



Desert Rose

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Description: He's my brother's nemesis. They've gone to war more than once over the same woman while I watched in the background unseen. My brother got the girl every time. And every time Edge lost, he became more bitter and hard. But I'm still here, waiting. Watching, unwavering for him to realize the one thing he's been looking for has been here the whole time. I'm a desert rose, strong but fragile. Surviving against all odds. When he finally see's me it'll trigger the last war between the Royal Bastards and the Bloody Scorpions. A war I started but hope love will end. It's time Edge saw me as more than his enemy's sister. It's about time he sees me as the woman he's been searching for.

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THE PAST

REGAN

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Summer Solstice 2013

“Behave, minx.”

“Don’t I always?”

My older brother, Tarak, stares me down. “Never.” He pinches the bridge of his nose. “Don’t start any shit with them Regan. I didn’t want you tagging along but leaving you behind didn’t sit right either.”

“You have my word. I won’t be an instigator with any Scorpion skanks, but if any of them but any moves on you, I’ll cut a bitch.”

He rolls his eyes, “I’d never touch a Scorpion skank.”

I grin, watching the desert horizon. It’s vast. Endless. And yet you can see everything so clearly. Nothing disrupts the beauty of sand stretching to the sky, the Black Mountains roll in the distance. We are almost there. Once a year, the greatest bonfire party hits the desert. Exclusive. Invite only. It’s the one time there is peace between the MC’s, the tribes, and the cartels. The Navajo’s host just in case shit goes south. They have sovereignty on their land. If shit goes down. Their law rules. No police.

No Feds. Which also means I need to be careful. I'm under the protection of the Royal Bastards, if someone gets drunk and handsy with me, they will be likely to lose more than a hand.

Excitement races through me. I'm fifteen. Ripe. Never been kissed and nothing makes my teenage heart, beat faster than a tatted-up rebel. But I don't like any in my own backyard. I've grown up next to them all in the Royal Bastards—sons of legends... but to me just babies turned toddlers that never grew up despite their growing muscles. I don't crush on any of the boys my age who grew up in the same MC. I know too much about them. There's no mystery. No excitement. But tonight, all I taste is excitement. It's in the air. On the horizon.

Tarak pulls off the interstate down a dirt road, after a mile of bumps and passing cactuses, poles with string lights line both side of the road. A barbed wire fence cuts along the desert dirt, we've arrived on Navajo lands... anything can happen now. Tarak parks next to familiar trucks. The rest of our MC is already here. Tarak checks the gun at his ankle, then opens the glove box, handing me a switch blade. "Put it in your boot. Don't except any drinks you don't make yourself. No smoking. No Drugs. No, bullshit, Regan. You hear me?"

I nod, biting the inside of my cheek, knowing I'm breaking free of his iron grip at first chance. I'm tired of being kept imprisoned by the Club. If you're a female under eighteen, you might as well be invisible to any boy within the MC and impenetrable to anyone outside. It's not protection, it's prison. But tonight, is my get out of jail free card and I'm going to play it.

I hop out of the truck, shut my eyes, and tip my face to the twilight desert sky. A soft wind kisses my face, teasing the locks of my long, dark hair.

"I meant it, Regan. Have fun, but don't fuck up."

I turn to face him. “Got it.”

“Regan!” My friend Robin squeals, waving her arms.

“Can I...?”

“Just go,” he waves me on with a sigh.

I don’t turn back as I wave and race straight for my friend. Robin is full Navajo and my father used to take me on runs to the Res since I was a toddler. Ma would complain I was hell while cutting teeth and long drives were the only thing that helped me sleep. Robin and I—let’s just say we learned to crawl, then walk together.

“Your brother, is glaring a hole in your back.”

“I know. I feel it. I have a headache from all the warnings that came with the two-hour pep talk to ‘behave’ on our way here.”

Robin wiggles her fingers at him, links an arm through mine and whisks me away. “I figured. Eagle has been assigned to ‘babysit’ the teens tonight.”

“Great,” I moan. Eagle is more like a hawk. He’s the Res’s newest soldier. Mid-twenties. Cut. Cruelly handsome with as much compassion as sandpaper. “He won’t let us do shit.”

“I know. That’s why I made sure Roxy from the Cartel was personally invited. He wants her bad.”

“The head of the Suarez Cartels, one and only daughter?”

“Yep.”

“That’s some shit. He won’t be able to get near her ass.”

She shrugs. “They always underestimate us, don’t they? Think we’re still just kids while they run the whole fucking show. Newsflash: tonight, is our production and we both have starring roles.”

I turn my head over my shoulder. Tarak’s clapping hands and making the rounds, but his heavy gaze still manages to find me. “He won’t let me.”

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Robin leads me over to a girl sitting by the fire, peeling the label off an empty beer bottle. “Sup, Kit?”

Her eyes lift, searing me over. “That’s her?” She asks, eyeing me.

“Yep.”

She huffs. “Fine. You know my rate.”

Robin dips her hand into her pocket, pulling out two-hundred-dollar bills, slapping it into the girl’s palm.”

“Fine. But if her brother catches on. I’m out. He’s fucking terrifying.”

I roll my eyes. “He’s a total softie.”

“Mandy’s here.”

“She’s back?” I hiss. “I’ve never laid eyes on her. My brother is discreet. Never brings a woman back to the Clubhouse. He only hooks up on runs. But I did hear she’s the only one he went out with more than once.”

“... and she already asked a zillion times if Tarak was still single... which is totally hilarious since she had a fling with a Scorpion all summer.”

I pop my shoulder. “I’d puke right now at the thought of my brother with a Scorpion’s leftovers, but he always had eyes for that bitch and if his are eyes on

her—they won't be on me."

"Exactly."

"So, what's the deal with her?" I shake my head at the girl sneering by our feet.

"She's your body double? Same build. Hair. Skin tone. We're going to tell Tarak, that we've entered the lawn games as a team. Her back will be to him for hours, wearing your clothes.... While we sneak off to the canyon, where the real parties at."

My brow raises. My heart starts beating faster... this is exactly what I was hoping for.
"Lead the way....,"

"Why is everyone so eager to get the fuck out of here?" I lay back, letting my head hit the desert earth. Exhaling, I watch I blow out the joint, watching the light smoke dissipate. "I mean, everything's here. The stars. The sky. Endless possibilities.... We are at the center of the universe... the looking glass to eternity is right above us."

"Because while the stars are free, we are trapped beneath them."

I freeze momentarily, startled that a rich, heavy voice responded instead of my friends.

"She took off ten minutes ago. But you were too lost looking above to notice."

I sit up, hugging my knees to my chest, the action bringing my hands in close proximity to the concealed knife in my boot. "There's no better place to get lost than in the heavens." I turn my head, tucking my chin so I can appraise the stranger standing behind me.

Our eyes meet. I swallow hard. His eyes are a sharp, clear. A shade of somewhere between blue and gray... it's hard to tell at night. His arms are thick, veins pop from his ink covered biceps. He's no boy. Older than me maybe five years, maybe ten. I can't tell. He's an old soul in a younger body. I surmise all this in mere seconds.

"Eagle took five. I'm on watch."

"Parties down there," I nod to the bonfire below our spot on the cliff where the rest of the teens are gathered drinking, smoking, and getting high.

He perches next to me. "Like you said... the view from here is second to none." But he isn't looking below, his eyes are solely on me.

"You move quietly for such a big guy. No one sneaks up on me, Ever."

He plucks the joint from my hands, flicking it over the edge of the canyon. "It's not safe for a pretty, little young thing like you to be alone out here."

I shrug. "No one will fuck with me. No one would dare. I'm small but I have quite the bite. I lick my lips, then flash him a grin.

His eyes flare a bit. "Noted, little viper. Who are you here with?"

I look away from his awesomeness and focus back on the sky. I hate giving away info that I'm a princess in the Royal Bastard's... especially that I'm Tarak's little sister. It makes me a target, to kiss up and get an intro to Tarak or to use me to hurt the MC. "Robin. She invited me. I'm a friend of the Res... you could say."

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He nods. “How about you?”

“Me?” He laughs. “I belong to no one. I haven’t pledged yet. I don’t have to.”

“Your full of shit. Everyone here tonight is connected.”

“Ah, so the little viper lies.”

He brushes a strand of hair that the wind carried across my cheek. His finger feels like lightning on my skin. I gasp at the unexpected heat, feeling my nipples harden in my bra. “Self-preservation.”

“Why aren’t you down below?”

“I’m a bit of a loner. I don’t do well in packs.”

“I could say the same.” I study his ink looking for a clue about who he runs with. But it’s dark and so are his tats.

We sit in silence for a while. He alternates between looking low and high. On alert, looking for danger as well as surveilling the party below. The heat from his body warms my skin.

I fling my hair back and lick my lips. This is it. What I came here for. I want to be kissed under the stars.

“You have a job?”

“I’m a mechanic.”

“No shit?” He laughs. “You? Your puny muscles couldn’t lift a tire.”

“I work on bikes. My father taught me. I’m the best. There’s not one engine I can’t rebuild from scratch.”

“Is that so? I’ll have to remember that next time my ride shifts the bed.”

“You’re cute.” The corners of his full lips curve. He’s not handsome like a movie star or celebrity. He’s grit, iron, stone. But warm, sculpted muscles and as I lift a hand to boldly press my palm across his pecs, I learn he’s fire. I shift positions to my knees, bringing my face close to his.

“How old are you?” He growls low.

“Old enough.” I trace circles with my index finger over his pec, feeling the muscle tighten.

“Doubt that, little viper. Stop looking at me with wide, eyes begging for heat you can’t handle.”

“You’ve got it all wrong. I’m the heat—you can’t handle.”

His mouth lowers, lips take mine. I gasp at the tingling warmth of my first kiss. He growls low, cursing before his tongue moves forward. His hands tangle in my hair, holding me still as he advances. He tastes of whiskey and fire. Smells like pine trees after a summer rain. I kiss him back with all I have. Heaving for breath he lifts his head. His eyes know glimmering like shards of uncut diamonds. Rough but still bright.

