braided bun on top of her head. She tugs on one of my braids.

"I wanna my braids down like yours." She leans against me, tears filling her expressive blue eyes. She's a miniature version of her mother, except for the eyes.

Marnie's eyes are a pale golden amber. Her emotions are in her eyes; they always give her away. Her long, dark hair is in a retro rockabilly style, complete with a red handkerchief. She's always so stylish and beautiful. She has tattoos on her arms and body that make me want more.

By the time I have Oly buckled into the spare car seat I bought for my truck, Marnie is already at the back, loading her things under the tonneau cover. I help her finish getting everything packed.

“Is that it?” I chuckle, and she shakes her head.

“I know it looks like I’m moving in, but when you have a kid, you’ll understand. I have to plan for every scenario.” I notice the extra backpacks that always go with her.

“Those extra clothes in case you spend the night?”

She turns away from me, and I’ve learned that’s her tell. She’s about to lie.

“Yep, just in case.”

“Okay. All locked up.”

“Just a moment.” Marnie rushes up the steps, and I climb into the driver’s seat. Fezzik is nuzzling into Oly and making her giggle.

“No, Ezzik,” she tells him, and he pulls away with a huff and sits on the floor of the truck.

As Marnie comes down the stairs in her high heels, the door below hers opens. A creepy-looking guy steps out and smiles at her. I open my door and step onto the running board.

“Ready, Marn?” I interrupt him, and she climbs into the passenger seat.

“Thank you so much, Harley. He’s so creepy.”

“I’ll have one of the guys come talk to him.”

“Oh no, don’t do that. I don’t want to make things worse.”

“It won’t.”

When I pull out onto the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, heading toward the coffee shop and town, she lets out a deep sigh. “I’m so excited,” she says. “It’s been so long since Oly and I did something away from the apartment.”

“Well, I’ll help get you out of the apartment more often.”

I turn the truck onto the Parks Highway, continuing on toward Big Lake. We pass Wasilla Lake, right in the center of town, packed with people enjoying the sun, heat, and holiday.

“So, how was your date last night?” Marnie wiggles her eyebrows.

“I want fry fries,” Oly says from the back seat.

“No, baby girl. I have snacks for you.”

“Oh kay,” she replies dramatically, as if it’s the worst thing in the world.

“Well?” Marnie pushes again.

“Fine. It was another night of him ending with just a deep kiss and holding me tight. I swear he’s broke or something.” I huff just as dramatically as Oly.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“So, he only got all hot and heavy with you that day you wore his shirt last month and hasn’t done more since?”

“No. I don’t know what I’m doing wrong, but I’m tired of waiting. I’m about to jump his bones or go find someone willing.”

I know I’m being ridiculous. I won’t actually find anyone else. I’m so in love with Crue. We take a ride every weekend, just exploring. He took me out to Sutton—to the old clubhouse and my parents’ house that my brother still owns. On top of that, we spend time at his place or my brother’s, watching movies, or I’m cooking for him. He watches me study and then kisses the shit out of me, but he won’t do anything else. I’m about to take matters into my own hands. Maybe if I initiate it, he won’t be able to say no.

“I doubt you’ll find anyone else. You’re in love with Aftershock.”

I glance at her as we pass the clubhouse. The girl who said she had Crue enters my mind. Is it because he now knows I’m a virgin? He doesn’t even talk dirty to me anymore. Oh, he tells me I’m his, but that’s it.

“Do you want me to stop and get fireworks for later at Rylan’s?” I change the subject, and she laughs harder.

“Girl, you got it bad. No, we don’t need to.”

And there she goes again. She never wants to feel indebted to anyone who helps her. I’ve noticed this over the last couple of months. I worry about her past because of this

and several other signs.

“Too late.” I pass the Big Lake turnoff and head to the fireworks stands. “Wait here.” I jump out and walk over to the stand to buy several different fireworks displays.

It’s tough to do many fireworks in Alaska during the summer since it doesn’t get dark enough, but I pick out things that will be fun and loud. I grab sparklers for Oly and a few small things she will like. When I head back to the truck, I spot my ever-present security detail. It’s GB today and another prospect with Icarus in a four-door truck. They decided not to all ride motorcycles since I’m bringing Marnie and Oly.

By the time we pull up to the North Big Lake Recreation Area, Oly, who fell asleep on the drive, is waking up.

“I swim now?” she asks as she looks out at the lake.

“Only with your vest on do you go near that lake, baby,” Marnie tells her as she gets her out of her seat.

We find a place to set up our stuff, and with the guys’ help, we carry everything down to the sandy beach area. I’m wearing a pair of torn-up shorts, a tank top, and sandals, with my bikini underneath. Marnie is dressed similarly but in her cute retro style. She takes off Oly’s T-shirt to reveal a swim shirt and shorts instead of a kid’s bikini top. It will protect her not only from the sun but the bugs that are notoriously bad here. Oly’s little pink top and shorts are covered with unicorns, she immediately sits in the sand and starts playing around.

“Want me to take you in the water, Oly?” I ask her as Marnie gets her things arranged. “Come on, Marnie, don’t worry. Fezzik will make sure no one takes our stuff or spot.” I order Fezzik to stay and then drop my shorts and lift the tank over my head. I have on a green bikini that hugs my body and isn’t too revealing, but I know

Crue would hate it. He didn't come today because some club business came up at the last minute. I'm not supposed to ask, so I didn't. I can't know what the club is up to. It's just to make sure the police can't use me against them.

