



# Jaxon

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance

**Description:** She thought she left her wild past behind, but some things never stay buried.

Harper Davis thought her life was finally settling into a peaceful routine—until her past roars back into town. When her ex, Jaxon Steele, reenters her life, so do old secrets, including the one she's kept for years: their daughter, Mia.

Jaxon, harder and older, a senior member of the Iron Sentinels MC, is back to claim what's his and protect the family he never knew he had. Jaxon has spent years shielding his club from danger, but nothing could prepare him for Harper's revelation. With the Vipers MC threatening to destroy everything he holds dear, Jaxon will stop at nothing to keep Harper and Mia safe. As danger looms, the spark between Harper and Jaxon reignites, burning hotter than ever. But with enemies closing in and the stakes higher than ever, Jaxon must fight not only to protect his family but to earn back Harper's trust. Can they reclaim the love they once lost, or will the secrets and threats of their past tear them apart for good?

**Total Pages (Source):** 27

# Page 1

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## Chapter One

Jaxon Reeves leaned against his bike, arms crossed over his chest, his sharp eyes scanning the crowd gathered at the town's community event.

The air was filled with the sounds of laughter, chatter, and the occasional clinking of glasses. He was never one for social gatherings, but his loyalty to the Iron Sentinels MC meant showing up for events like this when the club's presence was required.

At thirty-eight, Jaxon had seen more than his fair share of the world's rough edges. The scars he carried were proof of his loyalty to his club—a family that had been there when his own hadn't given a damn about him.

Still, he harbored some regrets when it came to his personal life.

As his gaze wandered, it landed on a familiar figure in the distance. Harper Davis. He recognized her immediately, despite the three years that had passed since they'd spoken. She was chatting with someone, her smile lighting up her face, but there was an edge to her, a guardedness he didn't remember.

Jaxon felt a stirring in his chest, a mix of curiosity and something deeper he couldn't quite name. She was the one who got away—no, the one who left. Their brief but intense relationship had ended abruptly, and he never fully understood why.

One day, Harper was there, filling his world with light and laughter, and the next, she was gone—vanished without a trace, leaving him with nothing but unanswered questions and a hollow ache he couldn't quite shake.

He'd replayed their last moments together countless times, trying to decipher where things had gone wrong, but the silence she left behind offered no clues. Now, seeing her again, it was as if no time had passed, yet everything felt different. Harper hadn't changed much, she was still as beautiful and captivating as he remembered.

Her dark hair fell in soft waves around her face, catching the light in a way that made his chest tighten. Her eyes—those deep, soulful blue eyes—held a familiar spark, a warmth that had always drawn him in. But there was something else, something new and unsettling. A tension in her posture, a guardedness that hadn't been there before. It was as if she was bracing herself for something, or perhaps protecting herself from him.

They'd been so good together. He could still remember the taste of her lips, the soft curves of her body pressed up against him. How their bodies felt like a perfect fit in the bedroom. Jaxon couldn't help but wonder what had happened in the years they'd been apart to make her so wary. His instinct was to reach out, to bridge the distance between them and find the answers he'd longed for.

But the look in her eyes stopped him short. She wasn't the same woman he'd fallen for. Still, for the first time in years, he wanted to reconnect, to find out what truly went wrong between them. Jaxon pushed off the bike and started toward her, weaving through the crowd with a calm, measured stride.

As he approached, Harper turned, her eyes widening slightly when they met his. The smile on her face faltered for a moment before she regained her composure.

"Harper," Jaxon greeted, trying to keep his voice controlled. "Been a while."

She nodded, her expression guarded. "Jaxon. It has."

There was an awkward silence, the air between them thick with unspoken words.

Jaxon searched her face, trying to read the emotions flickering in her eyes. She looked ...nervous. But why?

“How’ve you been?” he asked, his tone softening.

“Good,” she replied, glancing around as if searching for an escape. “Busy with the bookstore.”

He nodded, stuffing his hands into his pockets. “I’ve been meaning to stop by. Check out what you’ve got.”

Her eyes darted away, a faint blush creeping up her neck. “You should. We’ve got a lot of new titles in.”

There it was again—that distance, that hesitation. Jaxon felt a pang of frustration. He wanted to close the gap between them, to understand why she seemed so determined to keep him at arm’s length.

Before he could ask more, a small voice interrupted them. “Mommy?”

Jaxon’s gaze dropped to the little girl who had appeared at Harper’s side, clutching a book to her chest. She looked up at him with wide, curious green eyes that felt oddly familiar.

His heart skipped a beat as he took in her features—dark hair, green eyes just like his own. Something clicked in his mind, a realization that left him breathless.

“Hey, sweetheart,” Harper said, her voice softening as she crouched down to the child’s level. “This is Jaxon.”

The little girl offered him a shy smile, and Jaxon’s chest tightened. He crouched down

too, his eyes never leaving her face. “Hey there,” he said gently. “What’s your name?”

“Mia,” she answered, her voice barely above a whisper.

Mia. The name echoed in Jaxon’s mind, a storm of emotions brewing beneath his calm exterior.

He looked up at Harper, his gaze questioning, searching. But she avoided his eyes, her expression unreadable. Jaxon stood slowly, his mind racing. Those eyes. Harper’s dark hair. The best of him and her. There was no denying it now—this little girl was his daughter. The realization hit him like a freight train, and he struggled to keep his composure.

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“Nice to meet you, Mia,” he said, his voice steady but strained. “I hope I see you around.”

Harper gave him a tight smile, her hand resting protectively on Mia’s shoulder. “We should get going. It was good to see you, Jaxon.”

“Yeah,” he replied, his eyes locked on hers. “You too.”

As Harper led Mia away, Jaxon stood rooted to the spot, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts.

His heart pounded in his chest, his thoughts a chaotic swirl of confusion, anger, and something deeper—something he couldn’t quite name yet.

Mia. His daughter. It was like a punch to the gut. He had never imagined this moment would come, especially not like this. Jaxon had thrown himself fully into club affairs over the past few years, but if he knew about Mia, a child—his child—maybe he would have...

Jaxon shook his head, willing himself to stay calm. He couldn’t change the past. Jaxon flexed his fingers at his sides, the need to do something, anything, gnawing at him.

He couldn’t just let this moment pass. There were too many unanswered questions, too many things left unsaid. But the look on Harper’s face, the way she had avoided his gaze, told him this wasn’t a simple situation.

He turned on his heel, making his way toward his bike. He needed time to think, but

time was the one thing he didn't have. This wasn't something he could just let slide.

Mia was his daughter, his flesh and blood. And Harper had kept this from him. Why? What had happened all those years ago that had led to this moment?

Jaxon's mind raced as he threw his leg over his bike, the engine roaring to life beneath him. The sound of the motorcycle cut through the air, but it did nothing to silence the chaos in his head.

He didn't know what he was going to do yet, but he knew one thing for sure: he wasn't going to let Harper slip away from him again. Not this time. Not with a daughter involved.

As he pulled out of the parking lot, his mind kept drifting back to Mia and that soft smile she'd given him. The way she seemed so much like Harper, but also ...different. The way she looked at him with those big green eyes, so curious, so trusting. How could Harper have kept her from him all this time?

Jaxon gripped the handlebars harder, his knuckles whitening. He didn't know what he expected, what he was hoping for when he left her all those years ago, but this wasn't it. He wasn't prepared for this. But he was prepared to fix it.

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Later that evening, Jaxon couldn't shake the feeling of unease that clung to him like a second skin. He had no idea how to approach Harper, or if she'd even let him close enough to ask the questions burning in his gut.

She had shut him out once before, and she'd done it again—this time with a child. A child he had every right to know.

His mind went back to the way she'd looked at him earlier. She was still the same Harper he remembered, beautiful and independent, but there was something else there now. A hardness in her eyes, a layer of protection around her heart. And Mia—God, Mia. Jaxon's throat tightened as he remembered the way the little girl had whispered his name, as if she knew him, as if she'd always known him. That was the moment he realized how much he had missed.

Pulling into the Iron Sentinels clubhouse, Jaxon cut the engine and leaned back against the bike. He'd been here enough times to know what to expect, but tonight, everything felt different. The tension in his chest wouldn't ease, and all he could think about was Harper and Mia.

He took a deep breath, trying to shake the storm of emotions that swirled inside him, and walked toward the clubhouse. He didn't know what he was going to say when he saw Harper again. He didn't even know if she was going to let him get close enough to speak. But he knew he had to try. For Mia. For them.

Inside the clubhouse, the usual noise and camaraderie surrounded him, but Jaxon barely registered it. His brothers called out greetings, but he only gave distracted nods, his mind still fixed on the woman and child who had just walked into his life in the most unexpected way.

He found his VP, Gunner, sitting at the bar with a few of the other guys. Gunner raised an eyebrow when he noticed Jaxon's somber mood, but didn't say anything right away.

"You okay, man?" Gunner asked, his voice low and knowing.

Jaxon let out a breath and took a seat next to Gunner. "Yeah, I'm good. Just got something to figure out."



Gunner's sharp eyes narrowed. "Something like what?"

Jaxon rubbed his face, trying to push down the wave of frustration that threatened to surface.

"Harper," he finally said. "She's got a kid. My kid."

Gunner's expression didn't change, but there was a flicker of surprise in his eyes. "A kid? You're sure?"

"Yeah," Jaxon replied. "I saw her today. Mia ...that's her name. She's mine."

Gunner leaned back in his chair, arms crossed over his chest. "That's a lot to take in, man."

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Jaxon nodded, his gaze distant as he thought about Harper's face, the way she'd looked at him when Mia had been introduced. She had wanted to say something, he could feel it. She had wanted to tell him, but she hadn't. And now, here he was, holding onto a truth that should've been his from the start.

"Any idea why she kept this from you?" Gunner asked.

Jaxon's jaw clenched. "I don't know. But I plan to find out."

Gunner gave a knowing look. "You should talk to her, Jaxon. Figure it out. Don't let her shut you out again."

"I won't," Jaxon said, his voice hardening. "Not this time."

He stood up and made his way to the door, his steps firm. Gunner called out behind him, "Good luck, brother. You'll need it."

Jaxon didn't reply. He had one mission now: to find Harper, to get the answers he needed, and to make things right for Mia. Whatever it took.

## Chapter Two

Harper sighed, brushing a strand of hair from her face as she stood next to her car, its hood propped open in a futile gesture of hope.

The late afternoon sun beat down on her and she could feel a thin sheen of sweat forming at her temples. Her blouse clung to her skin, uncomfortable and damp, but it

was the least of her concerns.

She stared at the engine as if willing it to miraculously fix itself, though she knew next to nothing about cars. The car had sputtered to a stop a few blocks from her bookstore, a situation she had no idea how to resolve. She should have called a tow truck, but that would've meant relying on someone else, and right now, she couldn't afford to ask for help.

The bookstore had closed an hour ago, and all Harper wanted was to get home to Mia. To get back to her little bubble of safety and routine. The only bright part of her day had been hearing Mia's giggles earlier, the way her daughter's bright energy filled the house. But that moment felt far away now, just out of reach as she stood alone by the roadside.

The engine of her car was completely dead, and she was about to start walking home when the low, familiar rumble of a motorcycle made her stop in her tracks. The sound grew louder as the bike approached, the roar of the engine vibrating through her chest. Harper's heart skipped a beat, a flutter of something too familiar stirring deep inside her.

She'd been doing her best to push all thoughts of Jaxon out of her mind, but the universe clearly had other plans. She turned toward the sound, her breath catching when she saw him. Jaxon. He was riding his usual bike, a black, custom Harley, sleek and imposing. As if everything about him had been designed to stand out.

He slowed as he neared, his gaze locked on hers, his expression unreadable. For a fleeting second, Harper considered ducking behind her car, pretending she hadn't seen him, that this wasn't happening. But it was too late. He was already here.

With a soft whirr, the engine cut out, and Jaxon dismounted in a fluid motion, his movements smooth and practiced. He didn't look at the car, his focus was entirely on

her.

And that gaze—those sharp, dark green eyes that seemed to see right through her—suddenly felt too heavy to bear. His presence, as always, was overwhelming. Like a storm she didn't want to face but couldn't avoid.