I gasp as his fingers find the back of my tank, peeling it up and off in a flash. The cool air caresses my skin, my bare breasts are pert, nipples peaked and ready to feel a man's touch. My head falls back as he lowers his mouth to a nipple, rolling it with his tongue. My shocked cry is torn from my lips. I've never been touched before... ever and this... is Sweet torture.

I shift my hips, feeling the wet slickness in my panties. "You creaming for me, little viper?"

I can only moan as he chuckles against my skin, tugging my nipples with his tongue while a thick hand snakes down into my jeans. He pops the button, unzips and is there. Fingers seeking, rubbing through my virgin folds, finding the nub between, and playing with it.

"Ah," I gasp as a finger penetrates me. Then two.

"You like that girl?"

I can't speak, as my hands cling to the back of his silky head. My eyes find the stars as his hands take me to them. I cry out, reaching the pinnacle. My body shakes at the orgasm he gave me rips through me.

Through the haze, another cry mingles with my own. His head lifts from my breast as he looks at someone behind me.

"Mandy? Shit! Babe come back. She's nothing... it was nothing..."

What? Still in space it takes a few seconds to register what he said as the warmth from his body leaves mine and his fingers slip from my heat. I roll, seeing his back as he chases a girl running away from us.

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“Nothing?” I gasp. “It was everything.” But he can’t hear me. No one does.

“Regan? What the fuck?”

Robin marches up the cliff holding two hard lemonades in her hands. She looks off in the distance at the couple fighting. I pull my tank over my head and fix my jeans.

“Did you....?”

“No. we just messed around.”

She sucks in a breath. “Your brother is going to kill you.”

I shrug. “He barely touched me,” I lie. He touched my soul. Somehow with his fucking magic hands, lips, and those fucked up beautiful eyes.

“Who is she?” My nails dig into my palms as I watch him plead with the girl he caught up to.

“Mandy. I thought you’d gather that since you just made out with Edge, the guy she was fucking all summer while your brother pined for her.”

“I never gave him my name or asked his.”

“Slut!” She giggles, handing me a drink. “Leave it alone. He’ll always want her since your brother does. Scorpions and Bastards will always war over shit. You know that.”

I still feel the invisible marks from where his rough hands were between my thighs.

My senses still sing from the aftermath of his touch.

“He’ll be mine.”

Robin shakes her head. ‘Have you seen her? She’s perfect. A living doll. Flawless. But a complete selfish bitch if you ask me. She has them all fooled with her wide, dark eyes and full lashes that she bats at them. She’s their age. Their level. Shit, Reagan we’re barely out of training bras.”

I stare out into the night, with a sinking feeling I just drove that scheming bitch right back into my brother’s arms while still tasting the other man who burns for her. I bite my lip, remembering how he took my whole buds between his lips. I’m not done growing and I know it.

“I can wait. One thing I’ve always had is patience.” My eyes follow them, something shifts in my soul. The vow I made to myself roots deep. Nothing? I’ll show him. One day.... For now, I’ll plot. Think. How to get that girl away from the both of them.

“Racing to get the mail again? If I didn’t know better, I’d think you’re writing love letters.”

I roll my eyes, “To Robin? Wait, you’d probably love that if I was into chicks, you’d stop worrying about every swinging dick near me.”

Tarak, shakes his head as he takes a pull from his beer. It’s been six months since the summer solstice. The torture comes at night when I swear, I still feel his touch. I lie in my bed, alone, shut my eyes and try to mimic on my own the magic of what he did to me. It takes the edge off (pun intended) but it’s not even close to feeling the same.

Tarak's been fighting with Mandy. They're on, they're off. Mandy has been gathering intel, paying a few of her own eyes to spy on Mandy. She's been paying visits to Edge. Meeting him places she thinks have no eyes.

"Bing-the-fuck-O." Robin came through, in my hands are a stack of 4x6 photos of Mandy and Edge. Starring into each other's eyes. Naked and twisted in sheets. The punch to my stomach feels real as I stare at them. "He's mine, bitch. The two of you just don't know it yet."

I look up to where my brother whistles happily while working on his truck. He doesn't deserve this. Neither does Edge. She is fucking with both their heads. I take the pictures back to my room, slipping them in an unmarked envelope, then knock on the VP's door.

"Regan?"

I bite my lip, let my chin quiver. I'm quite the actress. I never pretended to be a good girl. I'm a viper, just like he said.

"Hey, Griff.... I ah... I ah.... Don't know what to do. I found this while checking the mail.... It was open and not addressed to anyone...." He takes the bomb from my trembling hands.

His eyes raise as he scans the photos. "Fuck...."

"I know."

"I'll take care of it."

"Thanks."

I slip back into my room, opening the window.... “He’s dead! I’m going to fucking kill him!” Tarak heaves lawn furniture, throws over the picnic table then I

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He nods, shaking his head, believing whatever shit is coming from the other end of the line.

My heart sinks. My plan, backfired. My brother will retaliate on Edge not on the slut who is playing him.

I hurry to the main room and grab the cordless phone. “Did you get my package?”

“I did... but Robin. He’s blaming Edge not her.”

“I know. She’s here. Out back. Pleading with him it’s all lies. That they are old photos from before... when her and Tarak were broken up. It’s all bulls hit though. Those pics are from last weekend when Tarak was on a run to Mexico.”

“I need to fucking stop her.”

Robin sighs. “How? You can’t stop lust or fucked up love. Sometimes you need to let shit just play out.”

“When’s the next get together?”

“Winter Meet. It’s gonna be heavy; not a party... Cartels want to stiff the MC’s their cut by 30%. Then there’s the shit with the Scorpions and the Bastards, and us trying to stay neutral.”

I twirl the ends of my ink-black hair. It’s long now. The same length as hers... in fact I’ve been studying her like a fine piece of art. Dissecting all her flaws, admiring the

perfect parts all the while trying to make my own counterfeit.

My breasts have also filled out.... I started eating more high calorie foods...little curves don't hurt anyone. A few trips into town for some push up bras and mascara and I'm prime. Still young but definitely prime.

"I'll find a way in."

"There's no way Tarak will allow it."

"He will. I'll see you soon. I'll guilt trip the shit out of him."

I waited in my room for Tarak to calm down. But when I ventured out into the main room. He was gone. Griff told me he went out to see her. Mandy. My teeth grated. Tomorrow was my birthday and he left. Drove hours to be with her. I slammed the door of the fridge so hard all the glass beer bottles inside shook and rattled. That women were stealing love from me. My brother's and his. I locked myself in my room, opened a box from under my bed and spend the night letting pain rip through me as I held photos of my family in my hands. Mom, Dad, Tarak and me. In happier times. My parents were killed in a car wreck three years ago. Tarak's a parent and a big brother. The sting that he has found love to soothe his pain eats me as I lay here all alone.

I fell asleep sometime after midnight, when I awoke my eyes were gritty with the salt of yesterday's tears. After a long shower, I put on fresh clothes not at all excited about my sixteenth birthday.

But the smell of frying bacon, frying eggs, and percolating coffee had me wearily shuffling to the kitchen behind the bar in the main hangout room of the MC. Ever since our parents died, Tark and I couldn't live in the house anymore. He moved me into the main house of the Club while he took over the third floor of the clubhouse as

his personal space.

I pull up short at the sight of Mandy wearing one of my brother's T-shirts. It reaches her naked thighs, and one side hangs off her shoulder. Her hair is all long and slightly messy. My eyes narrow as she turns around with a smile full of sunshine, like it's perfectly normal for her to be standing braless in my kitchen on my birthday looking like sex.

"Hungry?"

"Not anymore," I grumble.

She cocks a hip out, while blowing on the cup of steaming coffee she raises half-way to her lips. "I love him. We're together and nothing can change that. I'd like for us to get along. I could be a sister to you if you'd let me."

A large hand ruffles the top of my head. Rolling my eyes, I look over my shoulder as my brother walks past me and takes Mandy into his arms for a lengthy kiss.

"Fuck this," I breath, storming out.

"She's here to stay! Better get used to it. Come have some breakfast."

I spin, eyes angry. "It's my birthday, Tarak! Sweet sixteen and all that bullshit... I didn't expect a big fuss but seeing her half naked is an insult!"

"Fuck," he lowers his head, pressing fingers to his forehead. "I'm sorry."

"You should be. She's fucking poison. Everyone can see that but you!"

"I'm sorry. How can I make this right?"

I cross my arms and cock my head to one side. “Take me to the Res. They planned a party for me. My friends... actually remembered.”

He scrubs a hand over his face. “Shit.”

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“You stepped in it. I’m going for the weekend and you can’t stop me.” I turn on my heel, leaving him with her. I swallow hard fighting the tears. I’m his only living family and yet he chose her. And I know he will always choose her. It’s just how it is. I grab my oversized duffel bag, angrily packing for two days. When I finish, I call Robin. “I’ll be there in a few hours. Tarak knows he fucked up.”

“I have a special birthday surprise for you.”

I roll my eyes. “Nothing can surprise me anymore.”

She giggles, “You are going to eat those words tonight. Watch it happen.”

“Ugh! Stop!” I try batting robin’s arm holding the hot curling iron away from my head. “You’re frying me. I can smell the burning strands...”

She rolls her eyes. “It’s just the alcohol in the hair spray burning off the hot iron. Relax.”

“I don’t see the point in this anyway. Everyone knows who I am, and no one will go near me. My brother made sure of that.”

“Not everyone... we are going somewhere tonight.” I raise my eyebrow. “My cousins made a track out behind the dunes. Bonfire. Illegal street racing isn’t illegal on our lands. Boys pretending to be men, bet big. And.... The Scorpion Crew is coming tonight.”

