



Puma's Pride

Author: *K.L. Barstow*

Category: Romance, New Adult, Mc

Description: Puma You know what you get when you play ball professionally? Everything. Money. Women. Fame. Know what you get after a stupid mistake destroys your career? For me, I became the President of the Demon Dawgs Las Vegas Chapter. Which means I now have even more money, more women and a whole lot of infamy. So what happens when the woman you want only sees you as a player? Well, you try to prove to her you're not. Easier said than done when a woman from your past shows up with your child in tow. A child you knew nothing about.

Alisa Puma can have anyone he wants. For some reason, he seems to think he wants me. But I have too many reasons not to go there. Foremost is my little girl, Elina. She doesn't need the heartbreak if, and when, he tires of monogamy. But the bigger reason is the man who killed my husband. Because I know he'll kill Puma if given the chance, and that would destroy me.

Total Pages (Source): 63

CHAPTER ONE: PUMA

“This fucking sucks.” I gripe as Pete takes the tractor trailer around another corner. I never realized how hard it is to stand inside a moving vehicle until I find myself jostled around like a ball on a trampoline.

“Sit down before you topple over like a Redwood.” Dante snarks at me.

I scowl at Dante but don't sit. He may be my President but I want to be ready when we stop. Dante, Chaos, Scar and I are all inside the trailer heading for the rendezvous with Gareth Standish, his son, Gerard, and Colin Chambers. They're expecting Tally, Evie, Caitlin and Kingsley when they open the trailer door. But they're getting us instead. We need to be ready and I'd rather not get caught sitting on my ass when we stop.

“Feral said we're driving through the gate now.” Dante adds. Feral is up in the cab with Pete, but he's hiding in the sleeper. He and Pete drove the distance from San Diego to Chicago, taking turns so they could arrive early. We used the extra time to set up this ambush, with the help of our Chicago Chapter.

Chrome and his men worked overtime preparing for this day. He enlisted the help of other MC's in the state as well as a few gangs who don't condone human trafficking. Once we're done with this op, every facet of Standish's operation will cease to exist. The plan is a simple one. Once they open the trailer, expecting to find four, terrified and broken women, they'll find us. Chrome and his men have the meeting place surrounded and they'll close in and capture everyone. The goal is to take it all without a shot fired, but if one of the perverts gets shot, well I won't be feeling any remorse.

The truck comes to a stop so we all get in position. We're all aware that Pete may be in the middle of the upcoming ambush. He'd done us a solid by agreeing to drive the truck, once he discovered his boss had him transporting women without his knowledge. He has a wife and daughters, so he was understandably appalled to find the women trapped inside. He agreed to help us set the bastards up. He knew how close he came to either dying by our hands or convicted of human trafficking if the cops stopped him. We don't want him to be a casualty, so we'll take care to not shoot him.

The trailer doors open and we're in luck. Standish and his son are looking at Pete, listening to him tell a story about almost getting pulled over. Pete played his part perfectly by opening the door and stepping to the side, out of the way. Colin is the first person to see us, but he barely gets out a squeak when all three of them find no less than a dozen guns pointed at them. Demon Dawgs surround the truck yard, leaving our targets nowhere to run.

"How the fuck did you get in there?" Gareth sputters as Chrome's SOA and Chill zip tie their hands behind their back.

"Standish and little Standish, good to see you both again. You left town without saying goodbye, very rude." Dante says with a malicious grin that he then turns on Colin. "You must be Colin, my future brother-in-law. Let me congratulate, you're going to become an uncle soon. Of course you won't be around to enjoy it."

"You're telling me my sister is a whore?" Colin sneers. "I already knew it."

Dante calmly steps up to Colin, so close that Colin either has to raise his chin to see him or stare at Dante's chest. When Colin makes eye contact, Dante slams his fist into Colin's gut. The air whooshes out of him as he doubles over with pain. Dante steps to the side in time to avoid Colin spewing all over his boots.

“You don’t look very bright.” I tell Colin who glares at me. “Tally and Caitlin are fucking goddesses. You are a piece of shit. Amazing really that you share DNA.”

“Must be the extra X chromosome.” Chaos adds. “Makes all the difference.”

I nod in agreement. “Must be. So I’ll dumb this down for you. You are about to spend three days riding in the back of this trailer all the way back to San Diego. Now you have a choice. You can either ride back in the shape you’re in now, or you can ride back with several broken bones.”

“You’re a doctor.” Scar takes on the narrative. “So you can imagine the pain you can experience if you piss us off enough to start breaking those bones.”

“We’re not riding in there!” Gareth protests. He has enough sense to cower when Dante turns his attention to him.

“Accommodations aren’t good enough for you?” Dante asks, his voice spooky soft. “Well too fucking bad.”

“As Puma said, you have a choice. Riding with or without broken bones. We have some questions for you. For every question you don’t answer, we break a bone. For every one you do, we don’t. See? Simple?”

“Oh, and in case you’re thinking about lying to us.” Dante cuts in. “We already know some of the answers, so you try to fuck with us...” He leaves the threat hanging as Chrome joins us.

“You!” Gerard snaps, glaring at Chrome.

“Yeah, me.”

“But you work for us.”

“I can’t help it if you fuckers don’t bother vetting the companies you hire. Dumb shits.” Chrome replies. “Now, give us the details about every auction house and brothel you have.”

In the end, each of the three men sported two broken fingers and at least one cracked rib. We had confirmation on every target we needed to find and shut down. Chrome and the army he put together left us to take care of that task, leaving us with our prisoners. Chrome has one of his men take Pete to the O’Hare so he can fly home first class. Feral and Ghost are driving our prisoners back to San Diego. Chaos and Scar use their knives to strip the men down to the underwear while Chill collects their phones and wallets. None of them are carrying weapons.

“You won’t get away with this.” Gerard spits at Dante. “I got away once, I’ll get away again. We have friends. Friends that will destroy your stupid club.”

“Shut up!” Gareth snaps at his son.

“Are you talking about the men who are waiting for our women at the playground you created?” Dante asks and grins when Gareth pales. “Yeah, we know about that, too. We have eyes on it. Once all the men are inside, we’re blowing it up. Make it seem like you led them all into a trap. Probably a good thing we’re getting you out of Chicago, huh? Get them inside.”

“Since you went to so much trouble to create this prison, we figure somebody ought to get some use out of it.” Chaos tells them as he and I drag the men to the back of the trailer. As we’re carrying Gareth, one of the phones dings. I glance at Dante who’s studying it. His expression is murderous.

“My mother-in-law wants to know if her daughters made it safely.” Dante growls,

glaring at the three men who at least have the sense to cower under the heat of it. “So she knew of your plan? What was supposed to happen? Was she supposed to meet you?”

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

When none of them answer, Chaos slams his fist into Gareth's gut. "Answer him or I'll break another bone for every second you don't."

"She wanted to meet us here, get Caitlin to sign over the money." Gareth admits.

"Well we wouldn't want to disappoint her." Dante says, walking away as he sends a text. When the phone dings with a reply, he grins. "She's on her way. Seems like that prison is going to transport at least one woman after all."

Since I'm the only member she likely knows nothing about, I get the pleasure of greeting her. Normally, I don't like hurting women, but lifting up that bitch and throwing her into the cell with the other degenerates, gives me a warm glow.

About thirty-six hours after our arrival in Chicago, we find ourselves heading back to Vegas.

As exit the base, my phone pings. I answer it to a voice I haven't heard almost six years. "Corinne?" I ask as I point my bike toward the clubhouse.

"Malik. I'm sorry to bother you, but I need your help. I'm living in Vegas now and there's a man who's been harassing me. He's sitting outside my condo. The cops said they can't do anything. I was hoping maybe you could just come over and scare him away?"

I frown at her request. I don't know why she'd reach out to me, much less believe I'm someone who would willingly scare away a stalker. But Corinne had been a nice diversion once upon a time. Six years ago, she'd been a stunning breath of fresh air.

She had no idea who I was and watching her pink with embarrassment when she realized the truth had been fucking adorable. The sex was phenomenal. I have no plans on reliving the interlude. I want Alisa and only Alisa. But I'm not one to turn my back on a woman in need. Besides, I'm always up for intimidating assholes. "Give me the address. I'll be there in twenty." I say once she does.

As I veer onto 612, I ping Wildcard to let him know my plans.

"I've never heard about this Corinne." He says, perplexed.

"Met her when I was playing ball. Picked her up in a bar in Miami. Hot little blonde with an amazing body." I tell him.

"Jeez, and she's here in Vegas? Sure you don't have a stalker?"

I bark out a laugh. "I doubt it. Unless she's the most patient stalker on the planet. Haven't heard from her since that night. She said she just moved here, so I'm guessing she doesn't know anybody."

"Yeah, but how did she know you were here?"

"It isn't like I live incognito. She may have read that I settled here after my accident."

"But how did she get your number?" Wildcard persists and his question does give me pause. How the fuck did she get my number?

"I don't know. I'll ask her when I get there. Won't be long. Coming up on my exit now, should be at her place in ten and finished scaring the shit out of an asshole in fifteen."

Wildcard laughs as I end the call.

I pull up to a light. My mind six years in the past, so I don't notice the van pulling up behind me until the light changes and they ram my bike. My bike and I skid across the asphalt. Before I can grab my gun, they shoot me with a taser and its lights out.

CHAPTER TWO: ALISA

In the weeks since I've been living at the Vegas clubhouse, I've had a taste of what being the President's Old Lady means. But I realize all those other experiences were just tastes. This is the whole fucking seven-course meal.

Dante shouts out orders like a general until everyone is off doing what they need to in order to find Puma. I watch Ashlyn struggle to ensure Reaper she's fine leaving with Laser while Reaper stays behind to search for his uncle. As soon as he's out the door, she crumbles.

"Do you want me to call Reaper and have him come back?" I ask her as she shakes her head.

"No, I just need a minute." She says as I watch her struggle to regain control.

"Why did you tell him to go if you need him?" Laser asks as he rubs soothing circles on her back.

"Because he loves Puma, and he needs to help find him. I'll be fine. I just needed to break down for a few minutes. Let me go grab my stuff so we can get to San Diego." Ashlyn says after taking a deep breath and wiping her eyes. She walks down the hall to her and Reaper's room with Laser right behind her. Seeing Ashlyn stand tall and telling her man to stay here when all she really wants is for him to go with her gives me strength. Once Reaper claims her, he'll have a real Old Lady on his hands.

I wish I had half her strength.

Turning to Corinne, I see her glancing around the room. She looks so out of place and lost that I know she needs my help more than I need to have a breakdown.

“Let’s go check on the kids.” I suggest, and she nods quickly, rising to follow me.

We find Mal and Elina happily sitting on the floor. Their backs against the couch with a bowl of popcorn between them. Turning Red is blaring on the 75” television screen. My father has his phone out, ignoring the movie. I snicker as he fights to keep from glancing at the screen. Those Pixar movies are hard to ignore. Mad Max sits by the door, rising when we enter. I wave my hand to tell him to sit back down.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“Puma?” He asks in a soft voice, his eyes flicking to Elina. He, like everyone in the club, knows how much Elina adores Puma. If she knows he’s in any danger, she’ll be inconsolable.

“No word.” I whisper. “If you need to go and help, you can.”

He shakes his head. “He’d kill me if I left you unprotected. Then Chill would dig my body up and kill me again before Showtime has a go.”

I can’t stop my laugh. The sound causes my daughter and father to shift their attention to me.

“Mommy!” Mal calls out, jumping off the couch and running to wrap his little arms around his mother’s legs. “We’re watching Turning Red. Do you want to watch it with us?”

“I see that, baby. I’ll sit with you for a while.” Corinne says as she takes a seat on the other side of her son.

Elina is watching me with wise eyes. She’s lived at the club long enough to recognize when everyone is tense. I know she senses something is not right, but luckily she hasn’t asked, or realized Puma is missing. Once she does, oh boy. I give her a smile. She frowns in return, but turns her attention back to the movie.

“She knows something is wrong.” My father says. “She doesn’t know what, yet.”

“Yeah. Luckily, she didn’t see Dante and the others return without Puma.” I reply.

“Mal is a sweet boy. He looks just like his father.” Diego says to me, watching my expression.

“Yeah. Puma’s going to freak when he gets back.” I stop myself from saying ‘if’. But I can’t help but worry about the possibility of losing him.

“Puma’s as close to indestructible as a mortal man can get.” My father assures me. “He’ll find a way out of whatever mess he’s in and he’ll be home soon. You need to focus on how you’re going to help him deal with Corinne without alienating his son.”

I frown at my dad. “Puma won’t hurt the boy or his mother.” I protest.