I glance over at Icarus and lift an eyebrow before turning to pick up Oly. Marnie is in a red polka-dot, full-coverage bikini. The halter-style top is cut in a '60s fashion, and the shorts are high-waisted but cut high on her thighs. She takes Oly from my arms, and we head toward the chilly water. No matter how much sun shines on it, most lakes and rivers here are glacial fed, so the water is cold.

We play in the water for a while until Oly's teeth start to chatter. As I turn to head back up the beach, I'm stopped. I turn around and see Jerry, the guy who always comes into the bakery.

"Oh, hello." I'm surprised to see him here and glance around. The guys notice I'm backing away from him and start heading in our direction but stop when Icarus takes a call. Damn it. Looks like I'm going to have to shake him off myself.

"Hey, Harley, I thought that was you. Want to come on my friend's boat out on the lake?" He points to a boat at the dock with several people on it. They are all drunk by the looks of it.

"No, I'm here with Marnie."

"Oh, she can come too."

"No, thank you." I turn to walk away, but he grabs my arm.

"Come on. You don't need to hang out here with your brother's friends." He points to the obvious MC members.

“So, you know who my brother is?” I’m shocked he’s still standing here. He should run off scared, like most guys do.

“That would explain that guy saying you were his. He was just being protective for your brother.” I look over his shoulder and hold in the smirk, but it’s hard.

“I wouldn’t pretend with Harlowe. And if I were you, I’d take her no and my hint and back the fuck away from her,” Crue growls as he walks around him. He holds out his hand so I can finally step onto the dry beach away from where Jerry was keeping me.

“Come on, dude, she’s not into you. She’s not one of those tramps who hang around with you guys.”

“Those women who hang out at our bar know they will be protected and that no means no.”

“That doesn’t make sense at all. They just open their legs for every man.”

“They are still women.” I defend them.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Whatever. Come on, Marnie, you want to come? Maybe Harley will babysit so you can have some fun.”

I turn and see Marnie standing there watching. My brother is holding Oly in one arm and has his other around Marnie. She’s trying to pull away, but he won’t let her go. I’m shocked, but then Crue pulls me into him.

“I want you to leave Harlowe and Marnie alone. No going to the bakery. No bothering them again. You’re done,” Crue growls.

“You can’t tell me what to do.” Jerry tries to stand up to him as his buddies walk up.

“Yeah, I can. But I’m not the one who’s going to give the order.” Crue points to Rylan.

“No, I will. You see, we don’t like assholes who beat the shit out of women who say no. Bet your friends don’t know that about you.”

The guys who were standing around Jerry hold their hands up and back away.

My head is swimming with everything I just heard. Jerry beat up a girl?

“I didn’t do that. I don’t know what you’re talking about. You got the wrong guy.”

“Do I?” Rylan asks as Crue pushes me behind him. Rylan signals the guys to join us.

“Jerry, right?” Crue acts like he doesn’t know his name when I know he does. “These

are my friends. They want to talk to you.”

Jerry holds up his hands in defense and backs off. “No thanks. You have the wrong guy. If I did something like that, the police would be here, not you guys.”

Icarus stops him with a firm hand on his shoulder. I’m not sure what is going to happen, but I don’t like how Jerry talked about the girls at the bar, and I don’t like that he would have hurt someone.

“If we have the wrong person, where were you last night?” Crue asks him, and I watch the color drain from Jerry’s face.

“That’s what I thought.” Icarus says. “She’s alive, by the way, and my friends and I will make sure she stays that way. As for the police, be lucky they didn’t get you, because we’ll get you even if you’re behind bars.” He smiles darkly before turning to GB, who grabs Jerry and walks him off, despite his continued protests.

“Now, as for you two ladies,” my brother starts.

“I’ve got this one. We are done. You’ve had enough time,” Crue says.

“I have,” I agree. “See you later.” I’m thrown over Crue’s shoulder and he heads for my truck.

“Wait! We came with her,” Marnie starts to protest.

“I got you, babe,” Rylan says and holds up his hand. Icarus tosses his keys to him, and I watch as my brother and his guys clean up our beach party.

I’m tossed into the passenger seat of my truck, and the door is slammed before I can ask him where he’s taking me and why we are leaving.

I look around and see that GB and Jerry are gone.

“But Olympia’s car seat?” Marnie yells. Again, my brother says something to her, and she nods.

I look over as the back door is opened on the driver’s side and Fezzik jumps in. Crue climbs into the driver’s seat. He leans over me and pulls the seat belt. His hands brush my nearly naked body as he buckles me in.

“You wore this to test me, didn’t you, Starlight?”

I can’t deny that was my original thoughts, but now I’m going to deny it because I don’t want him to know he gets to me.

Aftershock

I watch her eyes and know she’s going to lie. She can’t lie to me, no matter how hard she tries. When I got the picture of her in this bikini with the extra strings around her back and the gold rings, I was done. I’ve been really trying to let her and her brother have more time after he begged me for it and asked me to make sure she really wanted to give her virginity to me.

I hated every time I didn’t do more than kiss her. I’ve been hard as stone for weeks while I waited for her. I knew she was frustrated, but she hadn’t begged me or pushed me until today with this bikini. I dropped everything I was doing and jumped on my motorcycle. Kodiak told me when we pulled up, he would have someone take care of my bike. Same with his, because I know he’s not leaving that beach without Marnie and Oly in his hands. The moment he saw her in the pictures and I told him who she was, he only said one word.

“Mine.”

Page 31

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

I looked at him and pointed at his sister. “Mine.”

“Yep.” That’s all he said as we drove from the Mat Su Regional Hospital where Jerry’s victim was being treated. She’s going to be medevacked to Providence in Anchorage to see more specialists because of all the damage he did when he beat her. Gunny is sitting with her, making sure she’s safe.