Despite the hitch in my breath and the thrill of remembering his kiss, anger burns at how quickly the moment I thought was something dissipated as he walked away from me that night.

“Edge? Please. He’s the enemy. I want Scorpion blood.” As my eyes narrow a plan starts spinning in my mind. A brilliant one. I want him to feel the pain and humiliation I felt. Even if it only lasts a few seconds.

Before Robin can grab another section of my hair to curl around her hot iron, I get off the bed, I inspect my reflection in the mirror. I tilt my head to the left, ever so slightly. Stick my right hip out and flick my hair over my shoulder. Just like she does. I’ve studied my enemy. Learned her moves.

“I need some perfume. “I need Marc Jacobs Daisy, Revlon matte lipstick in corvette, and Suave aerosol hairspray... the pink can.”

“What?”

“I’m going to mind fuck the hell out of Edge tonight. Make him think I’m that bitch Mandy whose fucking with Tarak’s head.”

“Girl.... You’re five years younger than her and no offense.... Don’t have that thing she does.”

I sigh. “I know. She has that stupid, unidentifiable, its thing that brings all the boys to the yard. But that doesn’t mean I can’t copycat the shit out of it and get Edge high enough to believe I do have it.”

I twirl, moving my hips in a seductive circle while looking at myself in the mirror. “Your cousins got the goods tonight?”

Her brow wrinkles. “They do but you know I don’t do that shit. I won’t let you either.”

“I’ve never touched drugs and I won’t start tonight.”

“You want to drug Edge?”

I bite my lip.

“No. Heck no. I’m not gonna blow up the peace my people have between the MCs’. We are kids. If we start a war....”

I snort. “Please. As if Edge or any of the other Bloody Scorpions don’t get high.”

“I have a bad feeling about this....,” she trails off.

I shrug. “It’s my birthday and I’ll pysop a guy if I want to.”

“What’s a pysop?”

I smirk at my reflection, “You know Arrow from our MC?”

“Yeah?”

“He was Army. Doesn’t talk much about the dark shit he’s seen but he’s talked about using the training he learned from his days serving to help the MC. Anyway, a pysop is a physiological warfare operation. Fucking with people’s heads—their minds. Making them think whatever you want them to. A total mind fucking of sorts. I’m going to mind fuck Edge that I’m Mandy. And hopefully stir enough shit to get her claws out of my brother.”

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“You’re gonna get yourself in a lot of trouble.”

I spin, winking at her. “Didn’t you know that’s my middle name?”

“You look hot as fuck. Totally at least twenty anddayyum girl,all the boys are gonna want to get with you tonight.”

I meet my eyes in the mirror. I don’t look like myself. I look like her twin. I hate it. I love it. I thrive in creating chaos. It’s sick but hey, I grew up in an MC, I’ve learned some shit. Like how to take out an enemy without firing a single shot. “Let’s go. I have a man to slay and a birthday to celebrate.”

“Well, if I know one thing... it’s gonna be one to remember.”

EDGE

2

You ever get that feeling that something bad is around the corner? That some unseen enemy is going to come out from a dark shadow and stab you in the back? That feeling is screaming at my senses.

“Damn, Edge. Stop cracking your knuckles. You’re spooking like a wild horse about to get lassoed.”

My eyes narrow as they scan the dark shadows of the desert. “I got a bad feeling shit is going to go down tonight.”

“You are paranoid as fuck. We sent Chief and Rage to scout. They already sent the all clear. Relax, bro.”

I grunt. “I only trust my gut and it’s telling me we are walking into some shit.”

“That or is it because we haven’t been back to the Res since you saw her with him.”

I wince, dipping my head down to stare at the ash from Rage’s cigarette that fell on the gear shift. Seeing Mandy in the starlight walking into Tarak’s embrace cut my hard. Summer Solstice is some voodoo cosmic shit. “I got mind fucked for sure that night.” But what I don’t tell Rage is sometimes it’s not Mandy who haunts me. Some nights I wake up in a sweat, my body strained and aching for the girl whose kiss was a sneak attack. While I was pining for one, another slipped in unnoticed. For the seconds I touched her, held her, and kissed her, I had forgotten all about the she-devil Mandy’s almost supernatural-like hold over me. But while I was losing my head in that one moment in time, my brother in the MC was watching my back. Rage pulled me aside and told me one of his informants on the Res had given him intel that the girl who’s name I don’t know but whose face I can’t forget was jailbait. It shook me to the core. Yes, I’m in an MC that does unlawful shit. But it’s because the lot of us come from broken homes, the system and would be eating dirt if we didn’t stick together. We are a brotherhood of the unwanted ones. Dangerous and deadly, but if I go down it’ll be for Club shit. I won’t get locked up for statutory. That’s a dumb as shit way to get your wings of freedom clipped. Besides, Mandy has my heart. She’s just with Tarak to make me jealous. Sleeping with my enemy and all that. Mandy saw me with the underage minx. Turning on each other is what we do. Love then hate. Hate then love. Mandy and I are trapped in a twisted love rollercoaster that neither of us seems able to get off. She’ll come back to me. Even if I have to kill Tarak to make it happen.

“She’s the bad part of me I can’t cut out. It’s like my heart’s been infected and I can’t cut the infection out without killing the entire organ.”

Rage's eyes cut over to me. "Damn, Edge. That's some deep shit. Who knew you were capable of it?"

"Fuck off," I sneer. "Just keep your eyes open. Something is going to go down tonight. It's in the air."

"The only thing going down, is you like a pussy." He smacks the back of my head.

"You're going to pay for that later, bro."

"Come at me," he smirks.

"Oh, I will. When you least expect it dick breath."

Shit. Thank fuck for the MC. These boys have kept me sane. My old man was my first kill. The drunk fucker beat me since I wore diapers. Kicked the cat. Split my Ma's lips to the point they never healed but only crusted over. When I was twelve. Something welled up in me. All the hate and rage had capitulated one night. I raised my fists, and they didn't stop coming down on him.

Ma had the good sense to call her ex who lived on the Res. He took care of it and us. But we weren't blood. We were outsiders. White. But I was pointed in the direction of the Scorpions. Pledged at fifteen and never looked back. The Royal Bastard MC are our enemy. Been like that for two decades. Out here it's kill or be killed. Eat or be eaten. There's hardly enough mayhem for two MC's to profit from. We compete for contracts with the cartels over the border. Fight for turf. It gets bloody and hard. But fighting for her seemed worth it. She was a desert rose in full bloom amongst the dirty thorns. Tarak and I saw the same thing. Wanted to feel the same thing. She's with him for now. But in the end, she'll be with me. I reach under the seat, checking for the SIG Sauer. Taking it out, I check the clip then, rack it and check the safety before sliding it into the holster under my cut.

Rage cuts the wheel taking us off the Interstate and down the dirt road leading to the western part of the Res. Rage and I are running point and checking the goods the boys on the RES are cooking. If the Meth is good, we are running it to Vegas where the players there distribute. Our MC is just in it for our fair cut for transport.

The deal means we get to eat good, have enough cash to live in rented places a step up from the shitholes we were raised in and keep the land our clubhouse is on. Alone, we'd never be able to own ten acres of desert. Together, we own that, the clubhouse we paid to be built there as well as the pawn shop outside of Albuquerque we just bought. We have our eye on a used car dealership next. Taking our dirty cash to buy legit businesses is how we move into the future.

Tonight, was just an informal meet to get a feel for how the operation is going. We'd get business out of the way, have a few beers, spend the night and report back to our MC tomorrow. But despite the plans, something just doesn't feel right in my gut.

Rage puts the truck in park. My jaw clenches, eyeing the sleek SUV's with bulletproof glass parked across the dirt lot. I don't trust the Suarez Cartel. Those fuckers will trade anything for a buck, even infants. My jaw clenches as I exit the truck, noticing Skinny Pedro smoking a cigar from the porch. He's dressed in thousand-dollar threads. Ink covers both his hands. But he greases his hair so much it shines at night. My lips twitch as I imagine taking a match just to see if his whole head would light. The man is a snake. Always on the take and always killing something. Not a day goes by he doesn't kill. A person today. An animal tomorrow. The man is a damn demon. I ain't no angel but men like him don't belong here. They belong in literal hell. But I won't give that prick Pedro the satisfaction of witnessing my disdain. The friggin' bastard gets a twisted sense of glee the more he makes people express darker emotions.

I grunt a hello, moving past him swiftly as I enter the main rec room of the Res. It's rustic but clean. Smells of whiskey and beer mixed with herbs that they throw in the

fire every few hours. The elders are superstitious and say the herbs “purify” the air and cleanse the souls of their people. I breathe in deeply, wondering if it’ll work for me.

“You’re late.” Tate’s gruff voice comes from my right. I shrug a shoulder meeting his dark eyes as he hands me a beer. I nod over my shoulder. “I saw Pencil Dick outside.”

“We have eyes on him and his crew. They wouldn’t dare start shit here.”

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“Watch your women and kids. Wouldn’t want any disappearing by sunrise.”

Tate’s eyes narrow. “I’ll cut him myself if he tries.”

I nod my head. “I’m only drinking one with you tonight. Got to keep my head clear. Something feels off and I can’t place my finger on it.”

The backdoor opens. The night air hits the back of my neck. My hand falls to my hip resting on my gun. “It’s time to start discuss business.” I follow Tate’s lead with Rage at my back. The meeting room is in the back. Windowless with steel reinforced walls. Bullets can’t penetrate in or out. But anyone inside is fair game. I hate it but am careful to keep a poker face. I’m not claustrophobic but it reminds me of being stuck in a tin can. The heavy door swings shut after the Suarez crew saunters in, locking like a vault. The elders are already seated. I nod my head then take a seat, moving my chair against the wall. Steel at my back and my gun inches from my fingers. I keep one eye on Pedro while the meet starts.

“Fuck,” Tate breathes as he checks his texts, firing off a response.