“Harper,” Jaxon's voice was low, familiar, like the rumble of his bike. “Need a hand?”

She swallowed hard, her mind racing. What was he doing here? Did he know she'd been avoiding him? Had he figured it out somehow?

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There was a part of her, the part that still remembered the heat between them, that wanted to step forward, let him hold her, take the burden away. God, they'd been so good together, in and out of bed. She remembered how solid he felt, the demanding press of his mouth on hers. The possessive way he held her, the way he looked at her, like she was the only thing in the world that mattered. But another part of her—the part that had learned to protect herself—wanted to shut it all down before it even started.

“Jaxon,” she replied, her voice a little too sharp, though she couldn't help it.

He had a way of making her feel exposed, like he could strip her of all the layers she'd carefully wrapped around herself. She ran a hand through her hair, glancing at the car and then back at him, feeling the weight of the silence stretching between them.

“Car's dead,” she added, the words coming out too casually, but she had no idea how else to fill the space.

Jaxon's brow furrowed as he glanced at her car, then back to her. “Mind if I take a look?”

She hesitated. She had never wanted to need help, especially not from Jaxon. Not after everything. But something in his expression—the softness beneath his usual ruggedness—made her heart twist.

She knew he wasn't offering out of obligation. He had always been like that, protective in a way that made her feel both safe and uncomfortable. But letting him

help? Letting him back into her life?

“It’s fine,” she said, her words tight, and she forced a smile she didn’t feel. “I was just about to walk home.”

Jaxon raised an eyebrow, his stance widening as he looked at her with that unwavering intensity. “In those shoes?” he asked, his voice dry but amused.

Harper glanced down at her sandals, suddenly acutely aware of how impractical they were for a walk.

“I can manage,” she said, her voice more clipped than she intended. She tried to walk past him, but the movement felt stiff, like her body was betraying her.

“Harper,” Jaxon’s voice was firm now.

He dismounted then stepped in front of her, blocking her path. He searched her face like he was trying to decipher a puzzle. Harper was being ridiculous and she knew it.

“Let me take a look,” he repeated.

After taking a deep breath, she relented. “Sure, if you want. I’m not sure what’s wrong.”

Jaxon moved to the front of the car and peered under the hood, his hands deftly checking connections and wires. Harper couldn’t help but watch him, the way he moved with purpose, his focus entirely on the task at hand.

“Looks like a dead battery,” he said after a few minutes, wiping his hands on his jeans. “I’ve got jumper cables at the clubhouse, but it’s a bit of a ride. I can give you a lift, or I can call someone to help.”

Harper's first instinct was to refuse. The idea of being so close to Jaxon again, of sharing that space, was overwhelming. But the alternative—walking home—was honestly less appealing. And besides, Mia and the babysitter she hired were waiting for her.

Harper also knew deep down that she had to face this sooner or later.

"A lift would be great," she said, forcing a smile.

Jaxon nodded, a small, almost relieved smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. He grabbed a spare helmet from the back of his bike and handed it to her.

Harper slipped it on, feeling an odd mix of anticipation and dread. She climbed on behind him, her hands hesitating before she placed them on his waist.

The moment they made contact, a spark of familiarity jolted through her. His solid back felt so warm. It had been years since she'd been this close to him, yet it felt as if no time had passed.

The bike roared to life beneath them, and Harper tightened her grip as they pulled onto the road. The wind rushed past her, whipping her hair out from under the helmet.

She focused on the rhythm of the ride, the steady pulse of the engine, and the warmth of Jaxon in front of her. The tension between them crackled in the air, unspoken but undeniable.

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When they arrived at the clubhouse, Jaxon parked the bike and helped her off. She removed the helmet, smoothing her hair back into place. The silence stretched between them, filled with all the things neither of them was ready to say.

“I’ll grab the cables,” Jaxon said, breaking the tension.

Harper watched Jaxon disappear inside the clubhouse, her mind a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions. This was the closest they’d been in years, and it was stirring up feelings she had spent so much time trying to suppress. Every glance, every word exchanged brought back memories she wasn’t sure she was ready to face.

She had always intended to tell Jaxon about Mia, but each time the opportunity arose, fear held her back. What if he reacted badly? What if he wanted nothing to do with them? The weight of that secret had grown heavier with each passing day, pressing on her like a physical burden.



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Jaxon returned with the cables and a small tool kit, his expression unreadable. The ride back to her car was cloaked in a heavy silence, one that felt louder and more telling than any conversation could have been. It was as if they were both teetering on the edge of something momentous, too afraid to take the plunge but unable to turn back.

He worked quickly, efficiently attaching the cables to her battery and starting his bike to charge it. Harper watched him, her heart pounding in her chest. The sound of her car roaring back to life filled the air, bringing an almost overwhelming rush of relief.

“Thank you,” Harper said.

“Anytime,” Jaxon replied.

For a moment, it felt like the years between them had vanished, leaving them as they once were—Jaxon and Harper, two people drawn together by an undeniable connection.

Harper’s gaze dropped to the ground, her mind racing. She knew she needed to tell him about Mia. He deserved to know. But the words felt heavy on her tongue, weighed down by years of uncertainty and fear.

What if he was angry? What if he felt betrayed? The thought of losing whatever fragile connection they had managed to rekindle terrified her more than anything.

“Jaxon...” she began, unsure how to continue.

He stepped closer, his hand brushing gently against hers in a touch that was both comforting and electrifying.

“Yeah?” Jaxon asked, voice a little rough.

Harper’s heart pounded in her chest, her breath coming in shallow gasps. She took a deep breath, trying to steady herself enough to speak the truth that had been locked away for so long.

“There’s something I need to tell you. About why I left.”

Jaxon knitted his brows together, concern flashing across his face. He nodded, his gaze softening as he tried to reassure her. “You can tell me anything, Harper. You know that.”

The sincerity in his voice only made the lump in her throat grow larger. She opened her mouth to speak, the truth teetering on the edge of her lips. But then the familiar wave of fear crashed over her, drowning her resolve. What if this ruined everything?

“Not here,” she managed to say, her voice barely steady. “Can we talk somewhere else? Another day?”

Jaxon’s eyes searched hers, as if trying to understand the turmoil she was going through. He nodded slowly, his expression gentle. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Harper exhaled, a mixture of relief and anxiety tightening her chest.

“Thank you.” It was all she could manage.

They stood there for a moment longer, the hum of the now-functioning car engine filling the space between them.

Harper's mind raced with thoughts of how to approach the conversation, of how to explain the choices she had made and the reasons behind them. But for now, she was grateful for the reprieve, however brief it might be.

As Jaxon stepped back to give her space, Harper's heart ached with the knowledge that this moment, this fragile peace, was only the beginning of what could either mend or break them.

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### Chapter Three

The afternoon sun was beginning to dip behind the horizon as Harper parked outside Mia's school, the familiar bell chiming the end of the day.

She leaned against the car, watching the stream of children pouring out the doors, searching for the familiar bounce of dark curls. There she was. Mia spotted her mother, her face lighting up as she waved enthusiastically. Harper couldn't help but smile, the sight of her daughter always managing to lift her spirits, no matter how stressful the day had been.

As Mia ran toward her, Harper opened her arms wide, catching her in a warm embrace.

"Hi, Mommy!" Mia chirped, holding up a drawing she'd done that day.

"Hey, sweetheart. What do we have here?" Harper asked.

"It's you and me!" Mia explained proudly, pointing out the figures with a small crayon rainbow arched above them.

Harper's heart swelled with love. "It's perfect. Let's get home and put this on the fridge, okay?"

Mia nodded, skipping toward the car as Harper opened the door for her. Fifteen minutes later, the engine sputtered and coughed, refusing to start. Harper tried again, her heart sinking as the car gave out entirely.

“Not again,” she muttered under her breath, glancing at Mia in the back seat, who was busy with her backpack and oblivious to the problem.

She took a deep breath, pulling out her phone to call for a tow truck. But as she scrolled through her contacts, her thumb hesitated over the familiar name: Jaxon.

She bit her lip, contemplating. The last time her car had broken down, Jaxon had been there to help. She could call the tow service, but something made her linger over his number.

Her mind raced with excuses. He might be busy. He might not want to be her go-to for car trouble. But the memory of his steady presence, the way he’d looked at her and Mia like they were the most important people in the world, pushed her to make the call.

Taking a deep breath, Harper pressed his name and held the phone to her ear. It rang twice before his voice came through, rough and familiar.

“Harper?”

“Hey, Jaxon,” she said, trying to keep her voice steady. “I’m sorry to bother you, but ...my car’s broken down again. I was wondering if you could help?”

There was a pause on the other end, and for a moment, Harper thought she’d made a mistake. But then, he spoke, his tone warm and reassuring.

“Where are you?”

“I’m near Mia’s school,” she replied, then gave him the directions.

“I’ll be there in ten,” he said without hesitation.

“Thank you,” she said softly, her heart fluttering at his quick response.

She hung up, glancing at Mia through the rearview mirror, who was now humming a song to herself, blissfully unaware of the small moment of turmoil.

True to his word, Jaxon arrived within ten minutes, the rumble of his bike signaling his arrival before she even saw him. He pulled up beside her car, dismounting with the easy grace that always seemed to take Harper’s breath away.

Jaxon approached the driver’s side, his concerned gaze meeting hers. “What happened?”

“It just won’t start,” Harper explained, stepping out of the car as he leaned over the engine. “I was about to call for a tow, but...”

“I’m glad you called me instead,” he said, a small smile playing on his lips. His words sent a warmth through her that she hadn’t felt in a long time.

As he inspected the engine, Harper watched him, her heart thudding in her chest. There was something comforting about his presence, a solidness that made her feel safe. She realized, as she stood there, just how much she had missed having him around.

Jaxon straightened, wiping his hands on a rag. “Looks like the battery’s dead. I can give you a jump to get you home, but you’ll need a new one soon.”

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“Thank you, Jaxon,” she said, her voice soft. “I don’t know what I would’ve done without you.”

He gave her a look that made her pulse quicken. “You don’t have to do everything alone, Harper.”

The weight of his words hung between them, and for a moment they just stood there, the world around them fading away. Harper felt a surge of emotion, a mixture of relief and something deeper, something she hadn’t allowed herself to feel in a long time.

Jaxon hooked up the jumper cables, the hum of the engine coming to life once more. As the car idled, he turned to her, his gaze intense but gentle.

“Let me follow you home,” he said. “Just to make sure you get there safe.”

Harper nodded, her throat tight with gratitude. “I’d like that.”

They both got into their vehicles.

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The drive home felt longer than usual, though Harper knew it was just her nerves making time stretch. Jaxon followed closely behind her. She glanced at Mia through the rearview mirror, her daughter humming softly, blissfully unaware of her turmoil of emotions.

Harper’s heart raced as they pulled into the driveway. She parked and stepped out,

waiting for Jaxon to dismount his bike. He did so with his usual grace, his eyes scanning their modest home before settling on her. His gaze was warm, yet curious, as if he sensed there was more to this visit than just a dead car battery.

Mia clambered out of the car, clutching her drawing tightly. She glanced up at Jaxon with wide eyes, a mix of curiosity and excitement. Harper's stomach twisted as she watched the silent exchange between them. Mia had always been a perceptive child, and it was only a matter of time before she started asking questions.

"Thank you for following us," Harper said, her voice softer than she intended.

Jaxon nodded, his hands resting casually on his hips. "It's no trouble."

There was an awkward pause, the air between them thick with unspoken words. Harper opened her mouth to say something, but before she could, Mia piped up, her voice clear and innocent.

"Are you coming inside, Jaxon?" she asked, tilting her head with a curious smile.

Harper's breath caught in her throat. She hadn't planned for this, hadn't expected Mia to invite him in. But before she could say anything, Jaxon smiled at Mia, his expression softening.

"Sure, if it's okay with your mom," he said, glancing at Harper for confirmation.

She nodded, swallowing the lump in her throat. "Of course. Come in."

They walked up the path together, and Harper unlocked the door with shaky hands. As they stepped inside, she felt the weight of the moment pressing down on her.

This was it. She couldn't keep the truth from him any longer. The guilt had gnawed at



her for too long, and now, with Jaxon standing in their home, she knew she had to tell him.