“No, he won’t. But Puma has a temper. He won’t be happy that she kept his son from him this long.”

I nod.

Corinne glances back at us, and I realize she must have heard our discussion. I feel a little guilty about that, but this is her reality and she’ll need to deal with it.

“I’ll be right back.” Corinne says to Mal before standing to join us.

“You heard?” I ask and she nods.

“Believe me, I’ve been stressing about how Puma’s going to react once he arrives. I’m not completely heartless. I tried to reach out to him when I discovered I was pregnant. When I couldn’t reach him directly, I contacted his manager.” Her face turns a light pink before she continues. “He told me to go away. Had some choice words about me being another gold-digger just looking for a payday.” Corinne says, her words directed at us, but her focus on Mal giggling with Elina.

“Did you try again?” Diego asks. “Another route?”

She shakes her head. “No. I planned on waiting until after Mal was born before I approached him again. Then he had his accident. I followed the news about him. I thought about visiting him in the hospital. Bringing Mal with me. But then I read about his career ending and I just wasn’t sure what to do.”

“Because you didn’t know Puma’s mindset?” I suggest.

Corinne looks at me with gratitude. “Yes, exactly. I weighed every probable scenario I could think of and too many of them ended in disaster. So I waited. But then today happened.”

“I wish we knew who attacked you.” I grumble.

“I have his picture.” Corinne says. “Do you think that might help?”

I want to smack her, but I just nod. “It might.”

Corinne takes her phone out of her pocket and taps it a few times before holding the screen so my father and I can see. The image is of a man behind the steering wheel of a car. I squint to make out his features as Diego draws in a breath.

“It can’t be. Are you certain that he’s the man who came to your condo?” Diego asks as I glance at him, then back at the phone. “Sorry, of course you’re certain. You took the photo.”

“Who is it?” I ask and then suddenly I recognize him. “Wait, is that John? Your second-in-command? The one who drove us to San Diego?”

“Unless it’s his twin and I don’t think he has one.” My father says. “What is he up

to?”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“We need to tell Spark.” I fiddle with Corinne’s phone, sending the photo to my phone and to Spark’s. “Stay here. I think this will help.” I tell her as my father follows me out of the room.

We find Spark and Byte sitting in front of separate keyboards, their fingers flying as various camera images flash on the screens.

“Spark...” I start, but he holds up his hand to stop me.

“Got the image. We’re looking for him right now.” He tells me.

“Maestro found something.” comes a voice over the speaker.

“Go.” Byte shouts back.

“An accident on the corner of Owens and Hood. Motorcycle on the side of the road, no sign of the rider.” Maestro says over the speaker.

Images flash on the main screen and I let out a sob when I see Puma’s bike lying abandoned in the road. The recording cycles backwards until we see Puma pull up to the intersection. We watch in horror as a van slams into him before four men jump out of the back. One man raises a weapon and points it at Puma. I gasp and close my eyes, burying my face in my father’s chest. “He shot him.” I sob.

“With a taser.” Spark assures me. “No blood. They wanted Puma unconscious, not dead. That’s good.”

I glance back at the screen in time to see the four men carry Puma and toss him into the back of the van. I feel a small sense of satisfaction knowing it takes four men using a van and a taser to subdue my man.

“I know that van. It belongs to the cartel.” My dad says, pointing at the logo on the rear of the van. “The cartel has Puma.”

“Where would they take him?” Spark barks.

“Maestro is tracking the van via traffic cams.” Smoke says. “It’s headed toward the airport.”

“Are they flying him out?” I ask, horrified. If they take Puma out of the country, we may never find him.

“I’ll call my contact at the airport. Tell them to be on the lookout.” Spark says as he leaves the room with his phone already in his hand.

“Wait, they could be taking him to the warehouses.” My dad chimes in. “The cartel owns three warehouses near the airport. They rent them out to legitimate business. To fool the cops. The warehouses are all tied together via a series of tunnels and rooms underneath. If they have Puma, that’s where they’ll take him.”

“Directions.” Byte asks and my father reels off three addresses.

CHAPTER THREE: PUMA

“What the fuck did I do last night?” I ask myself. I’m wracked with pain when I try to move. My eyes fly open when I realize I can’t move my arms or my legs. I’m sitting on a wooden chair in the middle of a boring and empty room. I have no clue where I am or how I got here. The floor is concrete and there are no windows. The bare bulb

hanging above me does little to improve the ambiance.

Struggling against the zip ties, I realize it won't take much for me to smash the wooden chair to pieces. But before I try, the single door opens to allow four men to pass through. Three are obviously the muscle, thick necks, thick bodies and vacant expressions give them away. The fourth is the one I watch. He looks familiar, but I can't place him. At least not yet. Since he hasn't said a word, I know he's waiting for me to break. Idiot.

When he realizes that I'm not scared, he buckles. I win.

"So you're the great Puma." He says with a sneer as he takes me in. The only response I give him is a smirk. "You don't look so tough. Probably don't feel so tough, either."

I glance at each of his guards before focusing my attention back on him. I'm still working out who he is. His taunts have given me some info, though. He's Mexican, and he's jealous of me. Interesting.

I can tell my silence disturbs him. He does his own glance around the room before returning his focus to me. "Got nothing to say? Too scared?" He taunts.

My laughter echoes around the room, causing all of them to jump, which only has me laughing harder. I know my laugh is loud and in this empty room; the sound bounces around the room.

My captor steps forward and throws a punch, laughing when I see him rubbing his knuckles. "I've had point guards hit me harder than that." I tell him. "What the fuck do you want?"

"I want to know why you tried to kill my father." The man demands.

“Who the fuck is your father?” I ask, although I’m piecing it together. I’ve never met the man standing in front of me, but if I’ve guessed right, I already know the answer.

“Salvador Gutierrez.” He snaps.

I don’t know whether to laugh or cuss. “Why the fuck would I want to kill Sal? We’re business partners, you idiot.” But his words cut through my anger and I realize I missed a crucial point. “Wait, someone tried to kill Sal? How? When?”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

As he glares at me, I realize who he is: Sal's middle son, Josef. The only member of the Gutierrez clan I haven't met.

"Look, Josef, I like your dad. He's a mean SOB, but then so am I. I didn't try to kill him and I can prove it."

Josef frowns when I say his name, but he doesn't question me about how I know it. He has other things on his mind. "How can you prove it?"

"Is Sal still alive?" When he nods, I continue. "Then it wasn't me. If I wanted Sal dead, he'd be dead."

I hear one guard chuckle, but he stops when Josef shoots him a glare. "You're a cocky bastard, aren't you?" He asks me, and I shrug. Why deny it?

"Tell me what happened to Sal?" I demand.

"Someone put a bomb in his car. It blew. Took out the whole garage." Josef tells me. "Along with the driver. My best friend."

With those last three words, I can see the pain that drove him to capture me. Even though what he did was fucking stupid and careless.

"If I wanted to kill your father, I'd use a gun. Or my bare hands." I tell him.

He snorts. "You couldn't kill him with your bare hands." He informs me.

In a single motion, I bust the chair into pieces. Since whoever tied me up zip tied me to different sections of the chair instead of locking my wrists together, I'm free and have no problem wrapping my hands around Josef's throat. I'm ready to order the guards to drop their weapons when the door flies open and my brothers pour in, with Dante in the lead.

"Fuck man, if you had it under control, you should have told us." Dante says as Chill, Chaos and Wildcard take down the guards.

"Fuck you. What took you so long?" Josef paws at my hand so I loosen my hold just enough to let him talk. "I don't know what the fuck you expected to accomplish by going after me, but all you've done is piss me off. Now you're going to answer my questions and if you answer them correctly, I won't break your neck. Got it?"

He nods, but his glare tells me he's pissed off. Well, join the fucking club.

"Are you going to introduce us to your friends?" Dante asks.

"Josef Gutierrez. Sal's middle son." I say. "Josef, Dante, President of the Demon Dawgs." I smile when I see Josef blanch. "Now that we have the pleasantries over with. Tell me about the attack." I demand.

"He was leaving his estate for a meeting at Mandalay Bay. Dad's regular driver ended up in the hospital after someone mugged him. Greg offered to drive him. When he went to get the car, it blew."

"But Sal's ok?" I ask and he nods. "Have there been other attempts?"

He narrows his eyes at me, but shakes his head.

I let him down, but as he's rubbing his neck, I plow my fist into his gut. He goes to

his knees as he desperately tries to draw in breath.

“Don’t ever fucking come at me again.” I tell him. “I’m not killing you, but don’t think I won’t if you try a stunt like this again.”

“What the fuck’s going?” Dante asks.

“He thought I planted a car bomb to take out his father.”

“You’re working with someone else to move drugs into Vegas.” Josef says once he regains his breath. “What the fuck am I supposed to think?”

Glancing down at him, I snort. “I’m not working with someone to bring drugs in. Sal knows what I’m doing. I’m trying to find someone else to move the drugs I get from you since I want out of the drug trade.”

“Done here?” Dante asks me, but he’s looking at Reaper. I glance at my nephew and see him clutching his phone like an expectant father.

“What’s with you?” I ask him.

“Flame got shot. Ashlyn is on her way back to San Diego.” Dante explains.

“Well, why the fuck didn’t you go with her?” I demand.

“Because she insisted on my finding your ass.” Reaper snarls back.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

I grin at him. “I knew I liked her.”

Reaper snorts, but then glances at Dante. “Prez?”

“Go. Scar, you go with him. The rest of us will be right behind you.” Dante says.

Reaper punches my arm before saying. “Congratulations. Can’t wait to hear the details.”

I frown at him. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“You’ll see.” Is all he says as he and Scar hoof it out of the building.

I turn to Dante. “Do you know what the fuck that was about?”

Dante nods slowly. “Yeah, but it’s not my story to tell. You’ll know soon enough.”

I frown at my President but don’t push it. Instead, I grab Josef by the lapels of his silk suit. “Before you go around accusing others of trying to murder your father. Think about this. Sal never, and I mean never, sits in a car when someone turns on the ignition. That’s how his father died, so he’d never make that mistake. Whoever set that bomb either doesn’t know Sal very well or they weren’t after him.”

I watch the realization dawn on Josef just before I push him away. “Let them go.” I tell Chill, who’s standing over the guards with their arms tied behind their backs. Chill frowns but leans over to slice them free. She removes one of their guns from the waist of her jeans, but I shake my head. “Take the weapons. They’ll serve as payment

for my inconvenience.” It’s then that two facts dawn on me. “Where the fuck is my bike?” I see the guards wince and I’m seconds away from telling Chill to shoot them when Wildcard answers.

“It’s out front. We dropped Smooth off to get it.”

I glare at Josef. “I’m sending you the bill for any scratches.” Leaving without waiting for his agreement. Because I don’t fucking need it.

I turn back to Wildcard. “Corinne.”

“She’s safe. She’s at the clubhouse.”

“Why?” I ask. “What’s her story?”

Dante claps me on the back. “She has a few stories for you. Best get back to the clubhouse so you can hear them.”

CHAPTER FOUR: ALISA

As Diego and I stand in Spark’s office, we receive the news we’re hoping for. They found Puma and everyone is on their way back to the clubhouse. Byte gathers his laptop and heads for the door.

“Need to catch up with Ashlyn.” He explains. “We’re on our way back to San Diego to check on Flame.”

“Please let us know how he’s doing.” I request. “If you need anything...”

Byte grins at me. “We know who to call. Thanks for the hospitality, Alisa. You make an excellent First Lady.”

I know I'm blushing as I shake my head. "Puma and I aren't..." I start.

"No. You and Puma are, you just haven't realized it yet." He grins as he walks out the door.

I shake my head, turning my attention to Spark and my father. They're both staring at me. "What?" I ask and they both laugh.

"He's right, you know?" Diego tells me.

"Puma and I are not a couple." I stress.

"Hate to break it to you, kid, but you are. Byte is right, you're an excellent First Lady. Puma's lucky to have you." Diego says with a grin.

"Men." I growl as I leave the room. I need to let Corinne know Puma is alright and on his way back. As I head down the hall, I consider how best to introduce Puma to his son. Whichever way they meet is going to cause shock waves. As much as I don't want to see Puma hurt, I know Mal is the most important player in this little drama. I know Puma is a good man, one of the best. But he's a man with a temper and he doesn't always control it. He'd never hurt Mal or Corinne, not physically, but he may say something out of anger at the betrayal that he can't take back. I care about him too much to let that happen.

I enter the lounge to find Corinne watching the movie with the kids while Showtime now sits by the door.

"They found Puma." I tell her.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“I heard. Smooth sent me a text.” She nods at Corinne and Mal. “Puma doesn’t know about them. Dante told Puma that Corinne is here, but he said nothing about Mal. It’s going to be a shock for him.”