I lean over. “What’s up?”

“My fuckin’ cuz is throwing a party in the canyon for her friend. They are getting lit and high. Teenagers. They already send the word out and people are showing from Albuquerque to Santa Fe. And that fuck Pedro is here. I need eyes and security for the canyon now.”

“Rage and I will stick around. Although we weren’t planning on staying the night. I

can call in a few of our guys...it'll take a few hours..."

"Thanks, bro. I have a feeling we might need that."

"No sweat." I take out my cell, texting Rage who already has his eyebrows raised at me. In a few short sentences I let him know what's going down after we wrap up the meeting.

Pedro takes out a knife, spins the blade on his open palm, his eyes fixated on the sharp tip. "Pencil dick has some major issues," I hiss under my breath to Tate.

"I can't stand that fucker either. But the Cartel is a necessary evil. There's no other way for men like us to make decent pay."

I lift a hand to the back of my neck. "We need extra eyes on that fucker tonight for sure."

Pedro is silent as his boss starts the meet. Lucas Suarez is the number two in the entire organization. The fact that he is here in the flesh is either good or bad news.

"We've increased production. The Chinese have flooded Vegas with their cheap crap. If we increase our supply, it will force theirs back."

"Or cause a war." My brows lift.

"So? It's kill or be killed, gringo. Scared?" Pedro smirks as he stops spinning his blade.

My nostrils flare. "Only a stupid man looks forward to war. Smart ones find ways to avoid one."

Pedro throws back his head and laughs. “The meathead thinks he’s fucking Confucius now.”

Sighing, I turn my gaze from him to Lucas and Iron Fist, the elder Navajo in charge of this forced alliance between us all. “The Chinese have been a problem for a while. MC’s in Cali to Seattle have had to deal with them increasing the shit they’ve been able to smuggle in using the ports. They have major people on the inside of our government looking the other way, hell, helping them for a cut. We’ll get squeezed out. They’ll call DEA and US Marshalls on our asses. For now, we’ve been in South Vegas while they take North. They’ve left us the fuck alone. Making a move on their territory will open up a Pandora’s box not just for us, but the entire West Coast operation. We can’t make that decision without having a meet with our other Chapters in Cali, Washington, and Oregon.”

Pedro’s palm smacks down on the table. “We ain’t partnering with them. It’s your chapter who gets the cut from transport.”

My jaw tightens and my fist closes. “I don’t stab brothers in the back. Changing our arrangement affects them. I won’t put a target on my MC’s back without the Vegas chapter knowing about it.”

He curses in Spanish. Knowing I understand what he’s saying about me. Tate senses I’m about to launch over the table and grab him by his skinny ass neck. He puts an arm out to stop me while Iron Fist raises his hand signaling silence.

“I respect you. You have honor. We’ll wait until you clear it with the Vegas Chapter.”

The Suarez men’s faces turn red. “Boss doesn’t like being told no.” Lucas warns.

“It’s not a no, it’s a hold.”

“We have merch we need to move. If you can’t do it. Maybe this partnership will dissolve.”

“Not as wise move,” I warn. “The three outfits being in sync is what makes all of us operable and under the radar of the law. None of us can afford to fuck this up. What you are talking about is a power play. You can’t go in all hot. This needs planning. Military precision. We have men good at both. Patience will pay off.”

“How much time do you need?” Iron Eagle’s steady gaze rests on me.

I shrug, “Three weeks, give or take.”

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He nods. “It’s settled. We wait for Edge to clear it and then reconvene.” The Suarez crew is pissed as fuck, but the old warrior could care less as he lights the end of his pipe and takes a long drag.

“Come on,” Tate stands, and I nod over to Rage. “Time to babysit and kick some teenage ass. My cuz is in deep shit for not clearing this. She didn’t know about the meet tonight. We like to keep everyone low key when potential trouble comes on the res.”

“I get it. If I had a women or kids to protect, I’d keep them home too.”

“Someday, we will.”

I feel the burn in my gut and the fire tear through the hole in my heart Mandy made. Every time I think of Tarak’s hands on her, my shudders in anger. I fantasize about cutting his hands off, just so I can have piece of mind they’ll never touch her again. But Tarak’s MC is strong, they just partnered with Creed MC in Northern Cali and Oregon while we’re still on our own. The Bloody Scorpions are thin in the alliance department; that’s why I can’t fuck up what we have going on right now. A war over Vegas with the Chinese will bury us. Tate leads us over to a barn. “We’ll take the four wheelers.” We each get one, starting them up. Tate knows his land as he guides up around deep canyons and dunes. In the distance the glow from a huge bonfire lights up the night. It reminds me of that night during summer solstice. I slam the door shut on the memory because that night fucked with my head in so many ways.

Tate pulls over to the side. “Stay here and keep watch. I’ll go down and disperse them.”

He hands me a pair of night vision goggles that were tucked into the storage compartment strapped to the back of his four-wheeler. I'll watch your six," Rage looks back at the trail we just rode up as I scan the horizon before turning over my shoulder. Skinny fucking Pedro is two feet away. He surprised me, but somehow, I manage to control my flinch.

"I thought you left," I mutter gruffly, my hands itching to draw my gun.

"Heard there was a party."

"They ain't no party."

"Doesn't look that way to me."

"Get the fuck outta here. The meet is over."

"You've got nerve speaking to me this way."

"Nah. Just balls. Big ones."

The tip of his snakeskin boot kicks a pebble. It rolls past me over the edge of the rocky terrain and sails into the abyss below. I move left seconds before he lunges at me. The tip of his blade stabs empty air.

"Fast, eh."

"As a rattler."

"Come at me," beckon with an open hand. We both have guns, but that's not what this is about. He feels slighted. My words beat his in the meeting and it's not sitting right with him. I've been coiled tighter than a rattler ready to strike since I climbed in

the cab to drive out here.

We dance in the moonlight circling each other while each keeping an eye out for the cliff's edge.

He's half my weight but quick and dirty. He strikes low, launching at me feet and grabs an ankle, taking me down. We roll over jagged rocks; his arm raises but mine quickly slams it down. The knife falls from his hands. "Edge! Fuck, man! It's an ambush!" Rage's shout has me springing up and drawing my gun. I barrel toward him, raising to fire when all that registers is pain. The only quick thought to escape the coming darkness is: That fucker Pedro just bashed my head with a rock. Then the lights went out.

REAGAN

3

Something seems off. I can't for the life of me figure out what though. The party is lit. The fire burning high. The guys are placing bets. Tonight's entertainment choices including a street fight at the base of the canyon between The Navajo's champ and the Apache. I take a small sip of the beer that was handed to me while my eyes stare at the burning flames. The sky is dark tonight—void of its usual map of stars. Edge hasn't shown. Yet. But we overheard some of the other teens pissed that it's not quite their turn to compete for a spot at the table. Personally, I think they are dumb as fuck. My brother hasn't been the same since the burden of the patch was placed upon him. All he does is worry about the MC while trying to avoid jail and the biggest curse of all has been the lure his place in the MC has had on women. Specifically, her.

"Come on babe, the race is about to go down." I roll my eyes as one of the council wannabes hooks his arm through mine. He's harmless. Dorky... all half boy, half man. Robin is flirting with an Apache boy, I give her a smirk and knowing wink as

we head out toward the desert road where money exchanges hands and stupid boys race in their junkyard fixer ups. I snort at the desperate show of testosterone. But as we get closer to the crowd surrounding the revving engines a shadow of foreboding falls over me.

A group of guys hang to one side wearing hoodies and jeans. Dark eyes inspect us as we come forward. A shiver runs through me as their gazes inspect me from head-to-toe. My arms cross over my chest. I long to hide into myself. But instead, I'm exposed; trying to trap a man who isn't even here. The firing of a gun gives me an excuse to look away as the cars take off. Robin grabs my hand. "Come on. Kirk and his friends have a fire going around the hill." She gestures over to the desert dunes to our left. There's no smoke curling to the sky but I have no interest in staying and being the focus of intense stares but the gang in hoodies.

"Who are those guys, over there? They're not with either Res?"

"Cartel crew. Came in for the council meet."

"Fuck," I breathe. Tarak would never have allowed me to come tonight if he knew there was a meet with them. Eager to get away from them, I up my pace. The Apache boys are still young. They are warriors not trained killers. I fight the urge to look over my shoulder as we hurry toward the dune.

"Robin," I hiss. "Something isn't right..." We reach the other side of the dune. The hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. Around a group of large boulders is a small passage where the canyon and mountain creates a crevice large enough for a single file group of people to pass through. There's no fire. A group of men dressed in black clothing emerge. Amanda grips my hand we turn but we are closed in. Rocks and men surround us.

"What the fuck?" I hiss.

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“Sorry...,” the boy who romanced Amanda minutes early shrugs as he yanks her away from me and smacks a hand over her screaming mouth. I charge ready to kick him in the balls when someone grabs the ends of my hair. I scream in pain and fury. “My brother will kill you for this.”

“Oh yeah? And who’s that?” A low, husky laugh cuts through the dark behind me. I spin, finding a tiny man who looks like the devil in the flesh. He’s greasy with beady dark eyes and hands covered in ink.

“Tarak from The Royal Bastards.”

He laughs. “Tarak would never let one of his out here with no protection. Nice try.”

My eyes dart left the right. There’s no way out. No escape. He saunters closer. I refuse to back away or shrink in fear. I hold my ground knowing what’s coming.

He inspects me. Lifts a lock of my hair twirling it around his fingers. Then he leans in close to sniff me. The metallic taste of bile rises in the back of my mouth.

“You got a virgin pussy?” I bite my lip so hard I taste my own blood. In a swift move his hand cups my crotch. He removes his hand bringing it to his face. “Smells like fucking roses. Who did you hoar yourself up for tonight? Hoping to get that sweet cherry popped?”