“I’m not going to your house for you to just kiss me and leave.” Harlowe’s sassy tone breaks me from my thoughts.

I reach across the console and grip her thigh gently in my hand. “Oh, baby, we are past the kissing stage. You are going to choke on my aching cock before I eat your pussy and make you come so many times you’ll beg me to take you. I’m tired of waiting.”

She grabs my hand and pulls it to her core. “I’m tired of you putting the brakes on us too. Fuck my brother.”

“Nope, he isn’t my type, but maybe Marnie is his.” I chuckle as we finally pull into my yard.

I let Fezzik out before I round the truck to the passenger side. I throw her over my shoulder again, and this time I can’t stop my fingers from slipping under the edge of her bikini bottoms. She is soaked, and I slide my fingers through her nether lips.

She moans as she grips the back of my jeans and presses herself into my hand more. I stomp through the foyer and great room, then kick open the double doors to my room.

I turn and close and lock them both with one hand. No one will disturb us. My dad is out back, talking with the new architect he hired to design his place. Fezzik will be okay with him. I slide my girl down my body and push her down to her knees.

Harlowe looks up at me with those sexy eyes of hers before she reaches out and unbuckles my belt. I look down my body as she pulls my cock out of my boxer briefs. She rubs her hand up and down the length, and my head drops back on my shoulders. Her tongue slides up my cock to the head. When her soft lips wrap around it, I almost lose it right then. It's been so long since it's been encased in soft warmth other than my own hand.

She works my cock as far she can into her mouth before gagging. She uses her hand to slide along the base the rest of the way and up to her mouth.

"Fuck, Starlight, that feels so good. Are you getting wet for me?"

She moans around my cock, and the vibration causes a spurt of cum to release, and she moans again.

"Baby, it's been so long, I'm going to come if you don't stop doing that."

She pulls back and off my cock. "What do you mean so long?"

"I'm not a virgin, but it's been over five years since I've had sex."

She kisses the tip of my cock before sliding it back into her mouth. She doubles down and starts tightening her hand and sucking in her cheeks as she sucks me off. When she takes my balls in her hands and rolls them around her fingers, I grab onto her head and start moving in and out of her mouth, giving her more and more of my cock each time until she's swallowing my head down her throat. I come so hard my toes curl. I hold her firm, making sure she takes all my cum down before I let her go. She

licks her lips, and I'm hard again.

Reaching down, I lift Harlowe up and toss her to the bed. She lands with a giggle, and then I strip out of my clothes. Pulling my knife out of its sheath on my belt, I stand naked at the foot of the bed. I reach down and cut the sides of the bikini off her.

“What are you doing? Do you know how much this cost me?”

I flip her over onto her belly and then cut all the straps. Before flipping her back, I smack her tattoo.

“Yeah, I can imagine. But you and I both know you don't have to worry about money. I'll replace it with something or not. You aren't wearing this again, and the next bikini you'll wear, I'll be with you.”

I set the knife on the nightstand, then drop to my knees at the edge of the bed. I pull her to me and bury my face in her sweetness. The taste of sweet cherries and her bursts on my tongue, and I'm a mad man. I've missed her every day since the last time I tasted her like this. I eat her out until she's screaming and comes. But I don't stop. I continue taking her higher and higher, doing exactly what I said I would do. She's going to beg for me. She's going to know that from this moment on, she's mine in every way possible. Her body, soul, and heart are all mine. No more holding back. No more living with her brother. She's mine.

After her second orgasm, I look up her body and reach up to play with her nipples, knowing that will set her off again. I found that out the last time I had her under me. Her nipples are extremely sensitive. Harlowe's back bows off the bed, and she screams long and loud.

“Please, Crue. Please. I need you inside me,” she begs, and my mouth splits into a grin.

I knew she'd break, but I didn't expect her to go so easily. I figured it would take longer, but it appears my girl is as desperate for me as I am for her.

I nuzzle her leg and wipe my face on her. "You know if I take you, I'm never letting you go. You're all mine."

"I want to be with you too. Please just make the ache go away."

I'll never deny her, so I stand and position my cock at her entrance.

"Harlowe, you won't just be with me," I say, and her eyebrows lift in confusion. "You'll be my everything. You'll be my wife. The mother of my children. My old lady. Everything."

"Ye—"

"Baby, wait." I stop her. I need her to respond from her heart, not her desire to have my cock. "Do you know why I haven't had sex in over five years?"

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

She shakes her head.

“Because I saw you when you were eighteen, and I knew I didn’t want any woman but you. Do you understand? I love you. I’ve loved you since before it was okay to love you.” I slide my cock through her wet folds.

Her neck arches, and she moans. “I’ve loved you my whole life, Crue. It’s only ever been you. I never dated or even thought of other men because it was always you. I cared for you as a young girl, but now as a woman, I love you. I want all that too.”

I slowly push inside her body, making her mine. She tightens around me, but I continue to push as I circle my finger around her clit, keeping her mind off the pain and the stretch from taking me. Finally, I’m all the way in, and I swear I can feel her cervix at the tip of my cock. She’s so hot, wet. I feel everything. That’s when I realize what I’ve done.

I took her without a condom.

The thought repeats in my head, and I look down at her body. She’s mine. Told me she loved me. I confessed my love. She’ll have my name soon enough.

I pull out and slide back in. After a couple more long, slow slides of my cock, I need her harder and faster.

“More,” Harlowe begs. “Give me more, Crue. Give me all of you.”

“Fuck,” I roar as I pull out and take her hard.