I nod. “Yeah, I know. I think it’s best if he comes in here, away from everyone. He always stays calm around Elina. I think she can help keep him from losing it.”

Showtime looks at Elina and slowly nods. “Yeah. He’s definitely calmer around her. And you. That’s a good idea. I’ll go wait for him out in the common room and ask him to come back here. Will that work?”

I place my hand on her arm. “Thanks Showtime.”

When she leaves, I turn to see Corinne watching me. She mouths Puma and I nod. The look on her face is a mixture of relief and fear. I beacon her to join me. The movie is reaching the end, so the kids don’t notice us.

“Puma’s fine. He’s on his way back. He knows you’re here, but he doesn’t know about Mal or about what happened to you. I’ve asked Showtime to bring Puma back here. I thought it might be better than doing this in front of everyone in the clubhouse. Plus, he’s good about controlling his temper around Elina.”

Corinne jolts at my words. “You think he’ll be violent?” She asks and I know she’s getting ready to grab her son and bolt before Puma arrives.

I reach out my hand to calm her. “No, absolutely not. He won’t get violent, but he’s going to be upset. You know this.”

“But you think he’ll lose his temper?” Corinne pushes.

“I think he might. I’m more afraid that he’ll say something that he can’t take back. That’s all. He watches his words when Elina is around because the man has a potty mouth like you wouldn’t believe.” I reply, hoping to add a little levity to the situation.

Corinne’s eyes dart between me, Mal, and the door. I was so afraid of keeping Puma calm I didn’t realize how on edge Corinne is. I’m about to reassure her again when Trouble walks through the door.

“Puma is coming through the gate.” He says. I notice Corinne relax in his presence.

“I’ve asked Showtime to bring him back here.” I tell him. “Maybe you can stay?” I ask him, nodding my head at Corinne.

She’s looking at him like he’s the only friend she has in the world and I notice the surprise on his face when sees it. He nods and moves over to the window to watch Puma’s arrival. Corinne follows him, leaving me to face Puma when Showtime leads him into the room.

My heart bumps hard in my chest when I see him. I can’t stop myself from rushing forward to wrap my arms around him. He holds me tight before leaning down to kiss the top of my head. “I’m alright.” He assures me. “I wasn’t in any real danger. Just an associate who wanted to talk.”

I’m skeptical, but now isn’t the time or place for details.

“Puma!” Shouts Elina as she makes a beeline for him. Elina’s head barely reaches Puma’s knees. He reaches down and swoops her up with one hand so she can wrap her arms around his neck. Seeing him show so much affection to my daughter and vice versa always takes my breath away. I see the love he has for her and I’m equal

parts happy and sad. Happy that she has his love, but sad that she'll never know her real father. Her father, Matteo, died when she was a baby, so she has no memory of him.

“Meet my friend Mal.” Elina says, drawing me out of my thoughts. “Mal, this is Puma. He’s our President. Puma, this is Mal. He has eyes just like yours!”

Fuck. Out of the mouths of babes. I glance at Puma and see his eyes lock on the boy.

“Puma...” I start, but he holds his hand up to stop me. With some effort, he drags his eyes from Mal to Corinne. I watch Corinne shrink under his glare. Trouble steps up behind her, offering his support. Mal glances nervously between his mother and Puma. Even Elina notices the change in Puma. She pats his face with her little hands until he looks at her.

“There you are.” She says before squirming until he puts her down. She rushes around the couch to grab Mal’s hand.

“Dante said you had more than one story to tell.” Puma finally speaks to Corinne. “I’m guessing one of them is about why you didn’t bother to tell me I have a son.”

I see Corinne gulp. Her mouth opens and closes, but no words come out. I step between Puma and Corinne to grab his attention.

“You need to let her explain.” I tell him. “But before she does, realize she risked her life to get you help.”

Puma’s eyes flash with anger. “How do I know she’ isn’t the one who set me up?” Puma asks. “I was on my way to her condo when they grabbed me.”

“Corinne didn’t set you up. John Spada did. My father’s head of security.”

Puma shrugs. “I don’t know who that is. But he wasn’t the one who grabbed me. Unless he’s working for Sal now. It was his son, Josef.”

I pull out my phone and show the photo to Puma. “Did you see him?” I ask.

He glances at the phone and shakes his head. “No, I only saw Josef. I didn’t see his younger brother, Juan.”

I freeze at his words. I lose all thoughts of Corinne and Mal in the revelation. “What did you say?” I ask him, and something about my tone has Puma focusing his attention on me.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“The image you showed me. That’s Juan Gutierrez.” Puma says.

“No. That’s John Spada. My father’s head of security.” I say as the fear takes over. “Or that’s what he called himself. Oh, my god. That’s Juan. Are you certain?” I’m shaking and I can’t stop the panic from rolling over me. The man who is so obsessed with me he killed my husband is the same man my father trusted with our safety. There is no way my father could have known.

“Alisa.” Puma’s voice reaches me from far away, but I can’t find him. I’m lost in the land of what if’s. He drove Elina and me from Yuma to San Diego., he could have disappeared with us. No one would have known.

“Mommy.” I hear the fear in Elina’s little voice, so I struggle to resurface. When I do, I see Puma’s soft brown eyes and feel his calloused thumbs stroking my cheeks. Only then do I realize I’m crying. I feel Elina’s body pressing against mine.

“I’m sorry, I’m ok.” I tell them as I stroke Elina’s hair with one hand while placing my other hand against Puma’s. I hear a cough and see Puma shoot a hateful look over my head. Trouble stands with Corinne near the window. She’s clutching Mal to her side. His beautiful eyes, so much like Puma’s, are wide in fear. I berate myself for falling apart. I’m safe. Elina’s safe. This isn’t about me, it’s about Puma, Corinne, and their adorable son. Backing away from Puma, I turn to face Trouble and Corinne. “I’m sorry.” I repeat. “Let’s sit down. Corinne has a story to tell you, Puma. You need to hear her out. Please?” I offer him my hand and he takes it. I lead him to the recliner and push him into it. Or, more accurately, he drops into it.

Now that I know Puma is calm enough to listen, I turn to Corinne. “I think the kids

could use some lunch.” I suggest.

She nods at me, so I offer a hand to both kids. “How does a grilled cheese sandwich sound?”

Mal looks at his mother for guidance, so she gives him a nod. He takes my hand and I lead them to the kitchen where I find my father and Lilly, one of the bunnies. Since Elina and I moved into the clubhouse with Puma, all the bunnies dress in more kid-friendly attire during the day. I don’t know if Puma ordered the change or if the girls just decided on their own. Either way, I’m grateful. Like most of the bunnies, Lilly has a life outside the clubhouse. She lives here while she attends UNLV. I’ve seen a few of her software engineering text books lying around and all I can say is better her than me.

“I have two takers for grilled cheese sandwiches.” I say.

“Well, hello. You’re just in time. I was just thinking about how a grilled cheese sandwich would hit the spot.” Lilly says, grinning at me.

I mouth a thank you before locking eyes with my father. With a nod to the hall, he follows me.

“Puma just told me that John Spada is Juan Gutierrez.” I tell him. His eyes widen with alarm before narrowing in anger.

“That son of a bitch.” Diego explodes. “Is he certain?”

I nod. “Can you let Spark know? He needs to dig up everything he can.”

Diego agrees. “How’s Puma?”

“I need to go find out.”

CHAPTER FIVE: PUMA

When Alisa takes the kids out of the room, I watch Trouble coax Corinne onto the couch before he takes the seat next to her. I frown when he takes her hand and I have to stop myself from going off on him, too. Not from jealousy, but from suspicion. Just how well do they know each other?

“We just met today.” Trouble says, as if reading my mind. “So whatever has you considering my demise, can it.”

I smirk at him before turning my attention to Corinne. She looks between us before glancing at their joined hands. She glares at me. “We had sex the first night we met.” She reminds me and I chuckle as she continues. “Trouble has been a tremendous help.”

“I can’t leave you alone for two minutes before you rile everyone up.” Alisa says as she comes back through the door. She passes by me to sit on the couch, but I need her closer. Snagging her hand, I pull her onto the arm of the recliner. I want her on my lap, but I know she’ll protest. I have to pick my battles with her. So I also ignore her comment.

“How are the kids?” I ask her.

“Lilly is making them sandwiches. I asked Diego to get with Spark about Juan.” Alisa tells me. I nod in agreement. “But she can’t keep them occupied for long, so...”

I turn to Corinne. “He’s mine. Right?” When she nods, I continue. “Want to tell me why you kept him from me?”

Corinne takes a deep breath. “When I realized I was pregnant, I knew it was yours. Prior to meeting you, my sex life was barren, and it didn’t change much after that night. I tried to contact you. But I couldn’t get past your guard dog.” She states. When I frown, she continues. “I didn’t have your phone number, but I finally reached your agent. Brick or Brock, something like that.”

“Brock.” I say and I can see the scenario play out. “He turned you away?” I ask.

Corinne nods. “He asked me if I knew how many women called every week claiming to be pregnant with your child.”

When Alisa glares at me, I roll my eyes. “He was exaggerating.” I tell her.

“Right.” Alisa says, not hiding her doubt. I want to be pissed, but I understand. Being a professional athlete gave me access to unlimited pussy. Being the President of an MC meant more of the same until I met Alisa. Now my dick doesn’t react to anyone but her.

“Anyway.” Corinne interrupts nervously. “I couldn’t even get him to take my number.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“So you gave up?” I ask.

Corinne blushes with anger, and I hear Trouble suck in a breath as he watches her. I can appreciate his reaction. Corinne is a stunning woman. A pissed off Corinne is otherworldly.

“I didn’t give up. I packed my shit and moved to Vegas.” She snaps.

“You might want to let her tell her story.” Alisa suggests.

“You’re right. Sorry. Continue.” I tell Corinne.

“After your accident, I reached out to Brock again.” Corinne says. “I didn’t know if it was a good idea or not, but I thought I should try. He told me you weren’t up to dealing with a kid. That you had to focus on getting healthy again.”

“Fuck.” I say, pushing out of the chair. “That son of a bitch never said a damn thing. Did he see Mal?” When Corinne nods, I want to punch something. “There’s no fucking way that asshole didn’t know Mal was mine. I’ll fucking kill him.”

Alisa slid into the seat I had vacated. “Maybe he thought he was protecting you.” She suggests.

“Not from this. This isn’t protecting me, it’s fucking me over.” I growl.

“When I learned you retired and moved to Las Vegas, I came here. I own a business. Bookkeeping. I kept some clients and found new ones once I settled here. I thought

that if we were in the same city, it would be easier to find you and approach you.”

“What I don’t understand is if you didn’t know you had a son, how did this Juan person discover him?” Trouble asks, drawing my attention away from the many ways I want to destroy Brock.

“I’m missing something. What does Juan have to do with anything?” I ask.

“He’s the one who broke into my condo today. After he demanded I call you, he locked us up in Mal’s room. He was waiting for you, but when you didn’t show, he left.”

“Wait, what?” I ask, reclaiming my seat by lifting Alisa up and lowering her on my lap. The need to hold her is too strong so I’m grateful when she stays.

Corinne explains how Juan busted his way into her condo and forcing her to call me. I’m amazed at her courage in escaping from Mal’s room and then waiting to keep me from entering a trap. My stress rockets up a notch when she describes how she found Trouble, and through him, our clubhouse.

“How did you know I was part of an MC?” I ask her.

“I saw you at 1% when I met a client at Blacktop for a meeting.” Corinne explains. “I saw you walking through the lobby and could tell you were a regular by how everyone greeted you. I asked our server about you and he explained how the MC owns the casino and that you are the President of the MC. When I tried to find you today, I followed a couple of guys wearing kutties hoping they’d lead me to you.”

“I take it you are the one she followed?” I ask Trouble and he nods.

“She tried to tell me that Malik was in some kind of danger. It took me too long to

realize she was talking about you. That's when I brought her here."

"Juan ran out of the building while you were waiting for me to arrive?" I ask her and she nods.

"He was in a hurry and talking to someone on the phone." Corinne explains. "I think he realized we escaped."

"No, I don't think he thought about you again after locking you both up in Mal's room." Trouble says. "I had a couple of my guys go to your place and check it out. The door to the condo was wide open, but Mal's door was shut and locked."

"Then why...?"

"He got word that someone grabbed me." I say, considering the implications.

"What do you mean?" Alisa asks. "You don't think he set you up?"

"If he set me up to be captured before I got to the condo, then he wouldn't have been waiting at the condo for me to show. I didn't ask Josef, but I bet them finding me and grabbing me was serendipitous."