My chin quivers but I refuse to show my fear. He leans in close. “You’re going to be a tough one to break. You my virgin desert princess will make me a lot of money.” He grabs my arms, quickly zip-tying them before using my hair to yank my head

back forcing a gag tied around my mouth. He then pushes me forward. Amanda is also restrained as the men begin moving us through the crevice passage. We are being trafficked! Right under the nose of the elders, two tribes and a few men from an MC. No one notices. The boys trying to be men are too engrossed in their games of testosterone and cars.

I raise my face to the sky silently begging a God I've never prayed to for salvation. Please! If you exist.... Save us. I'm too young to go out like this! Please hear me tonight! I swear I'll make it up to you somehow; somehow if the plea from a girl like me is worth anything.

As if he knows what I'm thinking the skinny devil stands in glee, smirking at me. "No one is coming to save you. You'll be in Mexico by sunrise. Stripped and on display to be sold to the highest bidder."

No, I won't. I'd rather kill myself then live a life as human cattle. Somehow—some way I vow not to go down without a fight.

EDGE

4

"Wake the fuck up man! Come on!"

What? Huh? My eyes fight the bright light.

"Fuck!" I grumble at the ice-cold water raining down on my face. "Tate?" For a brief second, I see two of him. He helps me sit up. My mouth is full of desert dust. I can't remember where I am.... What day it is....

"Pedro cracked your skull with a rock. You ain't bleeding much, but probably have a

concussion.”

I shut my eyes, willing my body to ignore the pain. Shouts come from behind the dunes. I open them to see headlights bouncing through the desert as trucks and four-wheelers come racing in. “I’m gonna kill him.”

“Nah, we’ll settle it in the pit. A clean fight. You wanna war with the Cartel?”

“Fuck. You are right. I’m just pissed he got the jump on me. Where’s Rage?”

“Doing about the same as you. They got him over the head with the butt of a Glock.”

Chief races up the hill with a group of his men. He’s the head of the Res second under the elder council men. The elders make the decision, but Chief is the muscle that gets shit done. “Here.” He hands me some white pills and a water. “Pain reliever.”

“Thanks,” I grunt swallowing them down. “The bastards leave?”

“You wanna follow?” My fists smack the ground. “I can’t believe that skinny fuck got the drop on me.”

“Head back to the lodge with my crew while I deal with the teen age shit show below.”

“How long was I out?”

“I was gone about forty minutes or so. Had to fuckin’ go to the canyon to shut down the junkyard racing. But there’s still groups of fuckheads getting high and hiding out in different areas.”

“Fucking kids. They have no idea...”

With a bottle of cold water pressed to the base of my skull I rise, shrugging off help as I move toward one of the trucks jacked up with monster wheels. The bumpy drive back to the lodge has me wincing in pain but fuck if I'll show one grimace. I don't waste anytime finding a bottle of JD behind the bar and pouring myself and Rage healthy glasses. The shit burns good as I take a seat and rest my eyes.

“Nope. Can't do that. You need to stay up at least 24 hours. You know you have a concussion right.”

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I groan, pressing two fingers to my temple while sipping my whiskey. We pass time playing cards and eating the steak someone put on the grill to keep our bellies full and stop us from getting too buzzed. I don't know how much time passes by when Tate comes blazing in with two loaded semi-automatic rifles. "Two girls are missing."

All of us stand, grim and ready. Concussion or not. Women go missing all across Indian reservations in America. They just vanish without leaving a wisp of a trace. And all of a sudden, the foreboding feeling I had driving put here makes sense. One of Tate's men comes out of a backroom carrying long rifles and more semis. We are each handed one. The barking of dogs comes from outside. What's scary as fuck as they practice for this shit. Do drills.

I take a long rifle. "The Suarez Cartel. I'd bet money they took them."

"If they did the alliance is over. It's war."

"I nod. We'll be in it with you brother." We head out into the dark, desert night sometimes we are the grim reapers and other times the avenging angels. I just hope we aren't too late to be the latter.

REAGAN

5

They walked us through the desert canyons and loaded us into the back of a trailer like livestock. Inside the metal cage, huddled on the floor were a dozen women and children. Terror rolled through me. I was face to face with the evil Tarak often

warned about but stupidly felt would never touch me.

I whispered comforting words to Amanda while tears ran like a river down both our faces in the dark. Words of hope that I knew meant nothing, for the hell in which we were headed too, I knew the statistics of survival were nil.

The truck rolled to a stop after some time. I swallowed hard not knowing what we would face when the doors opened.

I looked away as a flashlight shined inside. “Her,” was followed by a rapid back and forth in Spanish. One of them men leaned inside, snaked a hand around my ankle, dragging me out as I desperately fought against it.

My chin was forced up. “I’m taking this one for myself.” I refused to look at the man who spoke those words, but the smell of expensive cologne wafted from him. He wore an expensive suit and watch. I refused to look at his face but as he stood close to me, I was able to get an impression of sorts.

He snapped his fingers twice and I was thrown into the back of an Escalade converted into a limo. He climbed in after me and the door shut. My nails curled into my palm. But I needed to face this. Him. Maybe I could smash his head with one of the expensive bottles of alcohol sitting in special pockets of a sort of bar.

I sucked in a breath. He was handsome. But evil. I knew immediately who he was. Costa Suarez... head of the Cartel.

“What do you want with me?” I gasped as his knife cut through my gag.

He seemed amused by this. “What do you think?”

“You could have anyone... models, actresses...”

“I can and I have.” He straightens the ends of his sleeves and my eyes are drawn to the shiny cufflinks at his wrists.

“Come here.”

Swallowing hard, I shake my head. His low, evil laugh fills the space between us before I’m cruelly yanked onto his lap. His hard erection presses against me as his breath which is not unpleasant, repels me nonetheless hits my face.

“You know why I wanted you? Because you have a virgin pussy that is sure to be tight but after I break it will be as big as my fist. Fuck... you’re beautiful. Untouched. Nothing turns me on more than purity waiting to be sullied and you know what, little doll? You’ll be wet and aching for my cock, for as much as you’ll want to fight it; you’ll crave the sweet pounding of my dick on your G-spot. My lips tugging that cherry nipple of yours. Because little virgins have never been touched but their nerve endings crave seduction just the same.”

He’s sick. Demented. But his hands skimmed under my shirt, gently tugging on my nipples that he plucked from my bra and fuck I hated myself as his lips sucked one and then the other.

I didn’t want this. Or him. But I was wet just the same. I struggled, hissed, and spat as his hand moved into my jeans one finger delved into my slit.

He groaned finding me slick. I struggled against him, but one of his arms was wrapped behind my back like an iron band. He found my clit, made it swell and be needy. I screamed, clawed but it was of no use. His mouth fell to my neck, sucking, kissing, biting. “Come for me, Querida?”

“Never!” I screamed.

His response was to cruelly pinch my clit so hard I saw stars. He lunged forward pushing me back against the opposite bench seat and jerked down my jeans before taking himself out. My mind couldn't process this was actually happening. My hands were still restrained, and his cruel kiss silenced my screams. I felt his heavy, naked cock on my bare skin. All of a sudden, my mind raced backward in time. Instead of him, I saw old memories flash like a movie across my mind. The desert sky at night. The feel of Mom's hug. Tarak's smile before her. The smell of the clay Earth after a spring rain... tears fell and I knew I was safe, tucked away inside my own head.

Suddenly the SUV swerved. Gunfire echoed around us. The sound of bullets hitting the metal side of the car erupted by my head. He cursed, shoved himself away from me and hollered at the driver and guards on the other side of the glass partition. I stayed down and prayed. I've never prayed as much in my entire life as have these past hours.

I fall to the floor; my body has no choice but follow the rules of gravity as the driver loses control. Suarez had opened the window trying to shoot back at whoever is pursuing us. I scream as a tire blows and the SUV spins out of control. I squeeze my eyes shut. My head bangs against the floor. In a weird way I guess my prayers were answered. The gunfire interrupted Suarez before he could... get what he wanted. Everything happens so fast, yet time seems to go so slow. Eventually everything stills. Suarez is either dead or out cold. His pants are still unbuckled. I hear shouts from outside the vehicle. Minutes later the door is ripped open.

My eyes go wide in shock. It's him. Edge. He peers into the wreckage, eyes bouncing until they finally settle on me with my clothes disheveled showing him everything he touched once but never saw.

My eyes fall in shame right onto the gun inches from the gun that must've dropped from Suarez's hand. I don't think. Numb from everything, I act on instinct, my zip-tied arms lift my finger able to grab the butt. I lift it, pulling the trigger five times

right into Suarez's chest.

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Edge breathes heavily, saying nothing in the silence that follows. The gun falls from my hands. Looking away from it all, I shut my eyes with one word falling from my lips. “Help.”

“I’ve got you. I’m gonna take my knife and cut your wrists loose then carry you out. Don’t look sugar. Don’t think. I’ll be your light in the storm, okay?”

I nod, crying in relief as the pair of hands that reach out are strong and sure. As soon as my arms are free, I wrap them around his neck. I don’t know if it’s still night or morning or somewhere in-between. “My friend.... She... they took her to.”

“Okay.” He runs a hand down my back and damn I think he’s shaking too. “I’m putting you in a warm truck okay?”

“No.” I cling tighter to him. “Don’t let me go...”

“Ssh, ssh, girl. No one here is gonna hurt you.” I try to stop it, but the tears fall. Sobs break free from me. “I’m gonna set you down so I can take my short off and give it to you.”

I refuse to open my eyes as he gingerly sets me down. I feel his soft T-shirt fall over my head covering the mess that was made of me.

“Th-thank you.”

He lifts me again, carrying me like a bride, my nose finds the side of his neck and inhales. I still smell Suarez on me, and I feel sick. Still feel his lips and hands and that

strange burning need that I tried so hard to fight. “I-I killed the head of the Cartel.”

“That you did sugar, but don’t worry. We’ll make it look like someone else did. We’re close enough to the border... it could’ve been anyone.”