I slam back into her body. She screams, and I do it again, over and over. I pull out and flip her over, position her on her knees, and press her chest into the mattress. When I slide in this time, it's smooth and deep. She rears up, and I grab her braids, holding her neck in an arch, as I slam in and out of her, taking her hard. She's going to feel me later, maybe even tomorrow. I don't care. The caveman inside me wants every man to know she's mine.

I take her again and again, and she screams as she comes hard, coating my cock in her essence. I look down to where we are joined, and it's almost too much. I pull out again and flip her to her back. I'm on her before she can protest, sliding back into her heat, deep and hard. Pulling her leg up over my arm, I open her up and take her even deeper.

"Yes, Crue. Yes. There." She's climbing up again, and I feel her throbbing around my cock.

I don't stop. I drop over her body so that I'm all over her. Her breasts press into my chest, and I'm getting close. I need her to go over again before I do. I release her leg and drop onto my elbows. Holding her head, I lean down to her lips.

"I love you, Starlight," I tell her before taking her lips deep and hard, just like my cock is taking her pussy.

We kiss for a few moments before she pulls back and moans long and loud, coming hard. Her body is pulling my cum from my cock. I slam into her, going deep and come hard.

"I'll always take care of you," I tell her before I press my forehead to hers and try to come back to myself.

I roll us so that she flops onto my chest and my arms lock around her, holding her

tight against my body.

CHAPTER

TEN

HARLOWE

We make love again in the shower before he gets dressed and goes out to my truck to get my bag. I have a change of clothes in there. I slip on my thong and look at my body. My skin is marked up from where Crue nipped and bit me in the shower. I left a hickey on his thigh and told him if another woman saw it, I'd use his knife on her before I took his cock as my trophy. He laughed and told me no other woman would ever get that close to him again.

I feel happy and blessed in this moment. Life has been so good, and I know there is still the threat on my life hanging over our heads. I can't not think about it, but I also can't focus everything on that.

We drive over to Rylan's house, where the barbecue has already started. My brother is sticking close to Marnie, who looks frustrated with him and something else I can't identify.

When I walk into the kitchen to grab a beer for Crue, Marnie follows me in. "Would you mind driving Oly and me home? I'm getting a headache and not feeling the best. Oly's also getting tired."

"Okay. Give me a second." I walk out to give Crue his beer.

"I'll be back soon. I have to run Marnie home," I tell Crue as I give him a kiss. "Love you." I smile at him.

It's already been determined that I'm staying with him. He watched me pack a bag as soon as we got here.

"What?" Rylan jumps up and storms into the house. He cages Marnie against the counter and whispers in her ear. She shakes her head and finally gives in.

"Just tonight, Ry," she says.

"Not until I'm done with you. Which will be never, sugar," he says before kissing her deep.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

I turn and walk back out to Crue and sit on his lap.

“Yeah, I guess I’m not taking Mar home.” We both chuckle when Rylan leads Marnie out of the house.

My brother drops her hand and walks over to where Icarus is playing with Oly with a sparkler.

“Want to let off some other ones, little miss?”

She jumps for my brother, who holds her tightly in his arms before he walks over and hands her to Marnie.

We watch the fireworks and spend the evening having fun and teaching Oly new things. My brother gets the fire pit going and has one of the prospects run out for s’mores supplies. Rylan lets Oly have a few, and by the time she’s done, she’s ramped up and running around the yard, singing until she drops to the ground and waves her arms like she’s making snow angels in the grass.

“Oh dear, she’s had enough.”

“Let’s get her ready for bed.” Rylan walks over and leans his tall body down to pick her up and take her into the house.

“Mar, you okay if we take off? You going to be okay?” I check with her.

“Yeah.” She looks toward the house. “He won’t hurt her, and I’m okay. Just freaked

out.”

I walk over to her and take her in my arms.

“I get that feeling,” I whisper in her ear before I turn back to Crue, and we head out.

When we get to his house, he lets Fezzik run around for a bit before we go inside. We head straight to his room, and he closes Fezzik out. Fezzik’s bed is all set up in the living room.

“You know he sleeps with me.”

“Not anymore, Starlight.”

I just smirk because Fezzik will paw at the door soon to come in and lie with me. When Crue takes off his shirt, I finally remember a question I’ve wanted to ask him for a while now.

“Crue?”

“Yeah, babe?”

“The tattoo on your chest has lily of the valley in it. Does that mean something?” I know what it means to me, but I don’t want to get my hopes up.

“Yeah, babe. It’s the flower of the month for the woman I love.”

I rush over to him and jump into his arms.

“I was hoping you’d say that.” I kiss him long and deep, but as usual, he takes over.

Before I know it, we are in bed again and both naked. He rises above me and opens my legs wide, holding them up as he slowly penetrates my body. I'm already so wet and ready for him. I'm a bit sore from earlier, but I can't stop myself from wanting him. I need him.

He is watching where his cock is slicing through my folds. I look down, and it's so erotic to see. His cock comes out covered in my juices, and he slides back in again.

"That's so fucking hot." I moan.

He flips me to my stomach before I can say another word and swats my ass. I cry out when he takes me from behind. He groans. He's so deep in this position. He lifts me up so my back is against his chest and slowly takes me. I thrash my head against his chest, the feelings so overwhelming. I'm so close. When he settles back on his knees and my legs go to the sides of his and I'm straddling him, I swear I can feel him in my belly.

"Fuck, it's so deep like this, baby. Ride me," he says, and I start moving.

He helps guide me with a hand on my waist, and I come from the deeper penetration and cry out again.

"I need you harder." He drops me back to the bed and starts taking me harder and deeper. Before I know it, I'm coming again and screaming into the bed as he groans my name and comes deep inside me.