Mia skipped off to her room, her drawing in hand, leaving Harper and Jaxon alone in the living room. The silence was deafening as Harper wrung her hands, gathering the courage to speak.

Jaxon glanced around, taking in the cozy space, his gaze lingering on the little details that spoke of a life he hadn't been part of—Mia's toys neatly arranged, photos on the mantle, and the warmth of a home built with love and care.

He turned to Harper, his brow furrowed in curiosity and concern.

"There's something you need to know, Jaxon," Harper began, her voice trembling. She clasped her hands together, willing herself to stay calm. "Mia ...she's yours."

The words hung in the air, heavy and charged with emotion. Jaxon's eyes widened, the shock clear on his face. He took a step back as if the revelation had physically struck him. For a moment, he said nothing, his mind racing to process what he had just heard.

"She's mine? I mean, I suspected, but I wasn't a hundred percent sure," he murmured.

Harper nodded, her heart pounding in her chest. "Yes. I'm so sorry I didn't tell you sooner. I didn't know how."

Jaxon ran a hand through his hair, his breathing uneven. "How ...how old is she?"

"Five," Harper said softly. "She's five."

Jaxon sank onto the nearest chair, his head in his hands. Five years. He had missed five years of his daughter's life. That must be what he was thinking.

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“I don’t understand,” he muttered, looking up at Harper, his eyes filled with pain and confusion. “Why didn’t you tell me? Why did you keep her from me?”

Harper felt tears pricking at the corners of her eyes. “I was scared, Jaxon. Scared of how you’d react, scared of what it would mean for Mia. I didn’t know how to handle it, and I thought ... I thought it was safer this way.”

“Safer?” Jaxon echoed, his voice rising slightly. “I had a right to know, Harper. I would’ve been there for her. For you.”

“I know,” she whispered. “And I’m sorry. I was trying to protect her, to protect us.”

Jaxon stood, pacing the room with a restless energy that filled the space. His earlier anger had cooled into something more thoughtful, though the tension in his shoulders remained.

Harper watched him, her heart pounding as she wondered what was going through his mind. She couldn’t predict his next move, and the uncertainty gnawed at her.

Finally, Jaxon stopped and turned to face her. “I want to be part of her life,” he said, his voice steady but laced with emotion. “I need to be.”

Harper exhaled, a weight lifting from her chest. “You will be,” she assured him, her voice firm yet gentle. “I want that too.”

She didn’t know why the words came so easily. Maybe it was the way he had shown up for her without question, fixing her car not once but twice, offering his help

without expecting anything in return.

Five years ago, they had been young and reckless, caught up in the heat of passion and the chaos of life. But time had a way of shaping people, of changing them in ways they never expected.

Jaxon was different now. She could see it in the way he carried himself, in the way he looked at her and Mia with a quiet intensity that spoke of responsibility and care. The wild, untamed biker she had known was still there, but there was something more—something deeper.

Harper's thoughts drifted back to those days when they were inseparable, when the world seemed to revolve around their connection. The memories were bittersweet, tinged with the pain of their sudden parting. She had walked away, thinking it was the best choice for all of them. But now, with Jaxon standing in her living room, the father of her child, she wondered if she had made a mistake.

"I want to do this right," Jaxon said, his voice breaking through her thoughts. He stepped closer, his gaze steady and sincere. "I don't want to disrupt her life, but I need to be there for her. For you."

Harper's heart swelled with conflicting emotions. She had spent so long building a life for Mia, keeping them safe and steady. Letting Jaxon in was a risk, but it was a risk she was starting to believe was worth taking.

"All right," she said. "Let's do this, step by step."

Jaxon nodded, his expression softening. "Thank you. For trusting me with this."

A silence settled between them, comfortable and charged with unspoken possibilities. Harper could see the worry in Jaxon's eyes, the weight of all the years he

had missed pressing down on him. But she also saw hope—a flicker of it in the way he smiled at her, in the way his eyes lit up when Mia’s laughter echoed from the other room.

Harper reached out, placing a hand on his arm. “She’s going to love getting to know you. She’s already curious.”

Jaxon covered her hand with his, a simple gesture that spoke volumes. “I’ll do my best. I promise.”

They stood there for a moment, a quiet understanding passing between them. The road ahead wouldn’t be without its challenges, but for the first time in a long while, Harper felt like they had a real chance. A chance to be a family.

“Why don’t you stay for dinner?” she offered, the words surprising even herself. “Mia would love it, and we can talk more.”

Jaxon’s smile was small but genuine. “I’d like that.”

Before they could say more, a loud crash echoed from the kitchen. Harper’s heart leapt into her throat as she rushed toward the noise, Jaxon right behind her.

They found Mia standing near the table, a broken plate on the floor at her feet. Her eyes were wide with fear.

“I’m sorry, Mommy,” she said, her voice trembling.

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” Harper said, crouching down to pick up the pieces. “It was just an accident.”

Jaxon crouched beside Harper, helping to gather the shards. “Hey, it’s all right, Mia,”

he said gently. “No harm done.”

Harper’s breath caught as she watched the interaction. Despite the chaos of the moment, there was something beautiful in the way Jaxon spoke to Mia, the way he reassured her. Maybe, she thought, this could really work.

### Chapter Four

Jaxon paced the clubhouse, his thoughts in turmoil. The news about Mia had hit him hard, and he was still trying to process it all. A daughter. His daughter. The idea both thrilled and terrified him.

He had missed so much already—her first steps, her first words—and the weight of that loss gnawed at him. He couldn't let Harper and Mia slip away again. He had to figure out how to be part of their lives, but right now, he didn't know where to start.

The rumble of laughter and the clink of bottles around him barely registered. The clubhouse, usually a place where he found solace, felt suffocating.

His phone buzzed on the table, pulling him from his thoughts. He snatched it up, recognizing the number of a fellow club member, Troy.

“What's up?” Jaxon asked, trying to keep his tone steady.

“Jax, we've got a problem,” Troy said, his voice tight. “Couple of guys from the Blood Vipers just rolled into town.”

Jaxon's jaw clenched. The Blood Vipers were trouble, always looking to stir up a fight. He didn't have time for this. Not with everything else weighing on him. But as one of the senior members present, it was his responsibility to handle it. Gunner and the Pres were out of town, meeting an allied MC, which meant the weight of this problem fell squarely on Jaxon's shoulders. He wasn't thrilled about it. But the club came first, and with tensions running high between the Iron Sentinels and the Blood

Vipers, Jaxon couldn't afford to ignore it.

He felt the weight of the club's expectations pressing on him. The Iron Sentinels had been through enough shit in the past few years, and every conflict had consequences. This wasn't just about some petty rivalry. The Blood Vipers had always been more than a nuisance. They were dangerous and unpredictable, their presence in town now felt like a ticking time bomb.

"Where are they now?" Jaxon asked, already bracing for the answer.

"The Reading Nook."

Harper's bookstore. Jaxon's heart skipped a beat, a sense of protectiveness surging through him. The thought of those bastards anywhere near Harper or Mia was enough to make his blood boil.

"I'm on my way," he said.

Jaxon pulled on his jacket, his mind already calculating what he needed to do. Troy's words still echoed in his head. Those Viper assholes weren't just sightseeing or passing through. They were here for a reason, and it wasn't good.

With a quick glance around the clubhouse, he spotted Bear, one of the other senior members. Bear was a solid guy—tough, reliable, and a good backup when things got ugly. They'd been through enough together that Jaxon didn't have to explain much. He just met Bear's eyes and jerked his head toward the door. Bear didn't ask questions, just nodded and followed Jaxon out.

The tension in Jaxon's chest had already begun to build. He tried to focus on the ride, to clear his head, but his mind kept drifting back to Harper. She'd always had a way of doing that to him. The way she looked at him, the way she'd spoken to him when



they'd last seen each other—there was so much left unsaid. Too much. And now, this. Clay and the Blood Vipers, showing up on her doorstep.

He had no idea what the fuck the Vipers wanted, but the thought of them being anywhere near her sent anger rushing through him. He prayed Mia wasn't there. He didn't want her anywhere near this mess.

The ride to Harper's was shorter than it should have been, his mind racing the entire time.

They pulled up in front of the bookstore, and Jaxon's eyes immediately scanned the area. Relief washed over him when he didn't see Mia, but Harper and her employee were inside, their expressions wary. Two bikers stood at the counter, one of them turning just as Jaxon and Bear entered.

Jaxon recognized him instantly. Clay. The scar running down Clay's face was a familiar mark, one Jaxon had given him in a brawl years ago. Clay had been a thorn in Jaxon's side for years. Their last encounter had been brutal. Jaxon hadn't been in the mood for games when Clay had pushed him too far.

He still remembered the adrenaline, the fury, and the satisfying snap of Clay's nose as it had broken beneath his fist. The scar was his souvenir. Jaxon was sure Clay still blamed him for it, and it seemed like today was as good a time as any for Clay to settle that score.

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As Jaxon stepped into the bookstore, the tension was palpable. Clay's eyes flicked up, and the smirk that formed on his lips made Jaxon's blood boil. He could feel Bear's presence at his side, ready for whatever came next.

"Clay," Jaxon growled, his voice low and dangerous. He didn't bother with pleasantries. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Clay's lips curled into a sneer, his fingers tapping the counter. "Thought I'd check out the local scene. Nice place you've got here." His gaze flicked to Harper, then back to Jaxon. "Didn't know you were into books."

"Leave them out of this," Jaxon said, stepping forward. His stance was tense, ready for a fight if it came to that. "You've got no business here."

Clay's eyes gleamed with a twisted amusement. "Seems I've got plenty of business here. You're acting real protective. She special to you, Jaxon?" His tone was mocking, meant to provoke.

Jaxon's fists clenched at his sides. He could feel Bear shifting beside him, equally on edge. He didn't want a fight, not here, not with Harper watching. The last thing he wanted was to destroy her place, to bring this violence into her world. But if Clay pushed him too far, he wouldn't have a choice.

"You and your pal are on Iron Sentinels' territory. You both need to leave," Jaxon said, his voice cold. "Now."

Clay leaned back, his smirk never wavering. "Or what? You gonna put another scar on

me?I've been waiting for another round."

The tension in the room was thick, every muscle in Jaxon's body coiled like a spring.He took a deep breath, forcing himself to stay calm."Not here.You want a fight, we'll take it somewhere else."

Clay's companion shifted uneasily, clearly not eager for a confrontation.Clay noticed and scowled, but he didn't move.Instead, he looked around the store, his gaze settling on Harper again."You've changed, Jaxon.Getting soft."

Jaxon stepped forward, his voice a deadly whisper."Last warning, Clay.Wouldn't want to send you and your friend back to your MC in pieces."

For a moment, it seemed Clay might push it further, but then he chuckled, raising his hands in mock surrender."Fine.We'll leave.For now," Clay said.

He turned to his friend, nodding toward the door.As they walked out, Clay paused, looking over his shoulder."See you around, Jaxon.And next time, I won't be so polite," Clay added.

Jaxon's first instinct was to go after Clay, to punch his lights out right there in the bookstore.He could already feel the satisfaction of landing a solid hit, the rush of adrenaline that would come with putting the rat bastard in his place.

But he knew better than to let his anger dictate his actions.If he and Bear really did follow through on their threat—if they sent Clay and his friend back to their MC in pieces—there would be consequences.And not just any consequences.It would spark an all-out war between their MC and the Blood Vipers, one that neither side could afford.

As much as the idea of getting his hands on Clay appealed to him, Jaxon knew he had

to think strategically. The club came first. He couldn't let a personal vendetta cloud his judgment, even if every fiber of his being wanted to do just that.

Still, Clay's words lingered in his mind, echoing over and over again. Getting soft? Him? Jaxon's jaw tightened at the thought. No way in hell. He wasn't soft.

He was still the same guy who had fought tooth and nail to protect the things he cared about. The same guy who had been through the worst and come out the other side. But Clay had hit a nerve, and now those words kept rattling around in his head, digging under his skin.

Jaxon had dealt with the situation the best way he saw fit. That was all. He'd protected Harper, kept the peace—at least for now—and avoided a full-blown fight in front of her. That was the logical choice. The responsible choice.