“But it wasn’t.”

“That was totally badass by the way.”

“I’m a killer.”

He lifts the bottom of my chin, forcing me to open my eyes, “You’re a survivor.”

I nod. His eyes are bright. Pupils dilated. He’s strong and sure and yet something is off. “Are you okay?” My fingertips brush his temple. He shudders without answering and walks me over to a truck. I know I need to get in and reluctantly let go. “Amanda. Find her and the others.”

“There’s no other cars, sweetheart just yours and his guards.”

“There was a truck and a trailer... women and kids... “I grip his forearm, hard. “We have to find them!”

Chief comes over. His voice is gentle yet hard as a rock. “Tell us everything you remember.” And I do. When I’m finished, he nods. Hands the keys to the truck to Edge with instructions to take me to a nearby safehouse he knows about. I finally open my eyes and face the reality I’ve put myself in. It’s still dark but yet almost light. The stars have come out now just to tease before they fade from view as dawn rises.

Neither of us speak. Maybe twenty minutes go by before Edge turns down a dirt lane

and a log cabin comes into view. He's silent as he opens my door and leads me out. My legs feel weak and I stumble but he catches me. When he finds the hidden key and opens the door, he reached for the light. "No. Leave them off. My eyes hurt."

"So, do mine."

"I won't hurt you."

I place a hand oh his forearm. "I need something from you."

"Anything."

"I-I still feel his hands on me. I don't want his to be the last hands on me."

He sucks in a deep breathe. "Anything but that. You don't know what you are saying."

My jaw works angrily. "No! You are the be who doesn't know what they are saying. You have no idea what it feels like. Please. He can't be the one. The one to touch me in places he had no right to. I need you to erase him from my body."

I reach up, my palm resting against the thud of his heart. "Don't you know who I am? Don't you remember?"

He curses in the dark as I lift his shirt then quickly remove the clothes that were barely staying on me. "Fuck, I'm going to hell."

"You and me both. Be my savior right here, right now."

His jaw works, one hand is fisted as he looks at me. "I won't be a monster and take advantage."

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I pick up his hand, boldly placing it on me. “He was the monster. You are the light chasing him away.”

He picks me up, blood rushes in my ears as he kicks open doors until he finds a bedroom to his liking. He gently places me down on the bed. With shaking hands, he unzips his jeans and shucks off his boots. His cock is thick and long, his skin golden, his body jacked with layers of hard muscle. He lowers his head to kiss me. And just like that one summer night, butterflies dance and his hands feel like lightning shocking me. His tongue is gentle as he kisses me. But I want more. Need more. I drag his hand down to the apex between my legs. He sighs into our kiss as he gently touches me.

I groan, feeling slick, feeling that same pound of need thrum through me. But this time it doesn't repulse me. This time I need him to ease the ache. He kisses his way down my body. My neck, shoulders, before finding my small breasts. “Mandy, girl.” He breathes against my skin. I'm so far gone I almost don't care. I guess he needs me to be someone too. He needs me to be his salvation, even if I'm a stand-in. It stings, but I can't handle one more emotion after what I've been through. In the dark, I'm what he needs and he's what I need. I feel all women, as he makes love to me. His fingers rub round and round then inch inside me. He fucks me with his hands and my hips buck into them. “You sure, sugar.”

I nod, kissing his head and sigh as at long last I feel him enter me. It burns but the thick head of his cock finds some secret place deep inside me, that makes my nerve endings sing and soon, I'm soaring across the sky, crying with joy and triumph instead of fear and pain. He moves in and out, his hoarse moan leads to a sweaty kiss then he stills, shaking as he pulls out before his own tumultuous release.

“Thank you,” I whisper, kissing him as he falls against me. His head cradled to my chest, I run my fingers through the silky strands, he groans as they find a huge bump at the base of his skull. I’m careful to avoid it and in the stillness of morning, I find peace. I find my answered prayers. I find redemption and glory. For I am no longer the girl without a future, a girl who a man threatened to take everything from me. I chose who and when. I took what I wanted and found power in that.

EDGE

6

She’s sound asleep. Beautiful. Strong. The hit I took last night before heading out has worn off. I feel dirty. Corrupted. I corrupted her. I saw the stain of her blood mixed with my seed. I pulled the covers over her and headed to the bathroom. The pounding cold water feels good on the back of my head.

I was high with a concussion. Tate made me take the drugs. Said the speed would keep me awake. It did. I felt like superman for a while. Even in my sorry as state I knew I shouldn’t have touched the girl. But I was fucked up. She smelled like my girl, looked like her. In a fit of rage, I wanted to burn the world to save just her. But she saved herself and damn I felt such pride well up when she did. How could I say no? She felt like the star that was just out of reach until it fell to the Earth. She felt so smooth, was so into me and when I entered her, I almost did pass out for how good it felt. For one brief moment the world fell away. It was just the two of us. I knew she wasn’t Mandy but some kind of other-worldly twin. When I was high, I imagined she fell from a parallel; universe, came for just me. That I could have this one perfect version of my girl.

My eyes focus on the water swirling down the drain. For a moment I ponder keeping her. I’d take her back to the Clubhouse and keep her safe. No one fucks with the Scorpions and my men will protect her if she’s mine. Suarez wanted her for himself,

but I'll take her for my own instead. I'd cherish her and give her what's left of my tattered heart. Maybe in time will heal the butcher job Mandy did on it.

After the shower attempts to clear my head, I check in on the sleeping angel more determined than ever to take the girl as my own. After all the fucked-up shit in my life, I deserve something for myself. Something good. My eyes narrow as Tate's truck ambles down the dirt lane. Rage is on a bike not far behind. The two of them practically run up to the cabin.

I hold the door opening signaling to be quiet. "The girl..." Tate rasps. "She belongs to the Royal Bastards."

My heart stops beating. Not again. "Not anymore. She's mine. I'm taking her as my own."

"You can't. We are in some shit with the Cartel, I'm on your side you helped us track them down and we got Amanda back, too. But a war on two fronts is unwinnable, brother. Tarak's on his way. Amanda told us everything. The girl is a Royal Bastard. I couldn't force more words out of Amanda in the state she was in. But she said they shared blood. "He won't budge. He won't give up his family especially to you."

Rage puts a hand on my shoulder. "He's right, bro. You've only spent three hours with the girl. Should be easy... of fuck. Tell me you didn't—"

"I thought she had no one. Let me go and at least tell her goodbye." I quietly open the door to the bedroom. She's out cold. I slip the dirty sheet out from under her and crumple it into a ball. What we shared is our secret. Hers to tell only if she chooses. I kiss her softly on the forehead, wishing for a different outcome. I don't even know her name. But I guess I don't need to, not when I know her soul. She stirs, mumbling my name. She knows me. My brows, furrow. She knew she was RBMC and that I was a Scorpion and yet she wanted me. Me... to be her savior. I rock back on my

heels. How can I walk away from this... from her?

Rage peeks his head around the door. I kiss her ear, angel... you need to shower. You need to face the new day. She murmurs again but slowly wakes up. My index finger draws a heart on her shoulder. "I don't regret anything."

"You going to be okay?"

She nods. "Yeah. I will." I rummage through a few drawers finding an old, flannel shirt for her to put on after her shower. I pick up her jeans and smooth them out before laying them both on the bed.

"Edge! We gotta split, brotha. Tarak is seriously gonna lose his shit if he catches you here. We gotta get back to the clubhouse and fill the Prez in on what went down. Heat with the Cartel and the Bastards could blow back too hard."

I know he's right. But just leaving like this seems like such a shitty thing to do. We shared so much and yet so little. I take the thick silver-plated chain necklace that hangs around my neck off, placing it on top the clothes. It's all I can give her.

"Just take the truck back to the Res. Stay as long as you need. We have a doctor on standby if you need before you head back to your MC."

"You take care of the mess?"

He nods. "Everyone is safe. We burned it all to erase any prints or DNA. It'll look like a surprise hit that won't lead back to us. We have alibis on the res. Shit got a little complicated cause a few teen boys sold the girls out. Lured them away from the bonfire, delivering them to Suarez."

My jaw clenches. "You handle them."

He nods. "I will let their elders decide their fate. Their own people will judge them. It won't end well."

I breathe in deeply, knowing I need to leave before she comes looking for me. I pick up the fob key to the truck and head out. Rage fires up his bike. I wave him on. "I'll meet you at the diner in Albuquerque."

"You sure man."

"I'm gonna pull over a take a good leak," I lie.

He takes off and I start the truck. I know I need to clear the drive before the Bastard's calvary comes.

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Once I clear the dirt road and drive a few more miles down a barren road, I pull over, rest my head on the steering wheel letting everything I held in out. I yell. Curse and pound the seat with my fist. When I look up, I see a familiar truck on the other side of the lane coming closer. I put a hand over my brow, trying to shield my face. But he doesn't even glance toward me. Mandy is tucked into his side as he races toward the other girl who's also his.

Rage like I've never felt before rises up in me. I exit the truck. The force of my emotions has me falling to my knees. My fists touch the desert clay Earth. "Why!" I scream up to the sky. "Why did you bless him. Give him everything and leave me barren? With nothing? Why is his heart full while mine bleeds out until it's nothing?" I make a vow right here and now to destroy him. I'll take everything from him. One day he will feel the painful bitterness who's my only companion. Our MC's will always war. I will lead the fight. If he becomes king, I'll take his queens. The question is which will I take first? Mandy or ... her? My cell dings with a text from Tate.

Tarak's here. The girl is not legal bro. Here on Res lands... yes but outside, no. Let it go. I'll keep your secret. Got rid of the evidence.