Trouble snorts.

"What?"

"Look at you using big words. I thought the only words you knew were 'fuck' and 'asshole'."

"Fuck you, asshole." I say, grinning. "I know other words, but most of the time, those are the only ones I need."

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“Getting back on topic.” Alisa says, smirking at our by-play. “If Juan didn’t orchestrate your kidnapping, then somehow he found out about it. That’s why he left the condo. He knew you weren’t coming.”

“Right.” I agree. “Josef has a mole.”

“Are you going to tell him?” Alisa asks.

I nod slowly. “Yeah, I am, because I think it would be in all of our best interests if we weren’t the only ones out looking for Juan.” I lock eyes with Alisa and she smiles at me. I know discovering how close Juan got to her without her knowledge terrifies her. As her father’s head of security, John could have grabbed her and Elina any time he wanted. Which makes me wonder why he didn’t.

“Dad’s talking to Spark about getting more information about Juan and John. Maybe he’ll identify Josef’s mole.”

I nod. “Maybe.” I look at Corinne. “In the meantime, you can’t go back to your condo. Not with Juan out there. You’ll stay here.” When Alisa jabs me in the gut with her elbow, I turn my attention from Corinne to her. I have to stop myself from rubbing the spot. “What the fuck, woman?”

“She isn’t wearing a kutte. You can’t just order her to stay here.” Alisa says, turning from me to Corinne. When I look at Corinne, I can see the argument forming in her eyes. “He’s used to giving orders and not making requests. But he is right. We would very much like you to stay here in the clubhouse. At least until these guys find the man who forced you to make that call. He’s still out there and he knows he can use

you to get to Puma.”

I nod my head. “She’s right. You are in danger. So is Mal.”

“If you want to go back to your condo, I’ll station my men outside to protect you.” Trouble offers, causing me to stiffen. I’m about to interrupt, but he continues. “However, you’ll be safer here. Puma’s crew will protect you both. Better than any army.”

Corinne glances at everyone and I can tell she’s feeling trapped and manipulated into agreeing with us, so I up the ante. “Corinne, I’d really like the opportunity to get to know my son. If you stay here, you’ll both be safe and I can spend time with him.”

Corinne sighs, but nods. “You’re right. I want you to know Mal and for him to get to know you. But I need to go back to my condo to get my laptop and pack a few things for us both.”

I smile at her. “Thanks. I need to meet with my crew and then I’ll take you to your place.”

“How about I take her?” Trouble offers. “That way you can have Church and Corinne and Mal will be settled by the time you’re done?”

CHAPTER SIX: ALISA

“I’ll go with you.” I tell Corinne and Trouble. “Let me check with Diego, see if he and Desdemona can watch the kids.”

“I can bring Mal with us.” Corinne protests. I share a look with Trouble.

“It’s safer for Mal to stay here.” I tell her.

“You’re used to doing everything all on your own.” Trouble adds. “This place is full of people who are more than willing to help you and Mal. You’re going to have to get used to accepting help. If you don’t, you’ll hurt their feelings. And it’s really a sad sight when bikers pout.”

His words have the right effect. He has Corinne and I both laughing.

“I hate to say he’s right, but he’s right.” I tell her. “Most of these guys are just big kids and they love having the little ones around so they can play without the ridicule.”

Corinne smirks. “Well, we can’t have that. Ok. I can drive. Are you coming with us or riding your bike?” She asks Trouble.

“Darling, you drive a Mini Cooper. I wouldn’t fit. Besides, we bikers always ride unless we can’t. And it has to be a fucking good reason.”

“We can take one of the club’s SUVs.” I tell her. “There’s more room, so you can bring everything you need. I’ll grab a couple of prospects, so we have some help. Let’s go check on the kids and then we can go.”

Corinne and I find Desdemona and my father playing Go Fish with the kids.

“We’re taking Corinne back to her place so she can pack a few things for their stay.” I tell them.

“We’re staying here?” Mal asks his mom, whooping for joy when she nods yes. “We’re staying here, Elina. Maybe we can watch another movie later?”

“We were thinking of taking the kids outside to the playground.” Desdemona says. “We didn’t want to interrupt your discussion.”

“I don’t want to cause any problems...” Corinne starts, but I interrupt her.

“Start letting them step in and help. I know it’s hard. Believe me. Took me several days before I felt comfortable letting Elina run around without following her every footstep.”

“Isn’t that the truth?” Showtime chimes in as she joins us. “She thought we were all hooligans, ready to corrupt Elina.” She winks at Elina, who giggles.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“And I was right.” I tell her, turning to Elina. “How many bowls of ice cream have you had today?”

Elina grins at me and glances slyly at Showtime. “Only two.”

Corinne laughs as I shake my head. “Honestly, Corinne. The only thing you need to worry about regarding Mal is how much they’ll spoil him.”

“Puma said you needed help from a couple of prospects.” Showtime says. “Mad Max is getting the SUV. Between the two of us, we’ll have you packed and back here before they’re done with Church.”

“I take it Church isn’t what I’m thinking, is it?” Corinne asks as Max drives through the gate with Trouble riding behind us.

“If you’re thinking a priest is in there giving a sermon, then no, that’s not what Church means.” I tell her. “It’s what they call their club meetings.”

Corinne nods. “That makes more sense. I guess I have much to learn about the biker lifestyle.”

“If you have questions, just ask.” I tell her. “I’ve only been here for a few weeks, so I don’t know everything about the lifestyle. Even though I was married to a biker.”

“Elina’s father was a biker?” Corinne asks.

“No. He was in the military and died overseas before Elina’s first birthday. She

doesn't remember him." I say. My heart breaks a little, knowing Matteo will never see his little girl grow up.

"So, who was the biker?" Corinne asks before her eyes go large. "Oh my god, did he die, too? I'm so sorry."

I smile and shake my head. "No, his name is Scar. He's still alive. Our marriage wasn't real." I sigh because I can't really explain about Scar without giving her the background about Juan. "This is a long story, but I'll try to give you the short version. When I was married to Matteo, Elina's father, a very dangerous man, decided he wanted me. When Matteo died, he went to my father to make a deal that included marriage to me. My father stalled him and helped convince Scar to marry me, to protect Elina and me. Scar was Matteo's and my best friend, so he agreed. The two of us are like brother and sister, so it was a marriage in name only."

"You said was. So, you're no longer married?" Corinne asks.

"We had an agreement. If one of us found somebody, we'd annul the marriage." I tell her.

"You found Puma?"

I laugh. "No. Well, yes, but no. Scar found someone. Her name is Caitlin, and she's the sweetest person you could ever meet. He adores her. Puma invited me to come to Vegas to keep me off Juan's radar. I'm grateful that he's given me a place to hide."

"Aren't you two together?" Corinne asks.

Not knowing how to answer, I shrug. "I don't really know how to describe our relationship." I say, then shoot a dirty look at Showtime when she snorts. "What?"

“Sorry, girl. I love you, but you’re an idiot if you don’t think Puma has claimed you.” She says. “You and Elina are even more important to him than the club.”

I frown, because that can’t be true. “I admit Puma cares about us, but...”

“No buts.” Showtime insists. “Why do you think he’s mimicking Dante and moving the club further away from the grey area?” She glances at Corinne. “Now that he knows about Mal, my guess is he’ll move faster.”

“Showtime.” Max protests, sending her a disapproving look. “You can’t discuss club business.”

Showtime waves her hand at him. “No details. I’m just saying that Puma is always thinking about you and how to protect you. Especially from Sal’s whacked out son. He’ll be working harder now that he has Mal. Especially since Juan knows about Mal.”

Corinne frowns, and I realize she missed the connection. “Juan was the man who forced his way into your apartment. He’s the one that made you call Puma.”

Corinne’s eyes grow wide as she takes in my words. “Does that mean Juan knows you’re here in Vegas under Puma’s protection?”

I nod. “I think so, either that, or he thought he could use Puma to find me. Juan knows about the Demon Dawgs. He was working for my father under an assumed name. When my uncle kidnapped my father, Juan got us out of Yuma and took us to Scar in San Diego.”

“Why did he do that?” Showtime asks. “I’m surprised he didn’t use the opportunity to kidnap you.”

I nod slowly because I've been wondering about that as well. "At the time, I was married to Scar. Juan may be a violent sociopath, but he's also a devout Catholic. He may have been waiting for an opportunity to kill Scar and leave me a widow, like he did with Matteo."

"Wait. Juan killed your husband?" Corinne asks and I nod.

"He died overseas, but I know Juan set him up. I don't know how, but Matteo's squad, including Scar, believes someone manipulated the situation to ensure Matteo's death. The only person who has the connections to make it happen is Juan."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“That’s messed up.” Showtime says, and I nod in agreement.

“Yeah it is.”

“You said Puma is working with Juan’s father.” Corinne states. “How does that work?”

Showtime and I share a look. “I think you need to ask Puma that question.” I tell her. “It’s club business. A term you will hear ad nauseam. It can be a little frustrating for those of us who hear it, but it helps to keep in mind that they aren’t keeping secrets to feed their egos. Although, sometimes I think their egos play a bigger part than they’ll admit.” I amend, causing Showtime to snort and Max to shake his head. “Mostly, it’s for our protection and theirs. As you spend more time with Puma, you’re likely to learn more about the club. They’ll protect you with their lives, but that means you have a responsibility to them as well. You need to protect them, and the best way to do that is to limit how much you know so the authorities can’t use you against them.”

Corinne nods as we pull up to her condo. Upon entering, my first impression is that Corinne created a lovely home for her and her son. I could imagine her and Mal eating at the small bistro table or snuggling on the brightly colored couch. The whole space is bright and cheery. The hardwood floors are a warm, honey color and the walls a soft coral. I can’t help but smile when I enter Mal’s Spiderman-themed bedroom. The room has more clutter than the rest of the space, but I have to admit, it’s neater than Elina’s room. Elina can’t seem to play unless she has multiple projects in play. She likes to bounce between dolls, Legos, drawing and reading. While Mal looks like he focuses on one activity at a time.

“How much should I pack?” Corinne asks.

“I’d say a week’s worth. Just to be safe.” Showtime says. “We can always come back and get more. If you need anything, one of us prospects can run to the store or even come back here to get it.”

“What about toys?” Corinne asks me.

“Bring Mal’s favorites, but believe me, we have plenty of toys for kids. Puma buys Elina at least one new thing a week. He spoils her rotten. So I imagine he’ll want to do the same for Mal. What does he like to do the most?”

“He loves to read and play with Legos.” Corinne says, pulling a few books off his shelf and putting them in a satchel. She eyes the stack of Lego sets and sets aside a few to take with us.

“Brilliant.” I tell her. “Puma loves to read to Elina. He’s going to be thrilled to have another kid to read to.”

“We have a ton of children’s books at the clubhouse.” Showtime adds. “We didn’t have a single one until Elina showed up. Now we all buy books whenever we see one we think she’ll like. I know I’ve yet to read the same book twice.”

“Do you watch Elina often?” Corinne asks.

Showtime nods. “I do.”

“Because you’re a woman?” Corinne pries, but her question makes Showtime laugh.

“Not at all. Elina is our princess. Protecting her is the most important job in the club. I have to fight off the other prospects.”

CHAPTER SEVEN: PUMA

I have to pull my thoughts away from Corinne and Mal and focus on my brothers. My club. I can't decide how I feel about Corinne and her keeping Mal away from me all this time. I go over her story in my head and I can't find fault with how she handled things. No matter how much I want to. The truth is, I played fast and loose on and off the court. While I was just looking for a good time, a chance to blow off some steam, some of those women had been looking for a meal ticket. I had people who protected me from them. People who knew every trick and story that the women might use to get past my defenses.

I never considered how they'd keep me from learning about my son.

"Ok, everyone shut up." I call out as I slam the gavel down. I don't have to yell. Not only are the guys ready to hear what I have to say, but my voice carries. Sometimes it's a blessing, sometimes a curse. Hell, what am I saying? I like I don't have to yell to get attention. "As most of you know, I disappeared for a while today. The story is long and convoluted, so shut the fuck up and listen. I don't want to repeat myself."

I look every member in the eye before I start with what I think is the most important piece of information. "It turns out I have a son. His name is Mal. He's five. You'll recognize him because he has my eyes." I smile when I hear snickers flow into the room. "He and his mother will stay with us for a while. Her name is Corinne. I want everyone to know that she didn't keep Mal's existence from me on purpose. I met her when I played ball. It was a one-night stand. When she reached out to tell me she was pregnant, my manager intercepted her. She tried again after my accident and she met with the same wall. I don't want anyone here giving her a hard time. Got it?" I look at every patched member and wait for their nod of agreement. The only one who hesitates is Chill. Which isn't a surprise. "Chill?"