Jaxon waited until the two bikers were out of sight, his fists slowly unclenching as the adrenaline coursing through his veins began to settle. The tension in his muscles loosened, but it didn't erase the lingering anger or the uncertainty of what could've happened.

He turned back to Harper, his eyes searching her face. She was standing behind the counter, her expression pale, yet there was a quiet determination in her eyes, as if she was trying to hold it all together.

"You okay?" he asked and took a step closer.

Harper nodded, though her eyes were still wide, flickering with that same unshakable wariness that had been there since the moment Clay and his friend had stepped inside.

"I think so," she said, her voice shaky. "Who were they?"

Jaxon tightened his jaw, the remnants of his frustration bubbling to the surface. "Trouble," he said simply. "But they're gone now."

Harper's employee, still looking shaken, glanced nervously between them before offering a quick, uncertain smile.

"I'll, uh, go check on the back," she murmured before disappearing through the door.

Jaxon watched her go, then turned his full attention back to Harper. He could feel the adrenaline still buzzing beneath his skin, the instinct to protect her a fierce, relentless need, making his heart race. But this wasn't the time for that. He needed to center himself, to make sure she was okay.

He ran a hand through his hair, letting out a long breath as he stepped closer, the sound of his boots echoing softly in the stillness. His eyes locked with hers, and he saw the fear, the uncertainty, the ghosts of a past she'd tried to keep buried.

Jaxon hated that his world had intruded on hers like this. She didn't deserve this kind of stress, this danger. She'd built something for herself, a life she was proud of, and he'd just barged in, dragging everything with him.

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“I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t mean for this to happen.”

Harper shook her head, her lips pressed tightly together as she let out a quiet, shuddering breath.

“It’s not your fault,” she replied, but her voice faltered. She paused, her gaze dropping to her hands, her fingers gripping the edge of the counter as if she were trying to steady herself. “I just—”

Jaxon didn’t wait for her to finish. He moved forward, closing the space between them, and placed a hand gently over hers. He could feel the tremor in her skin, the rawness of her emotions just beneath the surface.

“I’m here now,” he said, his voice steady, his grip firm but tender. “I’ll make sure they don’t come back.”

She looked up at him, her eyes meeting his with a quiet vulnerability that made his chest ache. For a moment, they just stood there, their fingers brushing, the tension between them shifting into something softer, more fragile. Harper’s fingers curled slightly under his, seeking comfort in the contact, and Jaxon felt his heart thud heavily in his chest.

“Thank you,” she whispered, her voice barely audible but full of gratitude.

Jaxon felt a pang of something deep inside, something that wasn’t just about protecting her but about wanting to stay. Wanting to be there for her, for whatever came next. His thumb brushed across the back of her hand, the gesture small but

meaningful. It wasn't just about keeping her safe from the bikers. It was about being her anchor, being there in whatever way she needed.

The silence stretched between them, but it wasn't uncomfortable. It was a kind of quiet that held something unspoken, a delicate weight that pressed gently on his chest.

He knew they still had so much to talk about, so many things left unsaid, but at this moment, all he wanted was to stay with her, to make sure she was okay. They didn't need words for that. He could feel it in the way her hand softened under his, the way her shoulders relaxed just a little as the tension began to lift.

Jaxon wanted to tell her everything would be okay. That he would protect her, no matter what. But he wasn't just offering his protection, he was offering himself. In a world full of chaos and danger, he wanted to be her steady, her constant.

He leaned in slightly, close enough so she could feel the heat of his breath on her skin. The scent of leather and motor oil lingered around him, familiar and comforting.

"Harper," he murmured.

She met his gaze, her eyes searching his face for something, for reassurance, maybe. He couldn't say how long they stood like that, the world outside still and forgotten for a moment.

"I'm not going anywhere," he added, his voice stronger now, more certain.

Harper's lips parted, as if she wanted to say something, but then she closed her mouth again, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

She was still trying to process everything that had just happened, everything she had

just learned. But despite the fear and uncertainty, there was something else in her eyes now. Something softer, warmer. Something that made Jaxon feel like maybe, just maybe, they had a chance at something more than this moment of chaos.

She didn't pull away, didn't let go of his hand. Instead, she held on tighter, like she was letting herself trust him just for a moment, just enough to believe everything would be okay.

## Chapter Five



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Harper watched as Miaran ahead, her laughter ringing out as she chased after a butterfly. The sight brought a soft smile to Harper's lips, easing some of the tension that had coiled in her chest since the incident at the bookstore.

Jaxon stood beside her, his hands tucked into his pockets, eyes following Mia with a protective gaze. There was a quiet between them, a fragile sort of peace, the kind that settled in when two people found solace in each other's presence despite the storm raging around them.

Harper stole a glance at him, noting the way his shoulders had relaxed, the hard edge of his jaw softening as he watched Mia. She hadn't expected this when he'd insisted on taking them out for dinner after the ordeal at the bookstore. She had half-expected him to keep his distance, to stay wary and guarded. But Jaxon had surprised her, just as he always did.

"You okay?" he asked, turning his gaze to meet hers. His voice was gentle, but there was an undercurrent of concern she couldn't ignore.

Harper nodded, though she wasn't entirely sure if it was true. The encounter with Clay had left her shaken, a lingering fear gnawing at the edges of her thoughts.

But for now, she wanted to hold onto this moment, this little pocket of peace with Jaxon and Mia.

"I think so," she murmured, offering a small smile. "It's nice to have a quiet evening."

Jaxon's lips quirked into a faint smile, and he reached out, brushing a stray lock of

hair from her face. The gesture was so tender, so unexpectedly intimate, that Harper's heart gave a little flutter. It had been so long since anyone had touched her like that, with such care and softness.

"I'm glad you let me tag along," he said. "Feels good to be here. With both of you."

Harper felt a warmth spread through her chest at his words. She glanced over at Mia, who was now crouched down, examining a patch of wildflowers.

"She's happy you're here too," Harper said softly. "I can tell."

Jaxon's fingers brushed against hers. It was a small touch, but it sent a shiver down her spine, a reminder of how much she had missed this connection.

They spent the next hour in the park, the three of them sharing stories, laughing at Mia's antics, and enjoying the simple pleasure of each other's company. For a while, Harper forgot about the danger that loomed over them. She let herself bask in the warmth of Jaxon's presence, in the way he made her feel safe and seen.

As the sun dipped lower in the sky, casting a soft orange hue over everything, they made their way back to Harper's car. Mia walked ahead, her little hand clutching a small bouquet of wildflowers she'd picked. Jaxon and Harper followed behind, their steps slow, as if neither of them wanted the evening to end.

But as they approached the car, Harper's heart lurched in her chest. Standing near the vehicle, leaning casually against the side, were Clay and two other men from his MC. The smirk on Clay's face was smug, his eyes glinting with malice.

"Evening," Clay drawled, pushing off the car. His gaze flicked between Harper and Jaxon, a predatory gleam in his eyes. "Nice night for a walk."

Harper's pulse quickened, her grip on Jaxon's arm tightening instinctively. She could feel the tension radiating off him, the way his body went rigid, muscles coiling like a spring ready to snap.

"What do you want, Clay?" Jaxon's voice was low, a dangerous edge to it.

Clay's smile widened, and he took a slow step forward, his hands raised in mock surrender. "Relax, Jaxon. We're just out for a stroll, same as you. No need to get all worked up."

Harper's heart pounded in her chest as Clay's gaze settled on her. There was something sinister in the way he looked at her, a promise of trouble that made her stomach twist in knots.

"We've been watching," Clay said, his tone casual but loaded with threat. "Didn't know you had a family now, Jaxon. Cute kid."

Jaxon's jaw clenched, his fists tightening at his sides. Harper could see the barely contained fury in his eyes, the way he was holding himself back for her sake, for Mia's sake.

"Leave them out of this," Jaxon said, his voice like steel. "They have nothing to do with you."

Clay chuckled, a cold, hollow sound. "Oh, but they have everything to do with you. And that makes them our business."

Harper's breath caught in her throat, fear clawing at her insides. She wanted to scream, to tell Clay to leave, but the words wouldn't come. Instead, she reached for Jaxon's hand, her fingers lacing through his, seeking comfort in his touch.

“Let’s go,” she whispered, her voice trembling. “Please.”

Jaxon’s gaze didn’t waver from Clay, but Harper could feel the tension in his grip, the war waging inside him. He wanted to fight, to protect, but he knew the cost of escalating things here and now.

“Not now, Jaxon,” she pleaded, her eyes searching his. “Think of Mia. Please.”

The mention of Mia seemed to pull Jaxon back from the edge. He took a deep breath, his jaw relaxing just enough for Harper to see the struggle in his eyes. Slowly, he nodded, his gaze hardening as he looked at Clay one last time.

“This isn’t over,” Jaxon said, his voice low, a promise of retribution. “But it won’t be here.”

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Clay smirked, giving a mock bow. “We’ll be seeing you around, Jaxon.”

With that, Clay and his men turned and walked away, disappearing into the fading light. Harper exhaled shakily, the tension in her body easing slightly as she watched them go.

Jaxon turned to her and cupped her face, brushing his thumbs gently over her cheeks. “Are you okay?” he asked.

Harper nodded, though she wasn’t sure if it was true. Her heart was still racing, her mind spinning with the implications of Clay’s presence. But in Jaxon’s arms, she felt a measure of safety, of reassurance that she wasn’t alone in this.

“I’m scared,” she admitted, her voice barely above a whisper. “For Mia. For us.”

Jaxon pulled her into his arms, holding her tightly against his chest. “I won’t let anything happen to you,” he murmured, his lips brushing against her hair. “I swear it.”

Harper closed her eyes, allowing herself to sink into his embrace.

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The ride back to Harper’s house was quiet but filled with an undercurrent of tension, the kind that thrummed just beneath the surface.

Harper could still feel the lingering unease from their encounter with Clay, but more than that, she felt the warmth of Jaxon’s presence beside her. The way he’d protected

her and Mia, the fierce determination in his eyes stirred something deep within her.

When they arrived, Mia bounded up the steps, waving a cheerful good night before disappearing inside. Harper lingered on the doorstep, her heart pounding as she turned to Jaxon. The streetlights cast a soft glow over his face, highlighting the angles of his jaw and the intensity in his gaze.

“Thank you,” she whispered, her voice barely audible over the gentle night breeze. “For tonight. For everything.”

Jaxon shrugged, but his eyes softened. “You don’t have to thank me, Harper. I’ll always be here for you.”

The sincerity in his voice, the way he said it like a vow, made her chest tighten. She stepped closer, her hand resting lightly on his chest. She could feel the steady thrum of his heartbeat beneath her fingers, a comforting rhythm that matched the pulse of her own racing heart.

“I mean it,” she said, her gaze locking onto his. “Thank you.”

Before she could second-guess herself, Harper leaned in, her lips brushing against his in a tentative kiss. Jaxon stiffened for a moment, surprised, but then his hands were on her waist, pulling her closer. The kiss deepened, slow and searching, as if they were rediscovering each other after years apart.

Heat sparked between them, a flame that had never truly been extinguished. Harper melted into him. She curled her fingers into the fabric of his shirt, anchoring herself to the solid reality of him. When they finally broke apart, they were both breathless, their foreheads resting together.

“Come inside,” Harper said softly. The invitation hung between them, heavy with

promise.

Jaxon hesitated a moment, searching her eyes for any doubt. When he found none, he nodded, his hand slipping into hers as she led him inside.

The house was quiet, the only sound the soft creak of the floorboards beneath their feet.

After tucking Mia into bed and ensuring she was fast asleep, Harper returned to find Jaxon waiting in the living room. He stood near the window, his silhouette outlined by the moonlight filtering through the curtains. The sight of him there, in her space, felt surreal and yet perfectly right.

She approached him slowly, her nerves tingling with anticipation. Jaxon turned to face her, his expression unreadable, but his eyes told her everything she needed to know. They were dark with desire, with something deeper that made her heart ache in the best way.

“Harper,” he murmured, reaching for her as she stepped into his arms.