I pinch two fingers to the bridge of my nose. I was out of my mind last night. High on drugs and adrenalin with a concussion, but she looked at least twenty. Her hair was so long and thick. Her straked make-up made it hard to get a good look at her face. Her mascara was on her cheeks. Her eyes red and swollen. When we touched, I felt fire. Something I've only felt with Mandy and that summer night. What the fuck is wrong with me? I need to stay off the Res. Every time I go there My head gets tripped by girls almost women. Maybe it's because I'm such a giant that I like the tiny creatures.

Something in me needs to protect them. Keep them close. But I won't do time for that shit. I'll never see the girl from last night again. And even if I do some years from now, I wouldn't be able to pick her out of a line-up. But if I kiss a girl one summer night years from now, I'd know. That's for damn sure. I pick up a rock, hurling it into the dry brush then get back in the truck. I have a journey to make and no way of knowing how I'll get there.

REAGAN

7

"Where is she?" Tarak's booming voice rattles the window. I saw him drive in with...her. My mind is still processing things. Blocking parts of last night out while rewinding the minutes with him. He left. Just up and left. Like a coward. It burns. Stings. I thought... he'd stay. But I also know he couldn't. I'm a Royal Bastard and he's a Bloody Scorpion. I'm still underage while he's all man.

I open the door. Tarak's rage is wind, traveling through the air. Mandy tries to hide her smirk. I hate her. Hate her with everything in me. She has the love of both the men I want. Why? Why have the gods favored her and not me? Why does she have everything I want in the palm of her hand?

I raise my palm. "Don't say it! If you weren't so busy fucking her scheming ass you would never have forgotten my birthday! You put me in this mess with your neglect and lust!"

His face turns from red to gray. He bites his tongue. "Wait for me in the truck," he growls to Mandy. Her eyes are wide in fear. He never speaks to her like that. Tate and his men clear out, knowing this was between the two of us.

"I'm sorry... Did... were you...," he swallows hard, unable to get the words out.

I lift my chin. “No. I killed Suarez.” His brows lift. “I did. He was the one who had me trafficked. He wanted to... he tried,” I swallow. “But Tate and his men tracked us somehow. “They’ll come for us. They won’t stop looking.”

“No one will touch you. The Bastards are Global. I’ll call a chapter meet. We protect our own, especially when other crews kidnap them. I’m proud of you.”

I pop a shoulder. “I fucked up.”

“So did I.” He swipes a hand over his head. “I love her. But she’s bad for me. She consumes me.”

I know what he means but I don’t voice it. Edge consumes me. He puts an arm around me and holds me close. “You’re my blood. Nothing will come between us ever again. I’m keeping you under lock and key for a while.”

The drive back is silent. Mandy and Tarak don’t speak. My eyes watch the desert plains, mountains, and valleys. Out in the desert a cactus tree blooms. It’s afternoon when we get home. I lock myself in my room and cry. Mandy screams, cries, and wails. Tarak’s low voice is steady and even as it comes through the walls. He’s breaking up with her for me. Blaming their out-of-control affair for so many fuckups. I don’t even feel a twinge of guilt. Fuck her.

Tarak knock on my door hours later. “She’s gone.”

“You didn’t have to do that for me.”

“I did it for me. I’ve messed up with you but also with the MC. I’m in too deep with her and haven’t made good decisions.”

I stay silent. “It was only a Res party. There was a bonfire, a desert race. Amanda met

a guy from another Res. We went with them. It was stupid. A trap. When he got around the boulders, Suarez Cartel was waiting. They had paid them to lure us. I wonder how much they took to sell us out like that?”

Tarak is silent. He lets me speak. I tell him everything. Omitting Edge’s presence. I tell him Tate and his men rescued me instead.

Over the course of the following days and weeks a truce forms between us. We become close again. I know he misses her. A man like Tarak loves with his whole heart. But he stays busy in the Club and making sure I’m okay. At night, I either have dreams or nightmares. Some nights his hands are on me in dreams and others the devil’s. Amanda and I text often. Only the two of us really understand what we are going through. My phone rings on the bed. I pick it u seeing her name flash across the screen. “Hey.”

I leave my room, opting to walk out into the desert sunset. Tarak got me a porch swing and I sit down, using one foot to make it rock. “I need to tell you something... she’s back with him.”

“No,” I snort. “Tarak swore to me that he’s so done with her. I know he’s still in love with her, but it’ll fade with time.”

“Not Tarak. Edge.”

My heart drops. “No.”

“I’m sorry. They came out here together for a Council Meet. Were all lovey dovey and shit.”

“That whore! What is it with her?”

“She can’t be alone.”

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“She’s a friggin’ ping pong ball. Going back and forth between them. Look, I need to go. Thanks for telling me.”

I stare out in the sunset. My heart sinking with the sun. I got my brother back but in doing so handed her right over to the man who feels like the other half of me. And I can’t even fight for him. I’m too young and belong to his rival MC. But somehow, someday I will rise and take my desert king. I might start a war in doing so. But maybe I could be the peace bringer. The one who bridges worlds. If the Bastards and Scorpions ever joined.... no one could best us. Not the Chinese mob in Vegas or the cartels in Mexico. We’d rule the desert just like my Apache ancestors did and no one would be able to take it from us. No woman or child would be trafficked across our dunes.

I go back to my room and throw out the perfume she wore and all my makeup. I will imitate no body. I will be my own unique desert rose.

THE PRESENT

EDGE

8

Where desert king left off...

I carry Amber over the threshold of the clubhouse. Just like I swore to myself in the desert that night, I took something that was his. Finally, when he had moved on from the ghost of Mandy, I struck. The only problem is I kinda fell for the same girl, too.

“Who’s that?” Butch asks as I carry her in.

“Tarak’s girl. And mine.”

“Again? Damn, the two of you need to find another type.

I don’t answer. I carry her into a back room, plop her down and lock the door before grabbing her a water from my fridge and loosening her gag.

“Don’t do this. Please, untie me.”

I ignore her.

“I-I’m falling in love with him.”

“But you want me.” I step closer. My finger tracing the curve of her cheek. “Damn, mouse. You became beautiful.”

“Is that what this is about? ...felt like you missed your chance with me, and you want to know what he has?”

“By the time I’m done with you, mouse, you’ll forget what his hands on you feels like...what he tastes like. I’m going to erase his every touch.” Her nipples peak under my thin shirt, betraying her. My lips find the crook of her neck.

“Please. I can’t. Don’t put me in the middle of your war.”

“You’ve been there since day one, babe. Smile.” She opens her eyes, blinking them quickly after the flash on my phone goes off. “Perfect.”

“He’s going to kill me,” she whispers.

I attach her pic to a text and hit send.

“What’s it gonna be, little mouse? Him or me?”

“Him. You know that.”

“Liar. I saw you first. I kissed you first. Why did you go with him?”

“You never made a play for me.”

“Is that it? Did you need romance? Hearts and flowers and all that shit? Well, fuck that. I stole you, sugar. You’re my property now.”

“Am I worth a war?”

“I don’t know. But I’m willing to risk finding out,” I growl, capturing her mouth.

“Edge, please. Stop this insanity. Stop all of it. You could have your own great love. She’s out there waiting for you. In fact, I already know who she might be.”

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I grab her chin, holding the bottle to her lips. “Drink. You need rest. I’m taking you’re blood tonight.”

“Let me go after.”

“Where? Crawling back to him? What’s he got anyway? Some magic dick?”

“I don’t know. We haven’t...”

I shudder. “Then you’re still fair game. Let me be the one.”

“I’m sorry. My heart wants him.”

I pick up a table, throwing it against a wall. “It’s always him! I’m sick of it!”

“But you have her. You have Elle. You have a piece of Mandy he can’t touch. He’ll never have...”

I grab a knife off a dresser then walk back to her, tracing the flat side over those tiny breasts, before cutting her free. “It’s only because I’m a father now that I won’t take you—make you love me and erase every memory of him. But I can’t let you go. I need your blood.”

“And I’ll gladly give it. That and nothing else.”

“That’s too bad, Amber. Me and you? We could’ve had one hell of a ride.”

“Maybe? Maybe in another life.”

“I wish you could be my desert queen. Not his.”

She cups a hand to my cheek. “Part of me wishes the same. I did feel something for you, but you did me wrong. You played me and he hated me. You should’ve told me about the truck. That it was hers.”

“Why? Yeah, I did it to piss him off. Make him hurt. But Mandy as much as she had issues was kind deep-down. She would’ve wanted you to have it. Please don’t trash that truck,” I beg her with my eyes and words.

“Maybe, Elle would like it? Could it even last that long?”

I swallow hard. “God, you’re perfect. Are you sure, it’s him?”

She nods.

“Fine. Go. I won’t keep you.”

“Go where? You brought me here.”

I hand her my phone. “Call him.”

“Tarak? It’s me.” She says his name so reverently I feel sick. “... No. I’m fine. He’s letting me go. It’s over.”

After they hang up, I give her back her own purse and phone from where I had locked it. “He’s going to kill you. Or at least try.”

“I know.”

“You can’t. You need to stop this for Elle’s sake.”

“Will you still help?”

“Of course.”

“Who is she? This woman you think could be it for me?”

“Ah, now that’s gonna cost you. You owe me two,” she winks.

“No hard feelings?”

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“None.”

“Are you gonna talk to that crazy ass man of yours? Put in a good word not to kill me?”

“I will. But I can’t promise you he won’t if who I think could be your match holds true,” she answers.

I shrug. “It’s what he and I do. Go to war. Only you, our desert queen can command us to stop.”

“You’re wrong. I’m no queen. I’m just the little, brown mouse, remember?”

“Ah, Amber? You were always a queen. I just loved watching your eyes spit fire every time I called you that. Didn’t you learn in school, boys only tease the girls they like?” My heart beats hard. Damn I want her. Just like I want everything Tarak has.

“No one ever liked me.”

“Bullshit, mouse. Bullshit. Go. Go wait for your man before I change my mind and lock you back up into my bedroom.”

She swallows hard, walking backwards. “I’ll text about Elle.”