She doesn't hide her displeasure, which is one reason I made her my SOA. The other

is that she doesn't trust anybody unless they're wearing a Demon Dawgs' kutte. "You already know I don't like her." Chill says with no remorse or hesitation. "She set you up."

"She did." I agree, which has everyone shifting in their chairs before I scowl at them. "But she had no choice. A man broke into her apartment and threatened their lives. She did what had to do, to protect her child. To protect my son. She escaped and put herself in a position to stop me from walking into a trap." I glance at Chill, who shrugs, which is as close to an apology as I'm likely to get. "She also got a photo of the man who broke in." I nod at Spark, who hits his keyboard to display Juan's photo. "For those who haven't heard the rumor that I'm certain is flying around the clubhouse, this is Juan Gutierrez, Sal's youngest son, the man who's after Alisa and Elina."

"He also goes by the name of John Spada." Spark adds. "He worked for a time as Diego's head of security."

"Should we get Diego in here?" Wildcard asks, and I nod. I want to hear what he knows about the man obsessed with my woman.

"Hold on, VP." Spark says before glancing at me. "Alisa and Diego brought this to my attention, so I've been doing some digging. I think I have all the information we need. We can bring Diego in if you have questions I can't answer."

I frown at Spark, unsure of why he's hesitating to bring Diego into Church, but I nod in agreement. I can find out later. "What do you have?"

"Ok. First, John Spada exists, but this isn't him." Spark says, hitting a key to split the screen in order to display a second image. Both men are similar enough that I can see how easy it would have been for Juan to pretend to be him. "John was in the military. He was a marine who worked in logistics. He left the Marines three years ago after a

mistake lead to the death of one of their own. Matteo Luna.”

“Alisa’s husband and Elina’s father.” I state. “I know Scar and Laser looked into Matteo’s death because Laser figured out someone intentionally stationed away him from the action.” Laser was a Marine sharpshooter who often looked out after the men on the ground by taking out threats. But during the attack that left Matteo dead, he’d been on top of the wrong building. They originally thought it had been an oversight, a mistake. But when Laser returned to the town where the attack took place, he realized that the assigned location of his nest was not just away from the action but as far away as he could get and still be in the same town, plus obstacles stood between him and Matteo’s location. It couldn’t have been a coincidence.

“They didn’t uncover who made the mistake?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“No, they didn’t. It was all buried so deep that they couldn’t have dug it out without help. I still have some contacts, so I got the actual findings.” Spark was former military intelligence, so saying he has connections is like saying Elon Musk has some cash. “There were only two people who could have changed the orders, sending Laser to the wrong location. One of them was John Spada. The other was Matteo’s CO, a man called Richard Torco. By the time they investigated Matteo’s death, Richard had died in the line of duty.”

“So no way of knowing who screwed up or, more than likely, who set Matteo up?” Chill asks and Spark nods.

“However, I think we all know that Spada more than likely did the deed, and Juan paid him off by killing him and stealing his identity.” Spark says.

“But Juan isn’t the one who captured me.” I say. “Corinne took his photo because she was waiting for me to arrive, and she saw him leave. Based on the timing, I’m guessing Juan found out that I wasn’t coming.”

“Who grabbed you?” Rush asks. He’d been busy picking up our take and hadn’t known I’d gone missing until they found me.

“Josef Gutierrez.” I tell them. “Seems like someone planted a bomb in Sal’s car so he thought I was looking to kill Sal.”

“Why the fuck would you kill Sal?” Wildcard asks, and I shrug.

“What a dumb shit. If you wanted Sal dead, you’d kill him face to face.” Chill adds

and I laugh.

“Yeah, that’s what I told Josef.” I admit. “I guess the bomb got someone, just not Sal. The victim was Josef’s friend. Best friend from what he said. So I cut him slack for being stupid with grief.”

“You should have made him bleed.” Chill says bitterly.

“I gut punched him and I’m sending him a bill for my bike.” I remind her. “I don’t want to piss Sal off, at least not until I can talk to him about Juan.”

“Who do you think is gunning for Sal?” Wildcard asks. “Or do you think anyone is after him? Sal always has a driver who picks him up. He’s never in a car when it starts.”

“I mentioned that to Josef. Because I don’t think whoever planted that bomb was after Sal. According to Josef, the usual driver was in the hospital.” I look at Spark. “Might want to follow up on that. Find out what you can about the attack.”

Spark nods.

“Are we looking for the bomber?” Chill asks.

“Might have to. If someone takes out Sal, it disrupts our business. But that’s not the only reason I want us looking into this. Juan knew Josef grabbed me. Either Josef is working with Juan or Josef has a spy.”

“Do we care if Josef has a traitor?” Dice, our Enforcer, asks.

“We care about anyone who is helping Juan.” I say. “He isn’t getting his hands on Alisa or Elina.”

“Any word on Flame?” Wildcard asks, and I shake my head.

“Last I heard, he was in surgery. Reaper or Dante will let us know if there is a change.” I tell them. “Spark, get with Diego and get all you can from him about how Juan ended up working for him as John Spada.” Once Spark acknowledges my request, I glance around the room. “Anything else?” When no one speaks up, I slam down the gavel to dismiss Church.

When I learn the women aren’t back yet, I head to my office. I’m going over the books when someone pounds on my door. I smirk because I only know one person who feels confident enough to demand entrance. Rising from my seat, I open the door to find two little imps wanting my attention.

“You hammered?” I ask Elina, who grins at me as she pushes past me, dragging a wide-eyed Mal behind her.

“We need to talk.” Elina says, climbing on my couch and patting the seat next to her to let Mal know he should join her. He glances at me as if asking permission, and I have to hide my grin when Elina slaps the seat harder to get his attention. With a quick look at me, he climbs up next to her.

“What do I owe this pleasure?” I ask as I sit down across from them.

“Mal has a question for you.” She says, looking at Mal, whose eyes grow even larger as he turns his attention from her to me.

I give Mal a smile as I lean forward just enough to make eye contact. I hope I’m appearing less intimidating, but I don’t think I’m succeeding. “You have a question for me, Mal? It’s ok, you can ask me anything you want.”

Mal glances at Elina, who encourages him with a nod. He gulps as he turns back to

me. When he still doesn't speak, Elina loses what little patience she has and asks for him. "He wants to know if you're really his father." I lock eyes with Elina and try to give her a disapproving look, but I should know better. Elina is our club princess, and she knows it. "What? I'm trying to help." She tells me, and it is all I can do to keep from laughing at her response.

I shift my attention back to Mal. "Is that what you wanted to ask me?"

When he nods, I have to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from smiling at Elina's look of smug satisfaction.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ALISA

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

When we return to the clubhouse, I show Corinne the suite of rooms where she and Mal can sleep. I chose rooms near Elina's and mine because the two are fast becoming friends. Once all the boxes and bags are in the right rooms, Corinne and I go hunting for our children. I expect to find them in the game room, but I only find Diego and Spark deep in conversation.

"Where are Elina and Mal?" I ask Diego. He gestures toward the playhouse the guys built for Elina. It takes up an entire corner of the playroom. It's a castle with ladders and two rooms. Elina has a beanbag chair and her bookcase in one and a desk with a chair in the other. I glance inside and don't see them.

"They aren't in there." I tell Diego, who strides over to check.

"They were." He protests.

"Where could they be?" Corinne asks and I can tell she's concerned.

"They're still in the clubhouse, so they're fine." I tell her, but I understand her worry. I was on edge the first weeks we came to live here until the guys showed me how aware they were of Elina.

"They snuck out of here about ten minutes ago." Spark says, proving my point. "I heard Elina tell Mal that she would take him to talk to Puma. He's in his office, so they're likely there, too."

I nod at Spark and shake my head at my father, who is standing with his mouth open. I love my father, but he doesn't always pay attention to his surroundings. But he, like

me, realized early on that Elina is always safe here.

“Come on, let’s go hunt them down.” I tell Corinne and lead the way to Puma’s office.

As we approach, I see his door is open a crack. I can hear Puma and Elina talking. I shake my head when I hear Elina’s imperious declaration that she’s helping. Elina is a great helper, whether or not you want that help. I hear Puma asking Mal a question. I move so I can see into Puma’s office, gesturing for Corinne to join me.

“Yes. I’m your father.” Puma says, causing Corinne to gasp. No one inside the room turns toward us, so I’m guessing they didn’t hear her. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I told him you were.” Elina says and I have to fight from rolling my eyes when she continues. “Everyone says that I have to be my mom’s daughter because I look just like her. Mal looks just like you.”

“How come I haven’t met you before?” Mal asks. I can hear the pain in his question and glance at Corinne, who looks sad and guilty. “Did you not want to meet me?”

Puma sighs and reaches out his hand to Mal. Mal looks at it before putting his smaller one into his. “I didn’t know about you. That’s the only reason we haven’t met before today. Your mom tried to tell me about you, but she couldn’t reach me.”

“Why?” Elina asks as Mal studies Puma’s face.

“Some people thought they were protecting me and wouldn’t let her talk to me. They made a mistake.” Puma tells him. “It isn’t your mom’s fault.”

Mal gives Puma a nod. “Ok.”

“You know, you and your mom are going to stay here for a few days, so we’re going to have plenty of time to get to know each other.” Puma says. “I, for one, can’t wait.”

He must have given Mal one of his smiles, because Mal smiles in return. I glance at Elina, who is looking at Corinne and me. She sticks her little thumb up in the air, which causes both Puma and Mal to glance our way. I hear Corinne give a watery chuckle as Puma stands to face us.

He glances at me and then at Corinne. “I hope I didn’t overstep...” He starts, but Corinne shakes her head.

“Of course you didn’t. Thank you. For everything.” She looks at her son. “You doing ok, my little man?”

He nods and moves toward her, but then stops and throws himself at Puma. Puma’s large hand covers the boy’s back. He kneels and hugs the boy. “We’re going to be great friends.” Puma tells him, and my heart does a small tumble, especially when I see the radiant smile on Mal’s face. I brush my hand against Corinne’s arm when I see her wiping away her tears.

“Why don’t we have some dinner?” I offer, holding my hand out to Elina, who slides off the couch to take it.

I lead everyone to the room we use as a dining room. Most of the men eat their meals in the common room, but I like to use the dining room when we’re eating with Elina. It gives meal time a little more normalcy. Before we fled Yuma, we’d always have dinner at the table. It makes me feel like a family again. When we get there, I find Desdemona cleaning off the table with Diego’s help.

“Let me help you.” I offer as I gather the paperwork I left on the table earlier. Desdemona and I are in the middle of planning a charity event and we’ve been using

the dining room as our makeshift office.

“What’s all this?” Corinne asks as she helps us while Puma and my dad take the kids to the kitchen to grab dinner.

“Alisa and I are planning a charity event.” Desdemona explains. “We’re trying to raise money for displaced families by having an art show. We’ve sold tickets and we’ll be auctioning off pieces.”

“The club’s casino, 1%, is hosting the event.” I tell Corinne. “We have a variety of artists contributing, including Desdemona. So, we have famous artists mixed in with a few amateurs. Like the woman I was telling you about earlier. The one who is with my ex-husband, Scar. Her name is Caitlin. She’s an amateur, but she has some beautiful pieces.”

“I think I saw an advertisement for the show. I didn’t realize it was a charity event.” Corinne adds.

“Would you like to come?” Desdemona asks.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“I would. And I would like to help, if I can.” Corinne offers.

“We can always use more help.” Desdemona smiles as the guys come back in carrying plates and bowls of food. Mal and Elina set the table while Diego and Puma set down the food.

“Corinne has offered to help us with the charity event.” I tell Puma, who frowns at the news.

“That’s good. We can use the help. This is a big event for us.” Diego says when Puma doesn’t speak up.

I look at Puma, who avoids making eye contact with me. He’s staring at his plate as he eats, with a few glances at Corinne as she discusses the event with Diego and Desdemona. I want to ask him what he’s thinking, but a glance at the kids has me deciding to wait until we’re alone.

Puma watches Mal and Elina arguing about which Marvel film is the best one while the rest of us discuss all the tasks that still need to be done for the event, including the tedious financial tasks. I may be an expert in party planning. While Desdemona is the art expert. We both struggle with tracking expenses and following up on donations.

“I can help with the financial tasks.” Corinne offers. “It’s what I do, so it wouldn’t be a problem. I can even help you find companies willing to match your contributions.”

“That would be amazing.” Desdemona gushes. “We definitely need the help and if we can earn even more money, we could help so many more people.”

As we discuss some companies that Corinne thinks will support our efforts, I notice both Mal and Elina drooping. I nudge Corinne with my foot and nod at the kids. She glances at them and grins at me.