The moment their bodies touched, the world seemed to narrow down to just the two of them. Harper tilted her head up, her lips seeking his again, and Jaxon met her halfway.

This kiss was different from the one on the doorstep—hungrier, more desperate, as if they were trying to make up for lost time.

Jaxon roamed his hands over her back, his touch igniting sparks along her skin. Harper tangled her fingers in his hair, pulling him closer, needing to feel every inch of him.

Their breaths mingled, their kisses growing deeper, more urgent, until they were both consumed by the heat building between them. His muscled body felt amazing against hers, solid like she remembered, a contrast to her softness.

“Are you sure?” Jaxon asked, his voice rough, his forehead resting against hers.

Harper nodded, her eyes shining with certainty. “Yes. I want this. I want you.”

That was all the encouragement Jaxon needed. He scooped her up effortlessly, cradling her against his chest as he carried her down the hallway to her bedroom.



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The door closed behind them with a soft click, sealing them in a world of their own making.

He laid her gently on the bed, his gaze never leaving hers as he leaned down, capturing her lips once more. Harper arched beneath him, and she used her hands to explore the expanse of his back, savoring the feel of his muscles tensing under her touch.

Jaxon left a trail of kisses down her neck, his teeth grazing her skin just enough to make her shiver.

Every touch, every kiss, was a reclamation of something they had lost, a bridge between the past and the present.

Jaxon's hands were skilled, knowing exactly where to touch, how to draw soft moans from her lips. Harper felt as if she were drowning in him, and she didn't want to come up for air.

Soon enough, they both dispensed with their clothes. Her breath caught as she beheld him. Over the years, he'd seemed to have worked out more.

She didn't miss his cock thickening at the sight of her. His hungry gaze was exactly as she remembered—full of lust and something else, something she couldn't name yet.

They took their time, savoring the rediscovery of each other's bodies, every moment a testament to the passion that had always simmered between them. The air was thick with heat and emotion, a heady mix that left them both gasping for more.

Jaxon closed his mouth over her erect nipple. He licked and sucked, making her gasp, to tug at his hair. He bit her lightly, before moving to her other breast. He went lower, kissing his way down her ribs, to the valley between her thighs. Reaching her pussy, Jaxon took his time, savoring the taste of her. Harper gasped, groaning as he began tonguing her slit.

Not long after, Harper climaxed. Jaxon got off her and from the corner of her eyes, she saw him grabbing his pants. He pulled a condom from his wallet before positioning himself at the edge of the bed.

“Harper, there’s no going back once we start down this road,” he told her.

“I know,” she answered and he didn’t ask her again.

Jaxon lifted her legs above his shoulders and slipped the condom on. He then entered her, going slow at first. Finally, he was balls-deep inside her. Harper groaned and needing something to hold onto, she gripped the headboard. Was he always this big?

“Time to make you fly, baby,” he said.

Harper could only nod. Jaxon delivered good on his promise. He started with a rhythm that suited them both. When she begged him to go faster, he complied. Her nipples tightened as he pounded into her.

They moved together in perfect harmony, their connection deepening. Harper soon found herself meeting him for every thrust. Jaxon changed the direction of his next push, making her gasp.

Jaxon smiled down at her and stole a kiss from her mouth. He kept aiming for her sweet spot. The pressure building inside her burst, and Harper came, screaming out his name.

He pushed in and out of her a few more times, before reaching climax. She panted, drifting in a haze of pleasure. Jaxon pulled out of her and disposed of the condom in her bathroom. He returned with a towel, cleaning them both up, before slipping in bed next to her.

They lay tangled in the sheets, the moonlight casting a soft glow over their spent bodies. Jaxon traced lazy circles on Harper's bare shoulder, his touch soothing, grounding.

"I've missed you," Harper admitted, her voice a quiet confession in the dark. "More than I ever thought possible."

Jaxon pressed a kiss to her temple, his lips lingering there. "I've missed you too," he murmured. "Every damn day."

They lay in comfortable silence, the weight of the past lifted, if only for the night. Harper felt a contentment she hadn't known in years.

### Chapter Six

Jaxon sat in the office of the clubhouse. Gunner leaned back in his chair, across from him, fingers under his chin as he listened intently.

The Vice President of the Iron Sentinels had always been a man of few words, but when he spoke, everyone listened.

Jaxon ran a hand through his hair, a gesture that betrayed the tension coiling in his gut. He had always been the type to take matters into his own hands, to deal with threats personally, but things were different now. The stakes were higher, and he had more to lose.

“I wanted to deal with Clay myself,” Jaxon began, his voice low but steady. “But it’s not just about me anymore. I’ve got Harper and Mia to think about. I can’t afford to be reckless.”

Gunner nodded slowly, his eyes narrowing as he considered Jaxon’s words. “Clay’s always been a thorn in our side, but if he’s getting bolder, it’s not just a personal issue. It’s a club issue.”

Jaxon leaned forward, the weight of the situation pressing down on him.

“It’s escalating. The Vipers are pushing boundaries, and it’s only a matter of time before things get out of hand. I need your advice, Gunner. I can’t handle this alone,” Jaxon admitted.

Normally, Jaxon hated admitting any form of weakness. In his world, vulnerability was a luxury he couldn't afford. It wasn't just about pride—it was survival.

As one of the senior members of the Iron Sentinels, showing any sign of weakness could be a death sentence. He was used to handling his problems on his own, but this time was different. The stakes were higher. Clay knew about Harper and Mia. The mere thought sent a cold wave of dread through him.

Harper and Mia were his world now. The knowledge that Clay had them in his sights made Jaxon's blood run cold. It wasn't just his life on the line, it was theirs too. That changed everything.

He had always been reckless with his own safety, taking risks that most would shy away from. But Harper and Mia had altered that calculus. They made him realize he couldn't afford to be impulsive, not when the people he cared about could be caught in the crossfire.

Still, admitting he needed help, that this was bigger than something he could handle alone, went against every instinct he had. But he couldn't let his pride jeopardize the safety of Harper and Mia. So, he swallowed his pride, pushed aside the ingrained need to handle everything solo, and went to Gunner.

The room fell into a contemplative silence, the only sound the faint hum of activity from the bar outside the office. Gunner finally leaned forward, his elbows resting on the desk as he met Jaxon's gaze.

"You're right to bring this to me," Gunner said. "The Vipers have been stepping on our toes more than usual. This isn't just about you and Clay. It's about them testing us, seeing how far they can go before we push back."

Jaxon nodded, the tension in his shoulders easing slightly at those words. "So what do

we do?" Jaxon asked.

Gunner exhaled slowly. "I'll talk it over with the Pres and the other senior members. We need to show the Vipers that we're not going to sit back and let them walk all over us. But we need to be smart about it. No unnecessary risks."

"Thanks, Gunner," Jaxon said, relief washing over him. "I appreciate it."

Gunner clapped him on the shoulder. "We've got your back, Jaxon. And Harper and Mia are part of us now too. We'll make sure they're safe."

Jaxon left the office, his mind still racing but his heart a little lighter. As he walked through the clubhouse, Bear caught his eye, raising a bottle in a silent invitation.

"Come on, Jax. Let's have a drink," Bear called out, grinning.

Jaxon hesitated for a moment before nodding and joining Bear at the bar. The familiar routine was comforting, but as the night wore on, he found his thoughts drifting back to Harper and Mia. He could no longer afford to lose himself in his old habits. His priorities had shifted, and he wasn't the same man he used to be.

After a few rounds, Jaxon excused himself, heading back to his room in the clubhouse. The quiet solitude of his space offered a welcome reprieve from the noise outside. He was just settling in when his phone buzzed, Harper's name lighting up the screen.

"Hey," Jaxon answered, a smile tugging at his lips.

"Hi," Harper's voice came through, warm and familiar. "I hope I'm not interrupting."

"Not at all," Jaxon said, leaning back against the headboard. "What's up?"

“I was wondering if you’re free this Saturday afternoon,” Harper began, a hint of hesitation in her voice. “Mia’s usual babysitter isn’t available, and I could really use some help.”

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Jaxon's heart leapt at the opportunity. "Of course. I'd love to. This is my chance to prove to you that I can be dependable."

Harper's soft laugh was music to his ears. "I don't doubt that. Thank you, Jaxon. It means a lot."

"Anything for you and Mia," Jaxon said sincerely. "I'll be there."

Jaxon ended the call. He was committed to being a part of their lives and being the man they could count on.

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Jaxon woke early on Saturday morning, a rare sense of anticipation humming through him. Today was different, special. It was his first real chance to spend time with Mia, his daughter. The word still felt surreal, but it also filled him with a warmth he hadn't known he was missing.

He left the clubhouse before most of the others stirred, the morning still crisp with the promise of a clear day.

On the way to Harper's bookstore, he made a quick stop at her favorite café. The smell of freshly brewed coffee and baked goods greeted him as he walked in, a stark contrast to the usual scent of motor oil and leather he was accustomed to. He ordered a couple of coffees and a selection of pastries he knew Harper liked, hoping to surprise her.



When he arrived at the bookstore, it was bustling with the weekend crowd. The familiar bell above the door chimed as he stepped inside, scanning the room. His gaze quickly found Mia, seated in a quiet corner with a book nearly bigger than her lap. She was engrossed, her small brow furrowed in concentration.

When she glanced up and saw him, her face lit up, and she waved enthusiastically. Jaxon couldn't help but smile and wave back. Feeling a swell of something he couldn't quite name—pride, joy, maybe both—he made his way through the crowd to find Harper. She was behind the counter, helping a customer. Jaxon waited until she finished before stepping up, placing the coffee and pastries on the counter.

“For you,” he said, leaning over to press a kiss to her cheek.

Harper's eyes softened as she smiled. “You didn't have to.”

“I wanted to,” Jaxon replied, savoring the way she looked at him, like he was something good in her world. “And thanks again for letting me spend time with Mia today.”

“It's my pleasure,” Harper said, her voice warm. “She's been looking forward to it.”

Jaxon nodded, glancing toward Mia, who was still absorbed in her book. “Me too.”

With that, he took Mia's hand, and they headed out for their day together. Their first stop was the park, a large, open space filled with families, kids, and the distant sound of laughter.

Jaxon felt a little out of place at first, but Mia's excitement was contagious. They played on the swings, chased each other on the grass, and even attempted to fly a kite, though it ended up tangled in a tree.

After a while, they took a break, sitting on a bench with ice creams in hand. Mia licked her cone thoughtfully before looking up at Jaxon, her eyes serious in the way children could be.

“Are you going to be around?” she asked, her voice small but direct.

Jaxon’s heart clenched. He hadn’t realized how much that question would affect him. “I hope to be,” he said honestly, meeting her gaze. “I want to be.”

Mia nodded, seemingly satisfied with his answer, and returned her focus to her melting ice cream. But Jaxon couldn’t shake the weight of her question. He knew how much it mattered, not just to Mia, but to Harper too. He had to prove to them both that he was here to stay.

As the sun began to dip lower in the sky, they made their way back to the bookstore. The crowd had thinned, leaving the space quieter and more intimate.

Harper’s assistant greeted them with a smile, letting them know she would handle closing for the night.

Harper appeared from the back, her expression brightening when she saw them. “How was it?”

“Great,” Jaxon said, glancing at Mia, who nodded vigorously. “She wore me out.”

Harper laughed, a sound that made Jaxon’s chest tighten in the best way. “Thanks again, Jaxon. Really.”

“Anytime,” he said, meaning it.

“Have you eaten yet?” Harper asked, a hopeful note in her voice. “I was thinking

maybe you'd want to join us for dinner?"

Jaxon didn't have to think twice. "I'd love to."

They walked to a cozy diner nearby, settling into a booth. The atmosphere was warm, the clatter of dishes and the hum of conversation providing a comforting backdrop.

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They ordered, and as they ate, the conversation flowed easily. Mia recounted their adventures in the park with animated gestures, and Harper listened, her eyes crinkling with affection.

Jaxon found himself watching Harper more than he intended, admiring the way she engaged with Mia, the soft curves of her smile, the way her eyes sparkled when she laughed. It wasn't just the warmth of the diner or the satisfaction of a good meal—it was being with them, feeling like he was part of something he hadn't realized he needed.