“You do that,” I growl with clenched fists, still debating if I’ll chain her to my bed. She runs out and I follow, stopping at the front window. Minutes later, headlights zip through the dark. My jaw works as I watch the two of them embrace. Tarak always

wins. Always rides off with the girl, leaving me alone with nothing but the bitter taste of defeat on my tongue.

Mandy was a dream. The slip of a girl whose virginity I took one night long ago still haunts me. Tate told me she was a distant cousin of Tarak's who was just visiting over a school break. Not local and far gone.

Amber was everything. I found her first. Wanted her first. But Tarak, again took what should have been mine. Cloaked in shadows I watch until the taillights of his ride disappear. I breathe in deep. As soon as my daughter is safe. I'll take my revenge. I'm going to end this shit once and for all. It's either the Bastards or the Scorpions. Both can't survive. Not anymore. It's been brewing for decades. Sure, we've had battles. Some won. Others lost. But now it's time to go the fuck to war.

My hands cup around the cigarette dangling from my lips as I take a match to the tip. "You good?"

"Damn, Rage. I didn't even hear you."

"That's because as usual, your eyes were on the girl. It's always a woman bringing you down, Edge."

"No shit." I exhale a cloud of smoke, watching it drift off into the night. "I guess I'm still a boy with no mama to love him. Scars of the past and all that shit."

"Chasing hearts will be the end of you."

"I'm not chasing them anymore. I'm going to capture one."

"Whose?"

“His sisters. Then I’m gonna break it the fuck to pieces and burn his world to the ground.”

“Shit. And here I am trying to talk some sense into you.”

“It’ll be easy. She wants me. Her eyes have been on me for years while I’ve been pretending not to notice.”

“Why didn’t you make that play before now then?”

I throw the cigarette down, crushing it with the tip of my steel-toed boot. “She’s a viper, that one. Her kiss is full of poison. She’s wild. Reckless. A real pain in the ass. She practically dry-humped mouse.”

Rage raises a brow. “Sounds like your perfect match.”

I smirk. “She’ll be the distraction I need. But hardly my soulmate. I’ve sworn them off. You’ve seen how many times I’ve been burned. I’m going to take Tarak down once and for all.”

“Don’t be stupid, Edge. The men are sick of your fucked-up love life getting in Club business.”

“Not this time. This time we’re storming his castle and taking all his queens. Fuck the Royal Bastards. They’ve gotten too big. Taken too much. We have a powerful crew, too. Maybe it’s time the Bastards lived under our rule.”

“You better have a solid plan, bro. Once that will pass a vote at the table.”

“I’m not worried. Tarak’s gone soft. I haven’t. He’s too used to winning. If I’m a fool for love, he’s a worse one. Rage shakes his head, “Don’t fuck this up, Edge. If you

do... the MC might not forgive you this time.”

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“I’m not worried. We’ve wanted the Bastards off our turf for years. It’s our turn now. Their time’s up.”

I saunter to the bar to grab a beer trying not to feel the weight of defeat sit on my heart. My room inside the Club still smells of her. I rub the back of my hand across my face. I’m gonna explode if I don’t get out of here. I grab my cut and my Glock. I need to ride; need to feel the freedom of the night air and the stars. My chest is so tight I feel like my lungs are gonna burst.

“You heading out?” I nod, walking past the few men still up, drinking and playing cards. “Want company?”

“No. Some things a man needs to do alone,” I reply to Rage.

“Be safe, brother.”

“Always.”

There’s no lights in the desert. You don’t need them along the highway when the sky is so clear the stars are all the light you need. When I was a boy, I used to stare at them, thinking my destiny was written there, like some kind of a celestial roadmap. Little did I know, my destiny was fucked. Like always loving and losing the wrong girl. On my chrome horse, dressed in my armor of leather, I charge.

Fuck Tarak.

First, he took Mandy, then he won over Amber. I wish I could just let it go. But I

can't. He took so much more from me then he'll ever know.

The final war is brewing. I feel it in my gut. The Bloody Scorpions and The Royal Bastard MC use to be allies but that went to shit when Razor, the Sergeant in Arms of The RB's, decided to cut the Scorpions out of our cut from the Mexico deal. We've been running drugs and guns for as long as I can remember. You see, out here in the desert there's no other way to make a living. There's no companies, no slick cities with skyscrapers full of suits and skirts. Out here it's nothing but desert dust and endless sky. Occasionally though, you'll find a desert rose.

REAGAN

9

My senses are on high alert. The air is still. Silent and yet it's full; heavy. I know he's here. I feel him. I always felt his energy swirling around me like clouds of fire. The blind is tight around my eyes. My wrists sting from the cut of the rope. On my knees, I wait with hands bound behind my back. It takes everything I have not to smirk. You see, he thinks I'm the one at his mercy. But I'm exactly where I want to be. I've wanted him for years, ever since that fateful night. I've tried to find a man I could want who wasn't forbidden. But I couldn't. Edge is a drug. A fucking fantasy that now maybe could be my reality. I don't even know if he knows, it was me that night long ago. But I knew who he was and whose hands felt like fire on my skin.

"What are you waiting for," I rasp. "I'm not afraid." I throw down the gauntlet, taunting the man circling me in the dark.

He doesn't reply with words. I feel a presence in front of me, seconds before the cold tip of a metal blade brush across my cheek, down my neck then circles both my nipples, erect and straining against my black tank.

“In case you haven’t figured me out yet, this shit doesn’t scare me. Instead, it turns me the fuck on.” I lick my lips as he presses the blade back and forth against my nipple. “Feel me, big guy. I dare you to touch between my legs and feel how wet I am... I dare you—”

The rest of my words are cut off as his lips fuse on mine. The knife falls to the floor with a clang as I’m lifted up and pressed against a stone wall. It cuts into my back, but I don’t care as the brute of a man I’ve always craved, hooks my legs around his hips and juts his thick cock between my legs. Our tongues duel and dance. I’m 100% in. Dying for more. He growls against my skin, rips my shirt in half, before fastening those hot lips around a nipple. Back and forth he goes. I thrust my hips forward needing relief. Needing to come.

“Edge! Fuck! I need you. Cut me loose.”

His large hand palms my mound, grips it hard and I see stars, I’m so close. Instead of reaching them. I’m dropped on the cold floor, dumbfounded. An angry cry bounces across the walls. He has me below his club in a cell. I’m sure of it now.

“How did you know who I was?”

I smirk in the dark. “Your scent is still the same. Your kiss, too.”

“The fuck?”

“Confused? It was me... back in the 2014. The summer solstice bonfire on the Res? Before the Bastards and the Scorpions second war? I was buzzed on Smirnoff Ice and you were there sitting on the cliff smoking a joint and drinking whiskey. Then months later you saved me from being trafficked...”

He’s silent. The wheels turning... we shared a night. That was more than a night. We

shared an eternity in five hours of soul-shattering kisses and wandering hands. “All this time you thought it was her, didn’t you? Mandy... the saint who could do no wrong. Newsflash: it wasn’t her. She wasn’t your soulmate. The one who trembled for your touch. The one whose heart is tied to yours. She lied to you. Fucked with your head. It’s me. It was always me.”

He moves behind me, my hands are cut loose. The blind is yanked off. He takes me by the arm, dragging me across the floor. A door is kicked open. Light from the star-spangled sky shines in. His face is stoic in the moonlight. But his cheek is taunt. The vein pops as his eyes full of disdain rake over my body. “You want me,” I hiss.

He shrugs. “Changed my mind. You’re free to go.”

“Are you fucking serious? You kidnapped me. Ripped my shirt off and now you’re sending me out into the middle of the desert at night?”

“You’re a smart girl, Reagan. I’m sure you’ll figure it out.”

My eyes narrow. “This is fucking war,” my index finger jabs into his pec.

“It always was.”

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I almost slap him. But he's pissed. Hurt. I just took something precious to him in mere seconds, a sacred memory he thought he shared with his dead love. I'll give him a pass, just this once while he processes it. Squaring my shoulders, I pick up the shredded edges of my tank and tie my split shirt together. Pretending I give zero fucks, I walk out into the night. The metal door slams shut behind me. I'm not dumb enough to venture into the abyss, instead I round the building. The front is packed with cars. A bonfire is lit, many loiter our front drinking, smoking, vaping... doing whatever. Giggling girls dressed in Santa skirts and stilettos, wearing velvet Christmas hats over big hair weave around the chrome bikes. Someone set up a large spruce, probably imported from Cali and put it in a tree stand. "Looks like I'm about to crash the MC Christmas party," I mutter, drawing closer. I blend in, just another woman, barely dressed. My ripped and knotted shirt gets no odd glances in this crowd.

"Damn, girl. You got loved up good, eh?"

I nod, brushing past a stripper I recognize from the Triple XXX. The MC guys love that place, and it sits on the border of the territory between the Bastards and the Scorpions. I've tagged along with Tarak and his crew enough times to see enough familiar faces amongst the women hanging around. I make my way over to a few. "Hey, I left my overnight bag... can you help me out?"

The group of strippers look me over, one downs whatever is in her Solo cup before summoning me over to a mobile camper. "We're staying the weekend.

"Come on inside."

I follow her inside the mobile camper. It's full of makeup, condoms, cheap wine, and clothes. I open the door to a closet of a bathroom and splash cold water over my face. My tank goes in the trash. I rinse my mouth with fresh water while my mind works a plan. I'll stay. I'll party, right under his friggin' nose. I'll sneak inside the Clubhouse and do what I do best—spy. I'll find all his secrets, snoop around his bedroom. Do to him what I did to Amber. He'll smell me on his sheets tonight and know I was there.

My lips curve. I'm not a bad person but starting a little trouble has always been my thing...I'm a bit of a hellion; a wild-rebel child turned all woman. Now it's time for payback. All those wasted years Edge spent wanting other women while I was right here waiting ends now.

.....TO BE CONTINUED.....