“I think these two are ready for bed.” She says as she stands up and grabs her dish and Mal’s.

“I’ll get the dishes.” Diego offers as he takes the empty plates from Corinne. “Why don’t you bring Corinne up-to-date on the event?”

“And I’ll take them.” Puma adds, rising from the table. In a simple move, he has both kids resting in his arms, their little heads on his broad shoulders. I see my future in that image until I glance at Corinne and notice the wistful look on her face. “I’ll read to them and get them to sleep.” Puma says as he leaves us.

We do as the men suggest and sit pouring over the details of the event. After several yawns, Corinne pushes away from the table. “I should go check on Mal and get some sleep. Today has been exhausting.” She pauses for a minute. “Can you give me directions...”

Desdemona laughs as she stands up. “I’ll show you. It can be a maze, but you’ll figure it out soon enough.”

I wish both of them a good night before heading to the bar to grab two beers, one for me and one for Puma. As I head for Puma’s room, I hear his rumble and move toward the sound. Glancing into Mal’s room, I see her engulfed in Puma’s arms. His chin resting on her head. I feel my heart crack as I take in how stunning they look together. I’m of average height, but Corinne is several inches taller than me. She’s a much better match for Puma’s height. When you add in their coloring, they look like a masterpiece sculpture ready for display at the finest museum.

“He’s an amazing kid.” Puma murmurs to her. “You did a wonderful job. I’m sorry, I wasn’t there to help.”

“I don’t blame you. I always felt like I should have done more to reach you.” Corinne tells him.

“I’m here now. You won’t be alone again.”

His words, and the warmth in them, break me. With a hole in my chest, I leave them alone. Ever since meeting Puma, I’ve been walking a tightrope. Terrified of falling in love with him, but unable to stop myself. I’ve pushed him away so often. Not once did I consider he might find a new love, or an old one. I also never considered how much it would hurt when he did.

I consider going to my room, but decide against it. Part of me is afraid he’ll find me and the other part is afraid he won’t come looking. I should be happy for him. He has the family he’s always wanted. A family that is all his.

I push open the back door and step outside. The air is cooler but still warm enough that I won’t need a jacket. Good, because I don’t want to go back inside to get one. Since we use the area for barbecues, we have several picnic benches spread out. I move to the furthest one and take a seat on the top, settling my feet on the bench. Opening the bottle, I take a long swig and wish I had brought a bottle of whiskey instead.

Glancing at the sky, I revel in the night's quiet. It’s the calm I need for my chaotic mind. Juan is back, and that thought alone is enough to make me want to crawl under the table and blubber. Will his attack on Corinne and Mal be the final straw for Puma? Will Puma want me to leave? Juan knows I’m here, which makes it stupid for me to be outside. If he ever found me...

“Alisa.” His voice sends a jolt through me. How did he sneak up on me?

CHAPTER NINE: PUMA

I carry the little ones to the playroom so they can pick a book for me to read to them. But instead of crawling into the castle to select one, Elina pulls me over to the couch.

“Can you tell us the story of the biker princess?” Elina asks. I smile at the little girl who owns my heart just as much as her mother does. She takes her spot on my lap.

“Maybe Mal doesn’t want to hear that story.” I tell her, looking over at my son, who climbs up on the couch to sit on my other leg. Good thing I’m a big guy. They both have plenty of room to get comfortable.

“I want to hear it.” Mal says. “Elina says she’s a biker princess and since I’m your son, I’m a biker prince.”

“That’s true.” I say, thinking about the story I made up for Elina when she first arrived at our clubhouse. It was a story about a beautiful and charming little girl who captures the hearts of a group of rough bikers. Maybe it’s time to revisit the story and include a biker prince.

“Once there was a small but great desert kingdom. It was ruled by a strong and dashing king named Puma. Puma was a fortunate man because he had great friends, but he was still lonely. One day, a beautiful queen came to visit with her daughter. The king and his followers soon realized that the queen and the princess brought something they were all missing. Joy. Soon all the knights in the land bowed before the Biker Princess because she brought so much happiness to their world. But the Biker Princess had to carry a heavy load, keeping all the knights happy. She needed help, but not just anyone could take on the task. It had to be someone very special. One day, a young man escaped from the clutches of a terrible ogre in order to find the

King and warn him of danger. Because this young prince risked so much to help the King, he proved he was a true Biker Prince.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

I elaborate on the gallant escapades of the Biker Prince and Princess until I see two sets of eyes droop and feel two tiny bodies relax into me. I sit this way for a few minutes, just reveling in the feeling of peace they bring me. This day has been one of the longest I've ever known, but I would gladly live through it again only for this moment. To have my son in my arms. I know we have to make up for lost time. We need to get to know each other. But for now, I'm just happy he's in my life.

I juggle the kids as I stand, careful to keep from waking them. Once I deposit Elina into her bed, taking a few minutes to rub her back until she settles again, I take Mal to his room. After I tuck him in, I glance around the room. It's a regular club room, similar to a hotel room, but with even less personality. I need to fix that. Mal needs to have a room that he can claim as his own. Not for the first time, I consider following Dante's lead. He and his crew are building homes behind their clubhouse for their members. Hell, they're building their own subdivision. I realize I want that, a real home for my family.

Throughout my career, I've owned many houses, but I've never had one that I called home. Not until coming to the Demon Dawgs and moving into the clubhouse. And while the Demons are my family, I want something more.

I turn to leave and see Corinne standing just inside the door, watching me.

"You're a natural." She says, smiling at me.

"I've had some practice with Elina." I see a sadness cross her face and I want to kick myself for being insensitive. But I shake it off. I can't change the past. If I'd known about Mal, I would have been there for him and his mother.

“She’s a firecracker.” Corinne says, chuckling. “I don’t think I’ve ever met a five-year-old with that much confidence.”

I smirk because she’s not wrong. “She’s surrounded by love. I can’t really get into her and Alisa’s story, but she’s always had the support of tough men.”

“Alisa told me some of what she went through. That the man today is obsessed with her.”

I nod, glad Corinne knows the story. I’d never betray Alisa by telling her story. But I was worried about potential problems if Corinne discovered the whole truth about her attacker later on. “I’m glad she told you. She’s a good person and doesn’t deserve the problems he’s caused her.”

“You love her?” Corinne asks.

I grin. “I have since we first met.”

“She’s lucky.” Corinne says, turning sad eyes to her sleeping son.

“I am sorry I wasn’t there for you. That you had to do it all on your own.” I tell her, brushing her arm. “But know this: you don’t have to worry about being alone any longer. I’ll be there for you. Hell, the entire club will be there.”

“You aren’t mad?” Corinne whispers, tears making her eyes brighter.

I pull her into my arms and stroke her back. “I’m not mad. Am I upset that I missed out on the first five years of his life? Of course. But I’m not mad at you. I know you tried to reach out to me and I know why you couldn’t reach me. I can’t even be mad at Brock for keeping us apart. My life was different back then, and he did what he had to do to protect me. But all that is in the past. I’m hoping we can start again. As

friends. Because I want both of you in my life now.”

Corinne backs away and gives me a smile. “I’d like that. Thank you.”

I leave her to tuck in her son and go looking for my woman. When I don’t find her in either my room or hers, I wander through the clubhouse. With each room I check, I feel a sense of dread take hold. Especially since no one seems to have seen her. My last stop is Spark’s domain.

“Have you seen Alisa?” I ask him, knowing he has eyes all over the compound.

“She went outside a few minutes ago.” He tells me. “Back door.”

I make my way back through the clubhouse to the door leading to our picnic area. Why would she be out here? I don’t realize how dark the area is until I glance around and can’t see past the picnic benches. When I turn to go back inside, I see her. She’s sitting at the furthest table. Alone.

“Alisa.” She jerks and turns toward me. I realize I’ve startled her. Even though I want to be mad at her for not paying attention to her surroundings, I see the sorrow on her face and immediately change tactics. I take a seat next to her and pull her hand into mine. “What are you doing out here, babe?”

“Thinking.” She says, handing an unopened beer bottle to me. I crack it open and take a long pull before pressing her for more details.

“About what?” I prod.

“Corinne is a beautiful woman.” She says. “She’s a wonderful mom.”

I nod in agreement because both statements are true. “She is. Is that a problem?”

“You two look good together.”

Realization dawns on me. Alisa must have seen me with Corinne. I can't help but feel a small level of satisfaction that she's jealous, but mostly I just want to laugh. Hugging Corinne felt like I was hugging Reaper's mom. My sister. Alisa is the only one who gets my blood revving. The feel of her skin against my arm and her scent has me rock hard and ready to go.

“Jealous, baby?” I ask. When she shrugs, I shift off the table to stand in front of her. “You have no reason to be jealous. I promise. I haven't thought of Corinne since the night she conceived Mal. She was just one of many. A diversion. Before joining the Demons, I was pretty selfish and very self-centered. I didn't care about anything or anybody.”

“You trying to convince me that you aren't worth my time?” She asks with a smirk.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

I bark out a laugh and shake my head. “No, smart ass. Will you just shut up and listen?”

“You could just get to the point.”

“Always busting my balls.” I say, shaking my head in mock disgust. When truthfully, I love how she stands up to me. “When I joined the Demons, I finally realized how lonely living a life only for yourself can be. The Demons showed me how much better life is if you’re working as a family for a common goal. But it wasn’t until I met you and Elina that I finally felt fulfilled and whole. I need you in my life. You and Elina. I love the club, but you are the reason I get up in the morning. You are the reason I bust my ass to make the club successful. I love these guys, but my feelings for you go beyond love. You are the reason for every breath I take.”

Alisa raises her hand to cup my cheek and the heat of her touch goes straight to my cock. My skin tingles and heats when she stares into my eyes. “I love you, too, Puma, with everything I have.”

Leaning forward, I capture her mouth and plunder it. My tongue battles with hers. She tastes like the beer she’s drinking and a spicy flavor that is all hers. A flavor that shoots through my veins. I want to shake my head at the absurdity of Corinne and me being a good match, because the only person who can light my fire is this woman.

I don’t break the kiss as I nudge her knees apart so I can slide between them. I nuzzle her until she’s laying flat before me like a banquet. My desire spikes as I slide my hands up her smooth thighs. Ripping off her damp panties, I raise them to my nose and breathe in deep. Nothing smells as good as my woman’s arousal. It’s like a drug.

A craving that I have no control over. With a growl, I bury my face in her luscious pussy. She coats my tongue as I lick her folds, trying to gather every drop. I hear her mewls of pleasure and I growl in response. This goddess has the power to turn me into a mindless beast with only one reason for living: her.

She screams when I plunge my finger into her core and again when I bite down on her nub. Her body shakes under my hands as I work her up and through her first orgasm. But one is not enough. Not nearly enough. Sliding two fingers into her as I bite down on her leg has another one building. Curving my finger until she detonates. My finger and thumb stroke her sensitive spots as I watch her shatter beneath me. Alisa is my exotic beauty, but seeing her face alight with pleasure under the glow of the moon is like seeing all the beauty of nature in one place.

Unable to ignore the pain of my cock fighting to escape my jeans, I release him. Pulling Alisa's body toward mine, I line up my dick and send him home. Alisa and I let out simultaneous growls of pleasure as our bodies fuse. Alisa loves it hard and rough, which fits me perfectly. Pounding into her, the sounds of our bodies coming together echoes off the trees. Our labored breaths filter through the branches and over the ground. Filling the silent night with our passion. I'm no longer in control of my body as her pussy clamps around me. I watch her face transform as her orgasm rips through her. With her body still shaking, I slam once more into her and roar through my own.

CHAPTER TEN: ALISA

Sex with Puma is like being caught in a hurricane. I have lost all sense of time and I can't even remember where I am. Not until I shift and feel the hard table against my back. I know I'll have bruises, maybe even a few splinters, but right now I couldn't care less. My body tingles with the aftermath.

"Fuck, woman." Puma growls as he pulls out of me. I groan at the loss of him. Even

spent, Puma's dick fills me up. "I've got to get you inside so I can get you naked."

I shoot up into a sitting position and glance around. "Puma! We shouldn't have done this out here." I protest, thinking of Spark or anyone with access to the cameras. "The cameras..."

"I'm sure Spark turned them off." Puma says with a shrug. "If not, I'll kill him."

I shake my head and cover my face. "Oh, my god. You will not kill him. You need him. Do you really think he saw us... doing that?"

Puma shrugs again as he gives me a blazing smile that has my pussy tingling again. "I'm kind of hoping he recorded it. I wouldn't mind watching the replay."