When they left the diner, the air was cool, and the streets were bathed in the golden glow of streetlights. Jaxon walked them back to their house, his hand occasionally brushing Harper's, each touch sending a ripple of warmth through him.

As they reached the doorstep, Harper turned to him, her expression a mix of contentment and something deeper. "Thanks for today," she said softly.

Jaxon reached out, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "I should be thanking you."

Without thinking, he leaned in and pressed a gentle kiss to her lips. It was soft, tentative, but full of promise. Harper didn't pull away, instead, she leaned into him, her hand resting on his chest.

"Do you want to come in?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Jaxon nodded, his heart thudding in his chest. They stepped inside, the warmth of the house enveloping them.

Harper helped Mia get ready for bed, and Jaxon listened from the living room, the sound of their voices filling him with a sense of belonging he hadn't felt in a long time.

When Harper returned, she looked at him, a question in her eyes. Jaxon stood, meeting her halfway. They didn't need words. The pull between them was undeniable, a current that had been building since the moment they reconnected.

In the quiet of the house, they found each other again, their kisses deepening, their hands exploring. It was tender, passionate, and full of unspoken emotions. They made their way to Harper's bedroom, the door closing softly behind them.

## Chapter Seven

Harper started her day like any other. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee wafted through the air as she poured a cup for herself and one for her assistant, Clara.

The routine was comforting to her frayed nerves, helping ease the anxiety that had lingered since Clay's visit. Jaxon assured her Clay wouldn't dare start anything so soon. For now, they were all safe and she believed him.

She forced herself to focus on the simple tasks: the soft hum of the store, the gentle clink of cups, the rustle of book pages as early customers browsed the shelves.

The morning unfolded with the usual rhythm, the small bell above the door chiming softly as regulars entered, greeted with warm smiles and nods.

Harper relished these moments, the familiar cadence of her life before the chaos threatened to disrupt everything. Her sanctuary, her store, was more than a business. It was the heart of her world, a world she was trying to blend with Jaxon and Mia.

She moved through the store, helping customers find their next read, restocking the shelves with new arrivals, and sharing small talk with Clara. The light, pleasant atmosphere was punctuated by Clara's laughter from the back, a sound that always managed to lift Harper's spirits.

But the peace shattered suddenly. The low, menacing rumble of motorcycle engines filled the air, growing louder, vibrating through the walls.

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Harper's hand stilled on a book spine, her heart leaping into her throat. She exchanged a glance with Clara, who had stopped mid-laugh, her expression turning to concern.

The engines grew closer, the sound reverberating ominously. Harper's stomach twisted in a knot of dread. The acrid scent of smoke hit her nostrils, faint at first, but quickly intensifying. Panic prickled along her skin as she rushed to the window. Her breath caught when she saw the flicker of flames climbing the side of the building.

"Clara, call 911!" Harper told Clara, voice trembling. Clara, wide-eyed, grabbed her phone, her fingers dialing rapidly.

Harper's hands shook as she fumbled for her own phone and scrolled through her contacts to Jaxon's number. He answered after the first ring.

"Jaxon, it's Harper," she managed. "Someone set fire to the store. I can smell smoke, and I hear the bikes outside."

"Get out of there, now!" Jaxon's voice was a controlled bark, underlined by a thin edge of panic. "I'm on my way. Backup is coming. Just get out, Harper."

They asked all the customers to evacuate. Once that was done, Harper grabbed Clara's arm. She pulled her toward the back exit.

The smoke thickened, clawing at her lungs with every breath. They pushed through the door into the alley, stumbling into the cool air, gasping for breath.

Clara's face was pale, her hands shaking. "Who would do this?"

Harper's thoughts spun wildly, but they kept landing on one name—Clay. The warning had been clear, but she hadn't believed it would escalate so quickly.

The fire was a direct attack, a message. Her heart ached at the sight of her store under siege, the flames curling around her dreams, threatening to reduce them to ashes.

The distant wail of sirens brought a small measure of relief as the fire department arrived, the bright red engines pulling up in front of the store. Firefighters moved swiftly, containing the flames to a small section of the building, but the damage had been done. Harper's sanctuary had been violated, and the message was clear.

A roar of another engine pulled her gaze down the alley to where Jaxon's bike came to a screeching halt. He leapt off, his eyes scanning the scene before locking onto her. In three long strides, he was at her side, pulling her into his arms.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his voice low and fierce. He ran his hands over her body, checking for signs of injury.

Harper nodded, her face pressed against his chest. "The store ...they set it on fire," she whispered, still unable to believe what just happened.

Jaxon's jaw tightened, a dark fury blazing in his eyes. "Clay," he growled out, the name a promise of retribution.

Harper gripped his arm. "Not now, Jaxon. Please. We have to think about Mia. We can't escalate this. We can't make it worse," she said.

His fists clenched, his entire body vibrating with the need for action. But her words cut through his rage. This wasn't just about him. It was about protecting them—her, Mia, their fragile family.



“I’ll get the club involved,” Jaxon said. He clenched his hands by his side but kept his focus on Harper. “Gunner’s already talking this over with the President.”

Harper’s heart twisted at the sight of him, torn between his instinct to protect and the danger that now loomed over them. She could see the tension in his jaw, the way his shoulders squared as if bracing against an unseen blow.

The Iron Sentinels were his family, his strength, and now they had to be hers too. She knew the risk he was about to take, but there was no other way. They couldn’t handle this alone.

“All right,” Harper agreed. She knew it wouldn’t be easy loving a man like Jaxon and she would never ask him to choose her or the MC.

“If we’re going to be a family, we can’t let Clay or anyone else tear us apart,” she added.

The word “family” hung between them, heavy with meaning and promise. Jaxon’s eyes softened, the fierce protectiveness giving way to something deeper, more vulnerable.

He reached out, cupping her face with a tenderness that belied the fury simmering beneath his skin. Using his thumb, he brushed her cheek, a soothing gesture that sent a shiver through her.

“I won’t let anything happen to you or Mia,” he vowed, his voice a quiet, deadly promise. “I swear it.”

The distant crackle of the fire, now mostly subdued by the firefighters, served as a grim reminder of the danger. Harper pressed closer to Jaxon, finding solace in the strength of his arms around her.

The acrid scent of smoke lingered in the air, mingling with the cool breeze of the morning. It was a stark contrast to the warmth of Jaxon's embrace.

As the firefighters moved methodically, extinguishing the last of the flames, Harper's mind raced with the implications of the attack. This wasn't just a warning—it was a declaration of war. Clay and his crew had crossed a line, and she knew there was no turning back now. They had to stand their ground, fight for what mattered most.

Jaxon's grip on her tightened briefly before he released her, stepping back to assess the damage. His gaze was sharp, scanning the scene with a critical eye, already calculating the next move.

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Harper followed his gaze, her heart sinking at the sight of her beloved bookstore, now scarred by flames and smoke. But the damage wasn't irreparable, not yet. They still had time to rebuild, to reclaim what was theirs.

"I'll call a meeting," Jaxon said, his tone all business now, the protective veneer slipping into the role of a leader. "The club needs to know what's going on. We can't let this slide."

Harper nodded, her resolve hardening. "What can I do?"

Jaxon's eyes met hers, a flicker of admiration shining through. "Stay strong. We'll need everyone to be ready. This isn't just about us, it's about the whole community."

The weight of his words settled over her, but instead of fear, it fueled her determination. She wouldn't let Clay's intimidation tactics break her. She had something worth fighting for now—Mia, Jaxon, the life they were building together.

"Okay," she agreed, her voice steady. "I'll be ready."

"I know you will be," Jaxon confirmed, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

As the firefighters began packing up, satisfied the blaze was under control, Jaxon pulled Harper into a brief but fierce kiss, a silent vow of his commitment to her and Mia.

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Iron Sentinels gathered at the clubhouse that evening. Jaxon stood at the front of the room. He scanned the faces of his brothers—men he trusted with his life—before speaking.

“The Vipers crossed a line today,” Jaxon began, his gaze sweeping the room. “They set fire to Harper’s bookstore while she was inside. This isn’t just a personal vendetta anymore.”

The murmurs of anger rippled through the room, the bikers exchanging dark looks. Gunner leaned forward, his expression hardening with every word Jaxon spoke. He crossed his arms over his chest, his jaw tight.

“We need to deal with this before it escalates further,” Gunner finally spoke. “They’re testing our limits, and we can’t let that stand.”

The room buzzed with the energy of agreement, the brothers of the Iron Sentinels ready to rally behind Jaxon. They weren’t just a club—they were a family bound by loyalty and an unbreakable code. No one threatened one of their own without facing the full force of their retaliation.

“We’ve got your back, Jaxon,” Bear growled out. “Whatever you need, we’re in.”

Jaxon nodded, the support of his brothers bolstering his resolve. Plans were swiftly made, strategies discussed. They would send a message, one the Vipers wouldn’t forget.

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Harper sat at home, her nerves frayed from the events of the day. The acrid scent of smoke clung to her clothes, a constant reminder of how close they had come to disaster.

She moved through the house, checking on Mia, who lay peacefully asleep in her room, blissfully unaware of the danger that loomed over them.

Harper's mind raced, fear and worry twisting in her gut. She couldn't shake the image of the flames, the heat, the suffocating smoke. The thought of what could have happened left her breathless. What would happen to Mia if she ...no. She refused to follow that line of thought. Harper wanted to believe they were safe now. Jaxon even sent one of his brothers to keep a close eye on her and Mia.

When the sound of Jaxon's bike rumbled up the driveway later that night, the tension in her body disappeared. She met him at the door, her heart pounding as she took in his tired face. Without a word, she pulled him into a tight embrace. Even though he sent someone he trusted to watch them, she was glad to see him, touch him again.

Jaxon wrapped his arms around her, holding her close. He pressed a kiss to her temple, the tension in his body slowly easing as he breathed her in.

"We'll get through this," Jaxon murmured against her hair. "I promise you, Harper."

Harper closed her eyes, the comfort of his words sinking into her. She believed him. She had to. Because the thought of losing Jaxon or Mia was too terrifying to consider. The stakes were higher than ever, but she trusted him. She trusted them.

"Would you like to come inside? Spend the night here?" Harper asked him.

"I'd like that," Jaxon said, grinning.

### Chapter Eight

The roar of engines filled the night as Jaxon followed the rest of the Iron Sentinels through the winding roads toward the Vipers' hideout.

This wasn't just about retaliation, it was about protecting Harper and Mia. About ensuring their safety from a threat that had come too close to home.

As they neared the abandoned warehouse that served as the Vipers' base, Jaxon's grip tightened on the handlebars. He glanced over at Gunner, who gave a sharp nod, his expression hard. The brothers were ready. They had planned for this, but no amount of preparation could ease the storm brewing in Jaxon's chest.

The bikes skidded to a halt in the dirt lot, the sound of engines cutting off one by one, leaving a tense silence in their wake.

Jaxon dismounted, his heart pounding as he led the charge toward the building. His brothers flanked him. They moved as one, a unified force ready to bring down the Vipers.

Inside, the warehouse was dimly lit. The air was thick with the scent of oil and smoke, the remnants of a fire burning in a barrel in the corner.

The Vipers were there, lounging and laughing, their guard down, unaware of the storm about to hit. Jaxon didn't wait. He stepped into the room.

"Clay! I'm here for you," he yelled.

The room erupted into chaos. The Vipers scrambled for weapons, but the Iron Sentinels were faster, more prepared. Fists flew, the sound of metal clashing against metal echoed through the space. Gunshots echoed.

Jaxon pushed forward, his eyes locked on Clay, who stood at the back of the room. Even cornered, Clay had the gall to sneer at him.

“You think you can come after my family and get away with it?” Jaxon growled out. “You made a mistake, Clay.”

Clay laughed, the sound grating against Jaxon’s nerves. “You think you can protect them? You’ll never be able to keep them safe.”

Rage boiled in Jaxon’s veins, fueling his movements as he charged at Clay.

Their fists collided, the force of the impact sending them both staggering back. Jaxon recovered first, landing a solid punch to Clay’s jaw. The fight was brutal, every punch, every kick driven by the need to end this threat once and for all. The sounds of the fight around them faded into the background as Jaxon and Clay faced off.