He rolls us to the side but doesn't pull out. When I get my breathing under control, I tell him what I've been worried about all day.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Crue, if you keep taking me bare, I’m going to get pregnant before we get married, and I don’t want my brother to kill you.”

“Already taken care of. Don’t worry about it.”

I pull away and moan as he slips from my body. I roll over to face him. My palm against his cheek. “Crue, honey, I love you, but it’s my body. I need to know your plan.”

He sighs and rolls to the side, reaching for something in his nightstand.

“I wanted to wait until your property patch was done, but you want to know the plan.” He rolls back over and takes my left hand in his. “Had this ring since you came home. I’m marrying you. I already got your brother’s permission. You have three months to put it together. I want to marry you in October, at your parents’ place.”

“Yes.” I jump on top of him and kiss him all over. He slips the ring onto my finger.

“Wasn’t asking, Starlight, but okay. Now look at your ring.”

I look at the beautiful blue and green sapphire, surrounded by diamonds. Something about it feels slightly familiar. I’m about to ask him when he tells me instead.

“Your brother gave me your mother’s ring. He took the center diamond to use in a piece he’ll give the woman he wants to marry someday. After today, I think that day might be coming soon.” He chuckles. “But the rest of the ring, the surrounding diamonds and the band, were all hers. The band I’ll slide onto your finger in a few

months belonged to her too.”

“Really?” I can’t stop the tears as I look down at my hand. “I thought she was buried with it.”

“No. Your father made sure your brother got it so you both could use it.”

“I love it. Why the sapphire?”

“I knew you’d love it. Sapphires represent nobility and loyalty. Both of those represent us. We’ve been loyal to each other all these years, and you are the princess.”

“I love you,” I say, then lean down and kiss him.

We make love slowly before we fall asleep in each other’s arms. I look over at the chair where my Paddington Bear is sitting, the same one that was in my room until we moved to Texas. I never thought I’d see him again. Crue told me he took him from my room before they closed up the house, just so he could have a part of me with him.

Aftershock

My cell pings in the middle of the night, and I roll over to see a text from Icarus. He took care of Jerry. He was beaten and left at the police station with a note stating all his crimes. Jerry won’t be giving our names to the officials, or he’ll die. This way, he has a chance to live until we make it known in jail that he’s a date rapist and uses drugs. He was planning to do that to my woman, then basically suggested he’d do it to Marnie, which upset Kodiak. I’m not sorry about what we did, and I never will be. We protect those who can’t protect themselves. It’s not easy, but we walk a fine line between legal and illegal acts. Some call us blue-collar workers because of our

construction jobs. I just call us the Granite Peak Grizzlies.

I roll back over and hold my fiancée in my arms. When I hear scratching at the door, I shake my head and roll out of bed. As I walk across the room, I see our clothes strewn everywhere and pick them up as I go. Standing on the other side of the door is Fezzik, and I let him in. He walks over to Harlowe's side of the bed, checks on her, then goes to the second dog bed I put in our room for him. I don't want him in here when I'm making her scream, but I'll let him be close when she's sleeping.

When I crawl back in bed, Harlowe wraps her body around mine, and I hold her tight as I drift off to sleep, trying not to think of the fact we still haven't taken care of Aaronov. The man who attacked Harlowe at the brewery was found dead near a homeless camp in Anchorage a couple of weeks ago. He must have pissed off his boss. Vortex is still looking into the files my father gave him. There was a lot of information. Vortex has said he wants to have a meeting on Monday to go over everything.

CHAPTER

ELEVEN

HARLOWE

Monday, I don't have class because school is still closed for the holiday. Marnie and I are both working in the kitchen. She's making some of her signature gougères, a light and fluffy cheese puff that customers love. She is avoiding talking to me, and I worry that she's mad at me, or that she and my brother aren't going to work out. Oly is at a summer day camp program at the local family fitness club, not the gym Jerry went to.

"Okay, I've let you wallow long enough. We are friends. I'm not giving up on you, even if you and my brother don't work out."

She sighs and drops her head. “It’s not that. I just don’t want you to get your hopes up. I can’t be with him.”

I sit on the stool and watch her work. Her hands knead and work the dough. She’s been working with me and teaching me how she does it.

“It’s just that my life isn’t in a good space for a relationship right now.”

“Are we ever ready? Do you think I was ready for Crue when he came into mine? I wanted revenge for my dad’s death. I wanted to prove I was tough enough to do it on my own and didn’t need the men who walked away from me all those years ago.” I share something with her I never have before. She only knows I moved from Texas, not that I was in hiding. “I didn’t know that for my safety my father told them never to contact me.”

“Why were you in hiding?” She looks up at me, taking her eyes off the pastry she’s creating.

“I had to because an enemy of the club decided to put a price on my mother’s and my head. She was killed, as you already know.”

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“Oh, crap. I didn’t know that.”

“I didn’t know how you’d react to learning that. Can I tell you something?”

She nods and smiles at me. “Of course you can. You’re my only friend.”

“I don’t know your story, but I want you to know I’m here to help you if you ever need it. I can teach you how to defend yourself and shoot a gun, if you want. I’m also a really good listener.” I stretch across the work bench and take her flour-covered hand in mine. “You’re my only friend too.”

“Thank you.” She doesn’t say anything else but looks up. “Oh, crap! I have to go get Oly. Would you mind putting these in the oven and then starting to close up on your own? I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Take my truck and Fezzik, if you want.”

“No, I can’t do that.”

“Yes, you can, and you will. I heard that p.o.s. giving you problems this morning.”

“I’ll take the truck, but Fezzik won’t leave with me.” She wipes her hands off, then moves to the sink to wash them before taking my keys off the hook and heading out.