When I smack his chest, he grabs my hand and, in a swift move, he tosses me over his shoulder before smacking my ass. "Come on baby, I want to fuck you again and then I need some sleep. It has been a long fucking day."

An hour later, I lay in bed with Puma's massive body surrounding me with his strength and warmth. I'm tired, because damn the man can wear me out. But I can't shut off my brain. Until I met Puma, I believed that Elina's father had been my soulmate. That I would never find another man to love as much as I loved him. Meeting Puma was a jolt to my system and my belief. When he arrived at the San Diego Demon Dawg clubhouse in time to rescue Kingsley from a poor hostage attempt, it was like seeing a mythological creature come to life. There was no way this perfect specimen was human. Later, when we locked eyes, I felt his power claim me. I was like a mouse trapped by a cobra. Even though I fought my feelings for him, Puma was an unrelenting force. One that I could never escape. Even if I wanted to. Which I don't. Even though I'm terrified of losing him like I did my Matteo.

I should have known after the day we had that I would have nightmares. I jolt awake,

sweat pooling on my skin as I try to shake the vision of Puma's lifeless body riddled with bullets. It doesn't help to find I'm alone in his bed. I hear the shower and I know exactly what I need to make myself feel better. Since I'm already naked, I slide into the bathroom and slip into the shower. Puma stands under the spray, the water cascading over his glorious body, following the lines of his defined muscles. His golden brown eyes track my movement as I slide to my knees in front of him. Cupping his balls, I bend forward to take his cock in mouth, never breaking eye contact.

"Oh fuck, baby girl. If I'd known you were awake, I wouldn't have left the bed." Puma claims as he rests his hand on my hair. Since he has no problem palming a basketball, his hand engulfs my head, making me feel protected. I moan as I revel in his size and strength. He's like my own private army. "Damn, woman, I love your mouth." Puma says as his hips rock when I take him deep into my throat. I love having Puma in my mouth. He's almost too big, but he tastes divine. Just when I think he's close, he pulls his hips back and lifts me up. He slides into me as I grab hold of his shoulders. His fingers knead my ass as he pounds into me.

"Puma..." I need to warn him that I'm about to cum, but it's too late. The orgasm tears through me as I wrap my arms around him and I hang on for dear life as he follows me over.

I slide down his body and want to giggle. I don't know if it's the endorphins or my exhaustion, but knowing Puma is my personal slip and slide tickles me.

"I can feel you shaking." He says. "Are you laughing or crying?" He cups my face so he can see. "You're laughing." He says with a stern expression. "If I were a lesser man..."

That does it. I burst into laughter as I cling to his arms. I shake my head to clear it. "Baby, if you were a lesser man, I wouldn't have been laughing." I can tell he doesn't

understand and now that my giggle fit is over, I'm not sure I want to tell him. But the frown is too much. "I was thinking you were my personal slip and slide." I admit, and he shakes his head as he gives me a smirk.

"Did you have a shot of whiskey before you tracked me down?"

I wrap my hands around him and bury my face in his chest. "No. But I had a bad dream, so I'm actually grateful I could laugh."

I tell him about my dream, especially the ending as he washes my hair and my body. "Baby, I promise you, Juan will never get the jump on me."

I glance at him and shake my head. "You can't promise me that. Josef grabbed you off the street."

He nods slowly, and I can see him considering his words. "You're right. But that was before I knew Juan was in town and that he knows you're here. I won't go anywhere alone, I promise."

I nod at this because I know how hard it is for him to admit that he isn't indestructible. He likely still thinks it, because he's Puma, but he knows I needed to hear the promise.

"What are your plans today?" Puma asks after I give him a kiss of thanks.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“I thought I’d see if Corinne wants to go shopping for ways to make their rooms more homey.” I tell him. “They’re kind of like hotel rooms.” My breath whooshes out of me when Puma yanks me in for a hard hug. “Can’t breathe.” I squeak out.

He loosens his hold but continues to hug me. “Thank you for welcoming them.” He says, and I can hear the gratitude in his tone.

I chuckle as I move out of his arms. “Of course I’m welcoming them. He’s your son, and she’s his mother. How could I do anything else after the way you welcomed Elina and me into your life? You’re my everything and I accept you for who you were then, as well as for who you are now.”

“I know, and I love you for it.” Puma says as he leads me into the bedroom so we can dress.

“Take Showtime and Max Max with you.” Puma says as we head to Elina’s room.

She isn’t in her room, so I assume she’s already made her way to the kitchen. I love how comfortable she is in the clubhouse, but sometimes I worry she’ll see more than she should. The members and the bunnies have been careful to keep their bedroom activities in the bedroom. They don’t complain, but I wonder if they sometimes resent our presence. “Dante and his men are building homes for its members and their families.” I say, glancing up at Puma.

He nods. “I know. I’ve been thinking about doing something similar. Would you like me to build you a house, my queen?”

“Only if you’re going to live there, too, my king.” I reply with a grin, accepting his kiss.

“Does this mean you’re finally agreeing to be my Old Lady?”

The vision from my dream flashes through my mind. Puma lying dead and I shiver. “You know why I’ve always said no?” I ask him.

“Because you’re afraid Juan will target me if he knows about us?” Puma says and I nod. “But he is targeting me. The attack on Corinne proves that.”

“I know. It was something I thought about when I was sitting outside last night. I realize I was letting him win. Again. I was putting my life on hold because I’m afraid of him and what he’s capable of doing. I’m afraid of losing you.”

Puma pauses and pulls me around to face him. He uses his thumbs to wipe away the tears I didn’t realize were falling. “I know we already talked about this, but I’ll say it again. I’ll say it every day if you need to hear it. Having you, Elina, and now Mal in my life guarantees that I’m going to do everything in my power to come home to you. I wasn’t suicidal before, but I also never wanted to stay alive as much as I do right now.”

I smile at him before wrapping my arms around his waist and snuggling into him. “I know, which is why I plan to say yes the next time you ask me to be your Old Lady.”

“Fuck, yeah!” Puma bellows, causing everyone in the common room to come looking.

“What’s going on?” Wildcard asks.

“Alisa has agreed to be my Old Lady.” Puma announces. Shouts of congratulations

echo around, which gives me the opportunity to add a little sass.

“Technically, you haven’t asked me again.” I remind him with a cheeky grin.

“Don’t care. You’re mine.” Puma says with a smirk before he nuzzles my hair.

We accept congratulations as we pass through the common room and head for the kitchen. Inside, we find Elina and Mal eating a breakfast of eggs, bacon, pancakes, and toast while Desdemona and Lilly are busy making more.

“Good morning.” We both say as I head to grab Puma and me some food while he heads to the coffeemaker.

“What was all the noise about?” Desdemona asks.

“They’re just happy their President has an Old Lady.” Puma says grinning at me.

I see the confusion on Mal’s face, but it’s the look of sadness on Elina’s concerns me.

I carry our plates to the table and sit next to my daughter. “What’s the matter, baby?” I ask her.

“I wanted to be Puma’s Old Lady.” Elina says with a pout.

At a loss, I glance at Puma, who is studying my little girl.

He puts the mugs of coffee down on the table before lifting her up into his arms. She wraps her thin arms around his neck and stares into his face. “You know I love you and that you are my princess, right?” He asks. When she nods, he continues. “Well, I love your momma and I need to give her a title that shows how important she is to me.”

Elina glances at me. “You love Puma?” She asks me and I nod.

“With all my heart.” I tell her.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“Ok, she can be your Old Lady as long as I get still be your princess.”

“Sounds like a good deal.” Puma says, kissing her cheek before depositing her back into her chair.

“What am I?” Asks Mal.

Puma rubs his hand over his son’s head. “You are my son and, therefore, the prince. I thought we covered that last night.”

He smiles before turning to Elina.

“You can be my Old Lady.” Mal asks Elina.

I fight back my laughter as I share an amused look with Puma.

“Ok.” Elina accepts.

“This ought to be interesting.” Puma whispers to me as he digs into his breakfast.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: PUMA

“You don’t need to spend money on us.” Corinne protests as Alisa gets the kids buckled up in the SUV.

“I want you both to feel comfortable here since I don’t know how long you’ll have to stay.” I tell her. “Besides, I’m hoping Mal will want to come visit after you move

back into your condo. I want you to know that you're welcome to stay here, too."

Corinne glances at Alisa. "I don't want to cause problems between you and Alisa." She starts, but I stop her with a laugh.

"Alisa knows I love her. She's the one who suggested this shopping trip. She hopes you both will be in my life now that I know about Mal." When Corinne grimaces, I touch her arm. "None of that. No more guilt. We're friends. Hell, we're family. Ok?"

After she lets out a long breath, she gives me a small smile. "Family. Good. I like that."

"Speaking of which. Mal has taken Elina to be his Old Lady." When she gives me a look of confusion, I laugh. "Alisa can explain it to you."

As I watch Mad Max drive the SUV out of the gate, Wildcard comes outside. "Sal called. He'd like a meet at his warehouse."

"Do you know what it's about?"

"Probably wants to thank you in person for not killing his idiot son." Wildcard says and I bark out a laugh.

"Who's going?"

"Spark, Chill, and Dice are coming with us."

I nod and head to my bike. Twenty minutes later, we pull up to the warehouse where Sal keeps his main office in Vegas. He owns several warehouses throughout the city, including the one where Josef took me. This one was less of a warehouse because he'd converted most of the building into office space for his sons and himself. They

still stored items in the remaining storage space, but never anything illegal. While his other warehouses hold weapons and cocaine, here it is only art and antiques.

Sal and his bodyguards come outside to greet us before leading us into his inner sanctum.

“Thank you for not killing my son.” Sal begins as we take seats around the conference table. “He acted without talking to me first. If we hadn’t been out of town, this wouldn’t have happened. I penalized the boy and he’ll pay for any damage to your bike.”

“What about the attack on my son?” I ask him.

Sal frowns and I can tell by his expression that he doesn’t know what I’m talking about. “You have a son?” Sal asks and I nod.

“I didn’t know myself, not until yesterday. But someone in your family knows.” I explain to him about Corinne and Mal and how I was on my way to them when Josef grabbed me.

“Son of a bitch!” Sal explodes before pulling out his phone and bellowing into it. “Josef, get your ass in the conference room now!” He turns to me. “I swear I didn’t know about your son. I would never condone...”

I hold my hand up to assure him I don’t hold him accountable.

When the door opens, I watch Josef pale when his eyes land on me.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“Puma.” He says and I give him credit for swallowing his fear.

“Josef.” Sal glances at me, so I take the lead. “How did you know where to find me yesterday?”

He glances nervously at his father before answering me. “I got a tip.” He admits.

I let out a snort loud enough to make him jump. “A tip from who?” I ask.

When he doesn’t answer immediately, Sal jumps in. “Answer him, and don’t even think about lying.”

Josef scowls, but he answers. “He’s the brother of my best friend. The one who died in the car bomb meant for my dad. John called me and told me he had proof that you had set the bomb. He had a plan for me to capture you so I could question you about the attack.”

I watch him for a few minutes, letting the silence build. I watch for any cracks, but they don’t come. Time to shake things up. “Your best friend’s brother is John Spada.” Even though I made it a statement rather than a question, Josef nods.

“We’ve known John and Greg Spada for most of their lives.” Sal adds. “My boys practically grew up with them. Greg was Josef’s best friend.”

“So, were Juan and John as close as you and Greg?” I ask.

Josef shrugs. “They were friendly, but no, they weren’t best friends. Why?”

I don't answer him right away, because I have a few more questions. "Did you actually speak with him?"

Josef opens his mouth, then closes it. "No, he texted me. Why?"

"Because it wasn't John who reached out to you." I tell him. "We believe John's dead and has been for quite some time. The person who contacted you took over his identity. This man broke into a woman's home yesterday and threatened her and her son. My son. He threatened them to set me up."

"How do you know it isn't the real John Spada?" Sal asks. I take out my phone and pull up the image I need. "They escaped and waited outside for me to arrive. She planned on warning me, but the man left before I arrived. She took this photo of him." I slide the phone over and hear both Sal and Josef gasp when they recognize the man.

"Juan?" Sal asks, looking at me. I nod. "How do you know he's been impersonating John?"

"Because for about a year, he worked as Diego's head of security. Both Diego and Alisa recognized him."

"So Diego and Alisa are with you?" Josef asks, and I glare at him.

"I don't wish them harm. I heard Dom bragging about running his brother out of town, so I wondered what happened to them."

"If Diego wants back in..." Sal starts, but I shake my head.

"I'll tell him, but I don't think he's interested. He's happy where he is, and they're both safer with me."

Sal nods.

“Why does Juan want Alisa so badly?” I ask Sal and Josef.

Josef shrugs.