Clay was strong, a formidable opponent, but Jaxon fought with a fierceness born of desperation and love. He couldn’t let Clay win. He wouldn’t.

Clay lunged at him, a knife glinting in his hand. Jaxon dodged, grabbing Clay’s wrist and twisting it until the knife clattered to the ground. They grappled, each trying to gain the upper hand. The world narrowed down to the two of them, the stakes higher than they had ever been.

Finally, with a burst of strength, Jaxon slammed Clay into the wall, his forearm pressing against his throat.

“This ends now,” Jaxon said.

Clay smirked, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth. “You think this ends with me? The Vipers aren’t going anywhere.”

Before Jaxon could respond, Clay kned him in the stomach, forcing him to release his grip. Clay stumbled back, his eyes wild as he realized the tide of the fight was turning against him.

With a final sneer, he turned and ran, disappearing into the shadows of the warehouse. Jaxon cursed, his breath ragged as he watched Clay flee. He wanted to chase after him, to end it once and for all, but the sound of his brothers fighting pulled him back.

They needed him here. The Iron Sentinels were holding their own, the Vipers outmatched and disoriented by the surprise attack.



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Jaxon jumped back into the fray and helped take down the remaining threats. One by one, the Vipers fell, the fight drawing to a close as the last of them were subdued or fled into the night.

Jaxon was about to step forward to help with the cleanup, when his phone buzzed in his pocket. Pulling it out, he saw Harper's name flashing on the screen. A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth, eager to tell her the news that they had sent a clear message to the Vipers. He swiped to answer, lifting the phone to his ear.

"Harper," he said warmly, ready to reassure her.

But her voice, low and trembling, shattered any sense of relief. "Jaxon," she whispered, barely audible over the crackle of static. "I think someone just broke into the house."

Every muscle in Jaxon's body went rigid, his heart dropping like a stone in his stomach. The world around him seemed to fade, replaced by a sharp, all-consuming fear.

"What?" he breathed, his voice barely more than a rasp. "Are you sure?"

"I heard a noise," Harper whispered, her voice shaking with fear. "The back door ...it sounded like someone opened it."

His mind raced, the need to be with her, to protect her, overriding every other thought.

“Where are you now?”he asked urgently, already moving toward his bike, his brothers noticing his sudden shift in demeanor.

“I’m in the closet,” she said, her breath hitching. “Mia’s with me. I-I didn’t know what else to do.”

“You did the right thing,” Jaxon assured her, mounting his bike and kicking it into gear. He signaled to Gunner and the others, his expression enough to convey the seriousness of the situation.

“Stay quiet. Don’t make a sound. I’m coming, Harper. I’ll be there in minutes.”

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Clay killed the engine of his bike, his jaw clenched so tightly the muscles in his neck throbbed. The sound of the cooling engine ticked in the stillness of the night, but Clay was too consumed by rage to notice.

He sat astride his bike, parked across the street from Harper Davis’s house, his eyes locked on the darkened windows. His chest rose and fell with each ragged breath, fury simmering just beneath the surface.

The fire at the bookstore had been a game, a twisted little joke meant to rattle Jaxon and his precious Iron Sentinels. But Jaxon had turned the tables, storming into Vipers’ territory with the full force of his club behind him, leaving Clay humiliated and fuming.

The memory of the raid made his blood boil, his fingers curling around the handlebars as if they were Jaxon’s throat.

But this wasn’t over. Not by a long shot. Clay had one last card to play. His lips curled

into a sinister smile as he reached into his jacket, checking his weapons.

A gun with a few bullets left, a knife with a serrated edge—tools of his trade, reliable and efficient. He didn't need much else. Tonight, he would make Jaxon pay.

His eyes flicked to the green motorcycle parked in front of Harper's house. A prospect, no doubt, a low-level Sentinel meant to keep watch.

Clay widened his smile, a dark gleam in his eyes. The kid wouldn't be a problem. He'd dealt with worse.

Clay slipped off his bike, the leather of his jacket creaking as he moved. He crept across the street, his footsteps silent against the pavement. The prospect never saw him coming. In one swift, brutal motion, Clay drew his knife, plunging it into the kid's side. The prospect gasped, eyes wide with shock and pain, but Clay covered his mouth, muffling the sound as he dragged him to the shadows. The kid slumped against the wall, lifeless.

"Sorry, kid," Clay muttered, wiping the blade on the prospect's jacket. "Wrong place, wrong time."

With the obstacle out of the way, Clay turned his attention to the house. He circled to the back, his eyes scanning for any signs of movement. The curtains were drawn, the lights on, casting a warm glow through the windows. It was almost inviting.

He approached the back door, his pulse quickening with anticipation. Pulling out his knife again, he smashed the glass, the shards tinkling like sinister wind chimes.

He reached through the jagged hole, twisting the lock and pushing the door open.

Clay stepped inside, the door creaking on its hinges. The scent of home—fresh

flowers, faint traces of cooking—greeted him, a sharp contrast to the malice in his heart. He relished the quiet, the anticipation of the hunt.

“Harper,” he called out loudly. “Where are you, sweetheart? Don’t be shy.”

He moved through the kitchen, the polished countertops gleaming under the fluorescent lights. The space was pristine, untouched. Clay ran his fingers over the surface, the roughness of his calloused skin scraping against the smooth finish.

“Wanna play hide-and-seek?” he taunted, his voice rising just enough to carry. “It’s my favorite game.”

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He stalked into the living room, his boots heavy on the hardwood floor. The room was cozy, lined with bookshelves and family photos. He sneered at the framed picture of Harper with her daughter, Mia, their smiles captured in happier times.

“You know, Jaxon should’ve been smarter,” he mused aloud. “Leaving his girls all alone. Doesn’t seem like something a tough guy would do.”

He prowled through the dining room, then the basement, each room empty, the silence stretching. The house felt larger in its stillness, the shadows growing deeper with each step. But Clay wasn’t deterred.

If they weren’t downstairs, there was only one place they could be. He moved toward the staircase, his fingers tracing the banister as he ascended. The wood creaked beneath his weight, each step a slow, deliberate reminder of his presence. He wanted them to hear him, to know he was coming.

“Upstairs it is,” he muttered, a grin spreading across his face.

His boots thudded against the stairs, each step a heartbeat pounding in the quiet.

Reaching the landing, Clay paused, his gaze sweeping the hallway. Several doors lined the corridor, all closed. The game was on. He approached the first door, his hand resting on the handle.

“Harper,” he sing-songed, twisting the knob.

The door swung open to reveal a bathroom, the space empty and brightly lit. Clay

chuckled, shutting the door behind him.

Moving to the next room, he found a guest bedroom, the bed neatly made, untouched. He pushed the door open wider, stepping inside briefly before turning back to the hall.

As he approached the final door, he felt a surge of excitement, the thrill of the chase building in his chest. He could almost hear their breaths, quick and shallow, just beyond the wood.

“End of the line,” he whispered, his hand gripping the knob. He twisted, pushing the door open slowly, the hinges groaning in protest.

The room was dark, the only light spilling in from the hallway. His eyes adjusted quickly, scanning the space. He stepped inside, his ears straining for any sound or movement. The closet door caught his attention, slightly ajar, as if hastily shut. Clay moved toward it, each step slow and deliberate. He savored the tension, the fear he knew was thick in the air.

Reaching out, he placed his hand on the closet door, his fingers curling around the edge. “Found you,” he whispered, his voice a venomous caress.

He yanked the door open.

## Chapter Nine

“Mommy, I’m scared,” Mia whispered, her voice trembling in the suffocating silence of the closet.

Harper knelt beside her daughter, wrapping her arms around the small, quivering body. “Shh, sweetheart,” she murmured, pressing her lips to Mia’s hair. “It’s going to

be all right.I promise.”

But deep down, fear coiled around her chest like a vice, squeezing tighter with every passing second.Her mind raced, replaying her panicked call to Jaxon.It had felt like an eternity since she dialed his number, her fingers shaking so badly she could barely hit the buttons.She had choked out the words, her voice barely above a whisper.He was coming.She knew Jaxon would ride like the wind, every second bringing him closer.But what if he didn’t make it in time?

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The intruder's voice echoed through the house, a low, mocking drawl that sent chills down her spine. "Harper, where are you, sweetheart?"

Harper squeezed her eyes shut for a moment, her breathing shallow and ragged. She couldn't rely solely on Jaxon. She had to prepare, to protect Mia, to buy time if nothing else.

Her gaze flicked around the dark confines of the closet, landing on an old baseball bat leaning against the wall. Her fingers closed around the worn handle, the wood cool and solid beneath her touch.

She pushed Mia gently behind her, positioning herself between her daughter and the closet door. The bat felt heavy in her trembling hands, but she gripped it tightly, knuckles whitening.

Her heart pounded a wild rhythm in her chest, fear mingling with a fierce determination. She had to be brave. For Mia.

The floorboards creaked ominously as the intruder moved through the house, his boots thudding on the stairs. He was on the second floor now, his footsteps growing louder, each step a countdown to their confrontation.

Harper's breath hitched, the sound of his heavy breathing sending a fresh wave of terror crashing over her.

"Found you," his voice oozed from just beyond the door, each word a sinister promise.



The closet door creaked open, and Mia let out a terrified scream, her small hands clutching Harper's back. Harper surged forward, desperation fueling her as she swung the bat with all her strength. She aimed for the shadowy figure looming in the doorway, her vision blurred with tears and fear.

The bat connected with a sickening thud, catching the intruder off guard. He staggered back with a grunt, clutching his shoulder where the bat had struck. Harper didn't wait. She swung again, this time aiming for his side. Her arms ached, muscles protesting from the force of her strikes, but she didn't stop.

"Stay away from my daughter!" she screamed, her voice cracking with a mixture of fury and fear.

The intruder recovered quickly, dodging her next swing with a snarl. His hand shot out, grabbing the bat mid-swing. He yanked it from her grasp, tossing it aside with a clatter. Harper's heart sank, but she refused to back down. She lunged at him, fists swinging, nails clawing at his face.

He caught her wrists, his grip like a vice. "Feisty, aren't you?" he sneered, his breath hot against her skin. "I can see why Jaxon fell for you."

Harper struggled, twisting and kicking, refusing to go down without a fight. Her mind raced, searching for any opening, any way to break free.

She bit down hard on his hand, the metallic taste of blood filling her mouth. He yelped, his grip loosening just enough for her to wrench free. She scrambled backward, grabbing the nearest object—a lamp—and hurled it at him. The ceramic shattered against his shoulder, making him stumble.

Harper grabbed Mia, pulling her close, shielding her with her body as they backed toward the window.

The sound of roaring engines filled the air outside, sending a spark of hope surging through Harper. The Iron Sentinels had arrived.

The intruder cursed, glancing toward the window, his confidence faltering for the first time. Harper seized the moment, grabbing the bat from the floor. She swung again, this time with a guttural cry, fueled by the knowledge that help was just outside.

The bat connected with his leg, sending him crashing to the ground. He snarled in pain, clutching his knee. Harper didn't hesitate. She grabbed Mia's hand, pulling her toward the bedroom door.

"Run!" she shouted, her voice hoarse.

They raced down the hall, feet pounding against the hardwood as they fled. Harper's heart pounded in her ears, each beat a desperate plea for escape.

She could hear the front door burst open, Jaxon's voice booming through the house. "Harper! Mia!"

"In here!" she screamed, rounding the corner just as Jaxon appeared at the foot of the stairs, his face a mask of fury and relief.

Harper and Mia descended the stairs. Once they reached the first floor, Jaxon pulled Harper and Mia into a fierce embrace, his arms wrapping around them like a shield.

Harper collapsed against him, the adrenaline finally crashing, leaving her shaking and breathless.

"I'm here," Jaxon whispered, pressing a kiss to Harper's temple. "You're both safe now."

Harper clung to him, tears streaming down her face, her body trembling with the aftershocks of fear and relief.

Behind them, the sound of boots thundered as the Iron Sentinels swarmed the house, their presence a wave of relief washing over Harper.

Clay was dragged down the stairs, his body slumped and bloodied, a shadow of the man who had broken into their sanctuary. His face was contorted in pain and fury, his lips curling into a sneer even as the Sentinels' grip on him tightened.