I pan the pastries that just need to be baked—she did everything else—and put them in the oven. I then step out front and start cleaning up. We were busy this morning for a burst and then again at lunch, but our normal afternoon rush didn’t happen. We

think it was because everyone is still on holiday time. Some businesses, like the college, took today off too.

I'm wiping down the tables when the bell rings, and I turn to see a man walking in. He's dressed in a suit and has tawny skin and a slightly rounded face. I smile at him.

"Welcome to Marnie's French Pastries Café, how can I help you?" I say as I move behind the counter.

He doesn't say anything to me but looks around the shop.

"What are you in the mood for today?" I try again. But the more he remains silent, the more the hair on the back of my neck stands up.

"I honestly thought it would be harder to get to you," he says in a deep voice.

I hit the panic button on my watch, and Fezzik comes from the back. He walks over to my side, and the man chuckles. Fezzik growls at him.

"I think it's time for you to leave," I tell him and wave my hand to the door.

Another man walks in, who looks vaguely familiar. Then it hits me.

"Goat," I say.

He smiles at me. He's not dressed in his cut but in dark slacks and a button-down shirt with a jacket over it.

"You do know who I am. I'm shocked."

"I remember you, plus I've seen you at the bar."

“They wouldn’t let me come to the table that night. You’re some special pussy, I’d say.”

Fezzik growls at his tone, and I turn back to the first guy, who pulls a gun out of his jacket.

“No, no, son, we don’t kill dogs.”

Fezzik moves between me and the counter, trying to push me back from the danger. Goat pulls a gun and fires it at Fezzik. I scream, but when I see the dart with the bright-colored tip, I realize he tranquilized him. I pull it out and drop it to the floor, but it’s too late. Fezzik falls to the floor, out cold.

“What did you fucking do to my dog, asshole?”

I come around the counter on the side near the other man. I don’t know him, but he’s the one I need to take care of first. Goat is easier to handle. He’s older, and from the looks of it, he hasn’t been working out as much as he used to. His skin is weathered, and he’s showing his age.

“It sounds like the princess is as rabid as the rest of those bikers. Is she what you call bear bait?”

“No, she isn’t. She’s worth it. I’ve heard she’s a virgin. We could get some money for this one.”

Page 36

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“You’re his son?” I ask the other man. “You’re Aaronov.”

“You were right, she’s smart. Hello, my dear princess, I’m Boruta Aaronov.” He’s got to be close to forty years old, and like his father, he didn’t age very well.

“I’m Harlowe Thatcher. You killed my parent’s, asshole.”

I twist my body, readying to attack, when a sharp pain hits my upper chest. I look down at the dart protruding from me. I rip it out of my body and throw it across the room before I punch Aaronov in his smiling face. My hit doesn’t land, and he punches me. I fall to the floor and stare out the door, hoping my guards come in, but I don’t see any of them. Instead, I’m lifted and carried out of the bakery.

Aftershock

I look down at my phone and see GB’s name. “Yeah, what’s up?”

“They got her. Sorry.” He coughs, and then there’s nothing.

I stand up in the middle of the meeting we’re having regarding the evidence from my dad. “Golden Boy,” I yell into the phone, but he doesn’t answer.

Kodiak is up, and we both run from the room. I miscalculated her safety, and I was wrong. I thought she’d be okay for a couple of hours without an officer. I had a patch and three prospects watching her.

“It’s Goat,” I shout to Vortex as I rush to my bike.

I don't bother with my helmet. I take off, tires spinning and throwing up dust. I cut off cars and weave through traffic, pushing hard toward the outskirts of town. I can't afford to get pulled over, not now.

By the time I reach the bakery, I see Harlowe's truck pulling up, but Marnie is behind the wheel. I whip around to the front, and there, lying on the ground, is GB. He's been shot.

I rush to his side and lift his head. "Come on, kid." I check his vitals. "Call an ambulance," I yell at Marnie as she holds Oly in her arms.

"Sorry, Shock, I tried. When I saw him tranq the other guys, I pulled my gun, and the other man shot me."

"Fuck," I exclaim, upset that he willingly took a bullet to save my girl—and she was still taken.

"She was tranqed when they carried her out. Blue panel van. Newer model. Had something weird written on the side."

"Okay, kid, don't worry. I'm going to take off. You get better. EMS is on their way."

Sparky, who is a volunteer firefighter and EMT, checks him over. "He'll be okay until they get here."

"Okay, let's go."

"Miner, take Marnie and Oly to my house. Put it on lockdown. Take Fezzik too."

"Where is Fezzik?" I look around, worried.

“He’s been tranqed too. I’ll have a vet I know come to the house and look him over.”

“Thank you.”

“Rylan?” Marnie says his name as she cries.

Kodiak walks over to her and kisses her deeply, then presses a kiss to Oly’s forehead.

“I’ll be back with Harlowe. Be safe, and do whatever Miner tells you.”

“I will. I’m sorry I wasn’t here.”

“I’m glad you weren’t. They would’ve hurt you both.”

He walks to his bike as we hear the sirens approaching, and we take off.

We pull over in a neighborhood where we have a safe house. We roll the bikes into the garage, hidden from prying eyes, and gear up with supplies we keep here for situations just like this.

When we finally leave, we’re in a large three-row SUV and another vehicle, switching it up to keep the police off our trail. I’m sure they’re watching for us after responding to GB’s gunshot wound.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

The drive takes us to the southern part of Anchorage, in Bear Valley, where Aaronov has a house, pretending he's not the leader of a criminal drug syndicate and gang. Tonight, I'm going to show the Black Devils why I'm really called Aftershock. I look into my bag on the floor with an evil grin. These fuckers won't know what hit them.