He spat on the floor, his defiance lingering despite his defeat.

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Jaxon's brothers handled him with cold efficiency, their expressions hard and unyielding. They knew what he had done, the danger he posed, and there was no room for mercy.

The muffled sounds of Clay's protests grew fainter as he was dragged into the yard, the heavy front door closing behind the Sentinels.

Harper's breath hitched, her body tense with anticipation. The world outside seemed to hold its breath, the night air thick with expectation.

Then came the cry—a guttural, desperate sound that pierced the quiet, followed by the unmistakable crack of a gunshot.

Harper's heart leapt into her throat, her grip on Mia tightening instinctively. The sound echoed through the still night, a sharp punctuation to the terror they had endured. Silence followed, heavy and final. She felt Jaxon's arm wrap around her, pulling her close.

“He won't hurt you or anyone else ever again,” he assured her.

Harper could only nod. The front door creaked open, and Gunner stepped inside, his expression solemn as he met Jaxon's gaze. He gave a brief nod, the unspoken message clear. It was done.

Jaxon exhaled slowly, his shoulders relaxing slightly. He turned to Harper, his hand gently cupping her face. “You okay?”

Harper swallowed hard, her voice barely a whisper. "I think so."

Mia shifted in her arms, her small voice breaking the silence. "Is the bad man gone?"

Harper kissed the top of Mia's head, her throat tight with emotion. "Yes, sweetheart. He's gone. He can't hurt us anymore."

Jaxon knelt down, taking Mia's hand in his. "You were so brave, Mia. I'm so proud of you."

Mia sniffled, wiping her eyes. "I was scared."

Jaxon nodded, his voice gentle. "It's okay to be scared. But you did amazing. Both of you did."

Harper felt tears prick at the corners of her eyes, the weight of the night catching up with her. She reached out, her fingers intertwining with Jaxon's.

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The quiet after the storm was almost unsettling. Harper moved through her kitchen, her mind still reeling from the night's events.

She had offered drinks and snacks to the Iron Sentinels who lingered, their presence a comfort in the aftermath of chaos. They had accepted with grateful nods. The bond they shared with Jaxon was evident in every glance and word, a family forged in loyalty and the protection of their own.

Mia hadn't wanted to sleep in her own room after the terror they had faced. Harper didn't blame her. The little girl had clung to her, wide-eyed and trembling, until Jaxon had come and gently scooped her up. The sight of him holding Mia, whispering soft

reassurances, had made Harper's heart ache with a mix of love and relief.

Now, Jaxon was upstairs with Mia, as he promised he would be until she fell asleep. The last time Harper had checked on them, Mia was curled up in Jaxon's arms, her favorite stuffed toy clutched tightly in her hands.

As the last of the Sentinels left, bidding quiet farewells and leaving with reassurances that they were just a call away, the house finally fell silent.

Harper stood in the living room, the soft hum of the refrigerator the only sound. The stillness was both a relief and a reminder of how close they had come to losing everything.

She was tidying up when she heard the creak of the stairs. Turning, she saw Jaxon descending, his steps slow and deliberate. His presence filled the room, a calming force that eased the tension still coiled in her chest.

"Mia's sound asleep," Jaxon said, reaching the bottom of the stairs.

Harper smiled softly, the image of Mia finally at peace after the ordeal, bringing a brief moment of solace.

"Thank you," she whispered, her voice thick with emotion. "For being there for her. For us."

Jaxon stepped closer, his hand reaching out to cup her cheek. "You don't have to thank me, Harper. You're my family."

Her eyes drifted down to his arm, and her breath caught. The sleeve of his shirt was bloodied, a dark stain spreading across the fabric. Panic surged through her.

“Jaxon, you’re hurt,” she exclaimed.

He glanced down at his arm, shrugging lightly. “Just a cut. Clay got lucky with his knife, that’s all.”

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But Harper wasn't convinced. Her heart pounded as she reached for his hand, gently tugging him toward the kitchen. "Let me see it," she insisted, her tone brooking no argument.

Jaxon followed her without protest, his gaze softening as he watched her fuss over him. She retrieved the first aid kit from a cabinet, her hands trembling slightly as she set it on the counter.

The reality of the night's events was still fresh, the adrenaline that had kept her moving beginning to wear off.

"Sit," she commanded, pointing to one of the kitchen chairs.

Jaxon complied, a small smile playing at the corners of his lips as he watched her pull out antiseptic wipes and bandages.

"You don't have to worry so much," he said gently. "I've had worse."

Harper shot him a look, her eyes filled with concern. "That doesn't mean I'm not going to take care of you. Just sit still and let me do this," she scolded.

She knelt beside him, carefully rolling up his sleeve to reveal the gash on his arm. It wasn't deep, but it was long and still oozing blood. Her breath hitched at the sight, her fingers gentle as she cleaned the wound.

Jaxon winced slightly but didn't pull away, his eyes never leaving her face. "You're good at this," he murmured.



“I’ve had to patch up Mia enough times to know what I’m doing,” Harper replied, focusing on her task. “Though her cuts are usually from falling off her bike, not ...knives.”

Her words were a reminder of how close they had come to something far worse. Harper swallowed hard, her hands steady as she applied the antiseptic and began to wrap his arm with a bandage.

Jaxon reached out, brushing his fingers against her cheek. “Hey,” he said softly, drawing her gaze to his. “We’re okay. You and Mia are safe. That’s all that matters.”

Harper nodded, blinking back the tears that threatened to spill. “I know. It’s just ...tonight was too close. I really thought we were both going to die.”

“I won’t ever let that happen,” Jaxon promised.

Harper finished bandaging his arm, her fingers lingering on the bandage as if to reassure herself he was whole and here with her.

Jaxon stood, pulling her into his arms. She melted into his embrace, the tension in her body easing as he held her close. The scent of him, the solid feel of his chest against her cheek, grounded her in the moment.

“Things are going to be better after today,” Jaxon murmured into her hair. “I promise.”

Harper closed her eyes, her arms tightening around him. “I believe you,” she whispered.

Chapter Ten

### Six Months Later

Harper stood in the kitchen, the morning sun warm on her face. It had been six months since the attack that had nearly shattered their lives, six months of rebuilding, not just their home, but their sense of security, their trust, and their future.

Mia's laughter floated from the backyard, a sound that was a balm and a reminder of how far they had come.

Harper glanced out the window, watching her daughter play with a few of the neighborhood kids, her little face lit up with pure joy. It was a sight Harper had once feared she'd never see again.

Jaxon's arms wrapped around her from behind, his presence grounding her in the moment. His hands were calloused from weeks of work—rebuilding the store, fixing up the house, and ensuring their lives returned to a semblance of normalcy. He pressed a kiss to the side of her neck, his breath warm against her skin.

“Morning,” he murmured, his voice a low rumble that sent a shiver down her spine.

“Morning,” she replied, leaning into him.

The simple intimacy of the moment filled her with a profound sense of gratitude. After everything they had faced, the quiet moments felt all the more precious.

Jaxon turned her in his arms, his blue eyes searching hers. “You okay?” he asked, his

brow furrowed with concern.

Harper nodded, a small smile playing at her lips. "I'm okay. Just thinking."

"About?"

"About how far we've come," she admitted, her voice soft. "It still feels surreal sometimes. Like, one day I'll wake up and realize it was all a dream."

Jaxon tightened his grip slightly. "It wasn't a dream, Harper. We went through hell, but we made it out. And we're stronger for it."

Her eyes welled up, but she blinked back the tears. "I know. It's just ...there are days when the fear creeps back in. What if something else happens? What if we have to face something like that again?" Harper asked.

Jaxon cupped her face in his hands, using his thumbs to brush away the single tear that escaped. "Then we'll face it together. You, me, and Mia. We're a family now, Harper. And nothing's going to tear us apart."

His words settled in her chest, a soothing anchor to her swirling thoughts. Harper believed him, because she loved this man with everything she was.

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They spent the afternoon in the backyard, a barbecue sizzling on the grill, the air filled with the scent of grilled vegetables and seasoned meat. Jaxon flipped the burgers with ease, his laughter mixing with Mia's as she ran around, a soccer ball at her feet.

Harper watched them from the porch, her heart swelling with love. This was their new beginning, the life they had fought so hard to protect.

She joined them, taking a seat next to Jaxon and resting her head on his shoulder as they watched Mia score a goal against one of the other kids.

“You’ve got a future soccer star on your hands,” Jaxon teased, his arm draped around her shoulders.

Harper chuckled, the sound light and free. “She’s got your determination,” she said, tilting her head to look at him. “And maybe a bit of your stubbornness too.”

“Comes in handy,” Jaxon replied with a wink. “She’ll be unstoppable.”

As the sun dipped lower in the sky, casting a golden hue over the yard, Harper found herself savoring every moment. The laughter, the warmth, the sense of belonging—it was all she had ever wanted, and now it was hers.

Later that evening, after Mia had been tucked into bed, her eyelids drooping as she hugged her stuffed toy close, Harper and Jaxon sat on the porch swing, the cool night air wrapping around them. The stars are all out tonight, she thought, smiling to herself.

Jaxon reached for her hand, threading his fingers through hers. “I’ve been thinking,” he said, his tone thoughtful.

“About what?” Harper asked, curious.

“About the future. About us.” He turned to face her. “I want us to build something together. Something lasting. I want to marry you, Harper.”

Her breath caught, her heart skipping a beat at the earnestness in his voice. “Jaxon, I—”

“You don’t have to say yes right away,” he added quickly, squeezing her hand. “I just want you to know I’m all in. For you, for Mia, for us. I’m not going anywhere.”

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Harper's eyes filled with tears, but this time, they were tears of joy. "Yes," she whispered, her voice trembling. "I want that too. I want to build a life with you."

A smile broke across Jaxon's face, one that lit up his entire being and made Harper's heart flutter. He pulled her into his arms, holding her close as the swing rocked gently beneath them, the soft creak of the chains a soothing backdrop to the stillness of the night. Harper clung to him, her heart full to bursting.

"I love you," she whispered

"Love you back, baby," he answered without hesitation, making her pulse quicken.

Harper tilted her head, her gaze meeting his in the dim light. His eyes, dark and intense, held a promise that made her breath hitch.

Jaxon leaned in, brushing his lips softly against hers, a tender caress that sent a shiver down her spine. He quickly deepened the kiss.

She tangled her fingers into his hair, pulling him closer as her body molded against his. The air around them seemed to hum with electricity, the world falling away until there was nothing but the two of them, wrapped in each other. Jaxon moved his hands to her waist, his touch firm yet gentle.

When they finally broke apart, both breathing heavily, Jaxon rested his forehead against hers, a small smile tugging at his lips.

"You make everything worth it," he murmured, his voice a husky whisper. "Every

fight, every scar, every damn moment.”

Harper cupped his face, her thumb tracing the rough line of his jaw. “And you make me feel safe,” she replied, her voice barely above a whisper. “Like I can face anything, as long as you’re with me.”

They sat there a moment longer, wrapped in the quiet of the night, the cool breeze playing with the edges of her hair. But the fire between them had been kindled, a smoldering heat that neither could ignore.

Jaxon stood, pulling her to her feet, his hands lingering on her hips as he guided her toward the door. “Come on,” he said, his voice laced with a promise that sent a thrill through her. “Let’s go inside.”

Harper’s heart raced as she followed him, her hand in his, their steps slow and deliberate. The anticipation built with every movement, every glance exchanged. As they crossed the threshold into the house, the door clicking shut behind them, the warmth of his presence enveloped her.

Jaxon turned to her, his eyes burning with desire, a mischievous glint playing at the corners of his mouth. “I’ve been waiting to have you all to myself,” he admitted, his voice a low murmur that sent a ripple of heat through her.

Harper smiled, a mixture of nervousness and excitement bubbling within her. “I guess we better not keep you waiting then,” she teased. Harper traced the line of his shirt, tugging him closer.

He chuckled, the sound rich and warm, before sweeping her into his arms, carrying her toward the stairs. Their laughter mingled as they ascended. As they reached their bedroom, the tension between them palpable, Harper knew this was the start of something beautiful.

The End

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