"Shock, I have everything needed to make it look like a gas leak, but you need to control yourself," Loki says from the back.

He's the cleaner and chemist of our group. I have several mixtures he's made for me. Growing up, my father was hard-pressed to keep us in line. Loki would make it, and I'd detonate it. I have a way with these things. It's as if the chemicals are telling me how to place them and where. When I was in the military, I served in the engineers' unit and also received extensive training in explosives ordinance demolition.

"I have both vehicles connected to this call." Vortex's voice fills the car. "First, GB is stable. He's at the hospital, and they're prepping him for surgery. The other prospects are awake with no side effects. The vet said Fezzik is okay too. Kodiak, Miner has your house locked down with your girl and kid."

"Enough with the niceties. Why did Goat betray us?" I bark.

"Aaronov is his son."

"What the fuck?" we all exclaim.

CHAPTER

TWELVE

HARLOWE

I come awake but know not to let them on to that fact. Realizing I'm alone, I roll over and push myself up. I'm in a room in a house, but I don't know more beyond that. The window is covered, blocking any view outside.

I scan the mostly bare room and move toward the closet. The bar is still there. Seph taught me a lot during those two months she had me in hiding, including how to turn everything into a weapon.

I return to the bed and arrange the blankets to make it look like I'm still out cold. Then I study the door, noticing a recessed corner between it and the wall. The perfect hiding spot to get the jump on whoever steps inside.

Just as I settle into my spot to wait, the handle jiggles. A man enters and moves toward the bed. It's not Goat or Aaronov. I rear back and swing the closet pole with everything I have, hitting him in the back of his neck. The pole cracks, and the guy falls to the floor. I don't have time to check for a pulse. I need to get out of here. I pat him down, retrieving a gun and knife from him before moving to the doorway.

I sneak through the house, realizing it's a really nice place. I don't know exactly where, but when I glance out the window, I see we're high up on a hillside or mountain overlooking Anchorage. Turnagain Arm stretches out in the distance. I hold the gun out in front of me, ready.

I come to a stop when I hear Goat and Aaronov arguing. "I have more men coming. Don't worry."

"You don't understand. Aftershock will not only kill us for taking her, but Kodiak

will try too also. They won't stop until they get her back. Get your buyers on the phone, and get her out of here now."

"No, don't tell me what to do. I'm tired of you bossing me around."

I step into the room and fire the gun at Aaronov first, hitting him in the shoulder. Then I rush up behind Goat and slam the gun against the back of his head, near the base of his skull, like Seph taught me to do. He collapses, and I watch as Aaronov reaches for his gun. I shoot him again, nicking his other shoulder.

I walk over to him and kick the gun away while I draw the knife from the back of my jeans. "You should've killed me." I lean down and press the knife to his throat.

I'm prepared to slice, but I can't. Something inside me rebels at the thought.

"Fuck it."

I stand up and shoot him in the leg. It won't kill him, but at least he won't be able to follow me.

I head toward the door with both guns in hand. As I step outside, two vehicles pull up. I tense, ready to run, until I spot Crue sitting in the front seat. He jumps out and rushes over.

"Starlight," he says, his voice rougher than usual, and I know he's close to losing it.

"I'm okay. They didn't hurt me." I look up at him, forgetting they hit me in the face.

"The fuck they didn't." He leans down and presses a gentle kiss to the bruise.

Rylan walks over after he and Gunny finish checking the house.

“Come here,” my brother says, and I step out of Crue’s arms and into his. “You have one dead, one unconscious, and one shot three times.”

“He kept twitching. But we need to go. They have more soldiers coming.”

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“We got it,” Rylan says, and their other vehicle heads down the long driveway. “Get to work. You don’t have much time.”

“Stay with your brother,” Crue says. He picks up a bag and heads into the house with Loki.

“Wait.” I reach for him, but Rylan holds me back.

They reappear less than ten minutes later, and Crue pulls me into his arms. We head for the large SUV and climb into the back, where he holds me tight. As we roll down the driveway and turn onto the street, a van passes going the other way. Moments later, a massive explosion erupts behind us, shaking the ground and rattling the windows.

The guys cheer, and I turn to see the house we were just at is now engulfed in flames.

Aftershock

I don’t let her go until we are at our house. My father had to hug her while I held her hand. The threat to her life might be over, but it was too close. I saw what she did to Aaronov, and I know she can take care of herself, but I’ll always be there to finish it for her.

“You have something in your room. On that note, I’m going to my room and watching television with my headphones on. Also, I have Fezzik and will keep him with me,” my dad says.

“Fezzik! Is he okay?”

“The vet said he’ll be fine, just really sleepy.”

“I should go check on him.”

“Not yet, baby.” I lift her up and stalk toward our room.

I set her down after locking us in and arming the house from the panel inside our room. We’ll stay on lockdown for a day or two, until we’re sure the gang won’t retaliate.

“Please strip, baby.”

“Okay.” She gets out of her clothes without question.

A doctor on our payroll is stopping by in a couple of hours to check her over and take blood. I want to make sure it was only a tranquilizer they used and nothing that could harm her.

When she is naked in front of me, I walk to the bed and grab the package. After opening it, I return to her and hold up the leather vest. On the back is the Granite Peak Grizzlies logo and Property of Aftershock stitched beneath it. I’m ready to have her in my ring and my property patch before I make love to her. She slips it on, and I’m on her. I kiss her long and deep before pushing her into the wall. I drop to my knees in front of her.

“I’m sorry I didn’t protect you. I trusted Goat, and I shouldn’t have. He came to me, and I shouldn’t have fallen for it.”

“He fooled all of us,” she says softly as she slides her hand into my hair.

I lift her leg to open her up and place it over my shoulder. I lean in and lick her essence from its source, pushing a finger into her. She's turned on. I stand up, needing inside her. I open my pants, turn her around to face the wall, and pull her out a bit.

"Hold on to the wall," I order her before slamming inside her from behind.

My property patch is on full display as I take her in long, deep strokes. She comes, screaming, and I can't hold back. I come deep inside her. If I didn't know it was too early, I'd have the doc run a pregnancy test on her, but it's only been a couple days.

When I come down from the high and get my emotions in check, I pull her up and hold her against my body. "Go climb into the shower. I'll be there in a sec."

I help her take the vest off and toss it on the bench, where I toss mine a moment later. Then I strip and walk into the bathroom, where we make love again in the shower, and then in bed before I finally feel the edge fade. I'm calmer and can handle talking to her. We are cuddled up in bed, holding each other.

"Goat was Aaronov's father," I say.

"I know."

"Did you know he was mad at your dad for not making him VP, and that's why he wanted your father to suffer?"

"Jeez, he held that anger for a long time."

"He wanted your father to suffer before he died. That's why they tortured him."

"I wish I had shot him instead of just hitting him on the head. I tried to kill Aaronov. I was going to slice his throat, then I thought of shooting him, but I thought of the guilt

of killing him, and I couldn't do it."

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:37 am

“That’s why you have me. I didn’t think twice about killing them because I knew they would keep coming for you.”

“I love you.” She kisses me, and I kiss her back, and we make love again before the doctor shows up and gives her a clean bill of health.

EPILOGUE ONE

HARLOWE

THREE MONTHS LATER

I look down at the dress I had rushed to have ready on time. I decided on a Halloween theme because of our October wedding, except for my dress. It’s a cream, rustic lace gown with a plunging neckline and a small train in a mermaid style. My hair is loose in long waves down my back, and I’m carrying a bouquet of black and orange flowers.

I’m ready to marry my man and take his name. He’s just as ready for me to have it since I already have the ring and his property patch.

I look across the master suite of my parents’ old bedroom to where Marnie is standing, fixing Oly’s hair. I still work for Marnie, and she’s still giving my brother a run for his money. She won’t tell me why she’s so scared to have a relationship, but I’ve decided she used to be married. When I told her I wanted her to be my maid of honor, she corrected me and said she was a matron, then quickly mumbled something and said never mind. I tried to question her, but she wouldn’t open up.

She and Oly are both in black dresses. Marnie's is in favorite retro style, while Oly's has a tutu skirt. My brother paid for whatever Oly wanted to wear and secretly paid for Marnie's dress too. He's not giving up on her.

I stand in front of the mirror my mother used, checking myself in it. Getting married here is perfect. It brings them close to me today. I love that Crue wanted that for me. Seph arranged to have my father's body flown up, and last month we buried him next to my mother in the yard out back. They'll both be with us today.

After everything settled, we found out that Goat and his son were the ones taking out all the original members. It was all revenge because he wasn't made VP. He held it against them for not voting for him. Goat also hated that Cy was left as acting president until Kodiak could take over. He also wanted to sell women and traffic them, and the club is against that. He was also the informant who was trying to get the club busted for gun running. His death, which was ruled a tragic accident, put a stop to that investigation.

A knock sounds on the door, and Marnie opens it. I see my brother standing there as I look at him through the mirror.

"Ready, Low Low?"

"Yes." I turn and walk to him.

Marnie and Oly walk out hand and hand, and my brother stops me. "Give him this." He pulls a ring out of his pocket. I recognize it instantly.

"No, that's yours."

"I got Mom's diamond and one of Dad's gold nugget rings. Give this to him. Dad would want him to have it."

I blink, trying to hold back the tears, as we head down the aisle, and I marry the man I've had a crush on since I was in third grade.

EPILOGUE TWO

AFTERSHOCK

I watch as my wife's truck pulls into the driveway earlier than expected. Glancing down at my watch, I realize she should be in class. The prospects watching her didn't tell me she wasn't going or that plans had changed.

"Can we stop fighting for a bit?" I interrupt Loki, who is arguing with Rose, the architect my father hired to design his house.

"No, we can't. She's fucking crazy if she thinks we can build this house. It won't pass inspection, and I'll make sure of it," Loki barks as he looks down at her. "I will make sure you lose your license if you don't make the fixes I told you to."

"No, I won't," she snaps and walks over to my dad, who is leaned back in a chair just watching them.

"Forget it." I turn back and see my wife walking toward us in the snow. She's moving carefully, and I worry she fell.

We had a good dump of snow over the last few days. Winter is back with a vengeance compared to last year when it barely snowed. It's early December, and we already have over thirty inches with more predicted before the holidays.

I trudge over to her and pull her into my body. "Starlight, what are you doing home so early? Did you slip on the ice and fall?"

"No, I'm trying not to slip and fall."

“Why?”

She smiles up at me and hands me a slip of paper. It’s an ultrasound image, and when I read the words typed on top, I can’t hold back the whoop that bursts out loud and clear.

“I’m going to be a dad,” I yell and turn toward the others.

“Congratulations!” They all rush over to us.

“Hello, Rose.” Harlowe hugs her. They’ve become friends.

Loki snaps his jaw so hard I hear his teeth clack when Rose jumps in front of him to reach Harlowe first. It’s fucking hilarious to watch the two of them together.

I’m going to enjoy watching Loki eat crow when he realizes all the arguing is foreplay for them.

Right now, all I care about is my wife. I pull her away from my dad and carry her bridal style to the garage, where we drop our snow gear before heading to our bedroom. I need her naked so I can kiss her stomach and talk to my baby.