“I don’t know.” Sal admits. “I’ve never understood his obsession with her.” When I growl, he gives me a small smile and shakes his head. “I’m sure Alisa is a desirable woman. It’s just he wanted her before he met her. I guess he could have seen her photograph and developed an obsession with her. But when he used to talk about her, he never mentioned his attraction for her. He only spoke about how she was key to his getting everything he’s ever wanted.”

“How?”

“He never said.” Sal turns to Josef. “Has he said anything to you or Junior?”

Josef shrugs. “The only thing he’s ever said is that one day we’ll be working for him.”

“Did you contact John when you grabbed me?” I ask him and he nods. So that’s one mystery solved. The traitor in Josef’s midst was Josef himself. “Have you heard from him since?”

Josef looks uncomfortable again, so I know I won’t like his response. “I tried reaching out to him. To tell him you weren’t the one who killed Greg. I can’t reach him.”

“Give me the number he was using and I’ll see what I can find.” Spark offers. “Do you have a way to contact Juan?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“I have his number.” Josef says, writing both numbers and handing Spark the piece of paper. “I haven’t spoken to Juan in several weeks.”

“Last I heard, Juan was still in Mexico. That’s obviously not the case.” Sal adds. “I had men watching him.” He turns to Josef. “Follow up with them and find out what happened. We need to track down your brother.”

“I know I already apologized...” Josef starts, but I wave him off.

“I get it. Your brother’s fooled several people. I just want to know his endgame.”

After Josef leaves, Sal turns to me. “We’ll search for Juan. If you find him first, I’m asking you not to kill him unless you have no choice.”

I study him and consider his request. He’s still a father and Juan is his son. Before I met Mal, I would have said no, but I can understand him better now. I’ve only known Mal for a day, but our interaction is enough to have me nodding my head in agreement. I imagine Sal is remembering the little boy rather than the man he has become.

“Thank you.” Sal says, closing his eyes in relief. Then the father is gone, and the businessman is back. “I have another request. Purely business.” He continues when I nod. “It’s about the charity event at 1%. I plan on making several purchases, and I want to hire your club to guard the transport until it reaches my warehouse.”

I consider his request. Most of my crew will be at the event. Those who aren’t protecting the women will protect the art, at least until the buyer claims their

property. They should have no problem switching over to protecting Sal's purchases. "We can do that." I tell him and he thanks me before walking us outside.

Before I have my helmet on, my phone buzzes.

"Puma." I answer, expecting to hear Corinne, since it's her number on the display.

"Boss, it's Showtime. We have a problem."

CHAPTER TWELVE: ALISA

"This is too much," Corinne says, yet again as we make our way through Bed, Bath and Beyond. I'm pushing one cart, which is overflowing with items for Mal's room, while Showtime is pushing a second, less full, for Corinne. When Showtime takes Mal and Elina to look at gaming chairs, I try to get Corinne to add more to her cart.

"Do you know how much money Puma has?" I ask her.

She looks at me and rolls her eyes. "No, but I don't want to spend it all today."

"You won't. Hell, you can't. He has more money than he needs. The most expensive thing he owns is that bike of his." I tell her. "When he played ball, he spent money on a whim. It surprised me to learn he still had any money left after his accident. But one thing the accident did was make him smarter about money. He rarely buys anything, unless it's for us or the club. This is important to him. He wants you and Mal to be comfortable at the club, or as comfortable as you can be."

"I understand, but I feel like I'm taking advantage of him. I don't want him to think that all I care about is the money." Corinne protests. "Not that I think there's anything between us." She says hurriedly when I narrow my eyes at her.

“I wasn’t thinking that.” I assure her. “Corinne, Puma knows you aren’t out to get his money. If all you cared about was money, you could have used Mal’s existence to bilk him for millions. Family means everything to Puma. He knows you could take Mal away. He hopes you won’t.”

“I would never take Mal away from him.” Corinne protests. “But I have a confession to make. It’s something I’ll tell Puma, too. I could have pushed harder to contact Puma. But I was afraid of losing Mal.”

My eyebrows fly up at her words. “You thought he’d try to take Mal away from you?” I can hear the anger in my tone and I know she hears it, too.

“Not really, no, but I was afraid of the possibility, of the risk. When I first found out I was pregnant, I tried to contact Puma. I wanted nothing from him, only thought he should know. After his manager turned me away, I waited. My plan was to wait until I after I gave birth to approach him again. I thought it would be easier to convince them with proof of his existence. But when I held Mal in my arms...”

“You considered all the ways you could lose him.” She nods when I finish her thought. “I get it. I do. Being a mother is rewarding, frustrating, amazing, and terrifying. The thought of losing our children is more painful than the thought of losing our own lives. I know Puma. He would never have behaved so callously. But I get not wanting to take the risk. For what’s worth, Puma feels nothing but gratitude that you had his son and that you’re willing to let him be a part of your life.”

“You’re amazing. I can see why he loves you so much.” Corinne says. “I hope you know I don’t want to cause problems between you. Not that I think I can.”

I smile at her. “I saw him hugging you last night.” Laughing when she turns even whiter than she already is. “My first thought was how perfect you two look together. Like Yin and Yang. Dark and Light. Physically, you complement each other

perfectly. Well, there's the proof." I say, jutting my chin at Mal and making Corinne smile. "I told Puma that last night."

Corinne frowns. "What did he say?"

"That he loves me. But I know he cares about you, too. He may not have thought about you after that night. I'm not being mean." I assure her when I see her frown deepen. "But when you called him for help, he answered. Now that he knows you and he knows about Mal, you're part of his life. So humor the poor guy and buy enough stuff for your room, so he knows you'll stay."

Corinne laughs as she takes charge of her cart and heads toward the comforters.

I walk over to Showtime to see what mischief she and the kids are up to. The kids are busy trying out all the various bean bag chairs, even though they are exactly the same, except for their color.

"You handled that well." Showtime says when I reach her.

"You heard that?" I ask, glancing at the kids and hoping they didn't hear as well.

Page 22

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“I did, but they didn’t.” She assures me. “They’re too busy discussing the pros and cons of bean bag chairs against those gaming floor rockers.”

I shake my head. “They’re five.” I protest.

“I’m twenty-three and Puma is thirty. What’s your point? We’re all kids. Those of us who enjoy playing with them want comfortable chairs, too.” She argues.

I laugh. “I see. This isn’t really about them.”

She shrugs. “It’s a little about them.”

After we’ve filled both carts and made progress on a third, we head to the register. The dent in Puma’s card isn’t that noticeable. I’m listening to Elina extolling the virtue of the bean bag chair over the gaming rocker when movement near our SUV draws my attention. Max and one of the store’s employees are loading the chairs into the back, unaware of two men fast approaching them. Before I can call out, they have guns against their necks. I glance over at a group of men heading in our direction. I recognize their leader. Juan.

Showtime brushes my arm before I feel her put something into my back pocket. I look over my shoulder and see her pulling Mal and Elina back into the store. I glance at Corinne. “Go with them.” I tell her.

She’s staring wide-eyed at Juan. “That’s the man...” she starts.

“I know. Go with Showtime. Protect the kids.” I bark at her. She glances at me, nods

and rushes back inside.

“Hello, Juan.” I say, turning back to face him. “I’d say it’s nice to see you, but that would be a lie. What do you want?”

“I want you.” He says, smiling as if he’s offering me a special treat. “With you by my side, we’ll rule not only Mexico, but this country as well.”

I snort, which causes his smile to slip. “I’ll never be yours. Ever.” I tell him. “Did you murder the real John Spada? Just like you murdered my husband? Afraid he’d tell someone how you used him to kill a Marine?” I’m shouting my words and I see people in the parking lot taking notice. I don’t want anyone hurt, but I’m hoping that if he realizes he has an audience, he might leave.

“Who said John is dead?” Juan asks me, smiling. “As for your husband. What kind of man leaves his wife and child to go fight in a war? He should have been home protecting you.”

“He was protecting his country. He’s a hero. Unlike you. You’re nothing but a parasite.” I snap back.

He’s no longer smiling, but glaring at me. “I’m going to have fun breaking you once you’re my wife.” I open my mouth to retort, but he holds up his hand. “You will come to me. If you don’t, then I will destroy everything in my way. You don’t want to be responsible for Puma’s death and the destruction of his club, do you? What about that sweet little boy and his mother? Are you willing to sacrifice all their lives? Are you that selfish?”

“Are you seriously declaring war on the Demon Dawgs?” I ask in shock. “And do you think you could win?”

Juan snarls at me. “I will win. I will be more powerful than Puma and his pathetic club. Once I have you.”

I frown at him. “How will I make it happen? Why do you even want me?”

“Pedigree.” He says. “You are the key to claiming my birthright.”

I open my mouth to reply but close it when I hear the most welcome sound. The roar of a dozen or more motorcycles heading our way. I smile nastily at Juan.

“You better run.” I tell him as he glares at me.

“I’ll let you go, for now. But I will have you. Use this to contact me or there will be war.” Juan says, sliding a phone across the pavement before he turns away. “Kill the clerk.” Juan orders.

Max reacts quickly, shoving the clerk into the back of the SUV before diving in. Juan’s man shoots at the SUV, but the bullet proof window absorbs the shot.

Juan and his men pull out of the parking lot seconds before Puma and his men arrive.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: PUMA

Showtime keeps a running commentary of what she’s seeing as Alisa faces off against Juan. The idea of Alisa on her own, surrounded by Juan and his men, terrifies me. I can’t fault Showtime for her decision to get the kids and Corinne out of sight. Juan wouldn’t hesitate to use Elina or Mal to get what he wants.

As we ride, several others fall in behind us. I know Chill or Wildcard rallied the troops. While I’m hoping we can trap Juan, I’m certain the roar of our bikes will have him running off with his tail between his legs. I just hope he doesn’t get his hands on

Alisa before we get there.

“She’s staying away from him.” Showtime tells me. “I set my phone to record before slipping it into her back pocket. I don’t know if it will capture their conversation, but I thought it was worth a shot.”

I shake my head at Showtime’s ability to think under pressure. She’s only been with the club for a few months, but she shows amazing promise. I doubt we’ll wait the full year before patching her in.

Before we reach the parking lot, I see an SUV fly out. It’s moving fast in the opposite direction. Chill, Dice, and Hawk give chase. My focus remains on Alisa. We form a protective wall of leather and chrome around her. I barely take the time to slide the kickstand down before I’m off and gathering her in my arms.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“Are you alright?” I ask Alisa and I feel her nod as she buries her face in my chest. I glance over at Corinne and ask her the same question. She nods as she holds her son close. I lock eyes with him and while he looks worried, I can tell he’s trying to stay strong. I give him a smile.

“Are Max and the kid who works here ok?” Alisa asks. I glance over at Max, who is talking with a young man wearing an employee vest. Both look fine. I see Max slip the guy some money.

“They’re good. The kids are safe. You’re safe. What did he want?” I ask her as I stroke her back. Feeling a tug on my vest, I look down at Elina’s pretty face. I lift her up into my arms as she snuggles into my neck while Alisa shifts away. I want to pull her back into my arms, but she doesn’t go far.

“He’s crazy.” Alisa says. “He has some weird idea that I’m going to help him rule Mexico. I don’t remember everything he said. I’ll have to think about it and write it all down.”

“Showtime slipped her phone into your pocket. I’m hoping it recorded your conversation.”

“That’s what she did? I was wondering. I was afraid to check because Juan was watching me.” She removes the phone from her back pocket and hands it to Showtime. “I want to get back to the clubhouse.” Alisa says.

“Ok, baby. Let’s get going.” Carrying Elina over to the SUV, I place her in her seat before snapping her in as Alisa slips inside. Then I help Corinne with Mal. “I’m so

sorry.” I start, but Corinne just shakes her head.

“You have nothing to be sorry about. Showtime was amazing. She made sure we were safe.” Corinne says, and I smile in gratitude.

I know she isn’t used to the club life. It would be easy for her to take what happened today and turn it into the reason she and Mal shouldn’t be around the club. But she didn’t. Instead, she complimented my prospect. I watch them drive off and see Corinne leaning forward to speak with Alisa. Ever since Dante met Tally, I’ve been a little jealous of the women his club has welcomed into the fold. Each one of them is strong. It looks like I’m gathering the same quality of women into our club.

On the way back to the clubhouse, I debate on calling Sal and letting him know about his son’s latest stunt. I decide to wait. I’m hoping Chill and the others who went after him can catch him. If not, maybe we’ll learn enough from his discussion with Alisa to figure out what he’s up to so we can stop him.

We surround the SUV as Max drives it back to the clubhouse. I don’t know if it’s good news or bad that Chill’s bike is out front along with the others. I get my answer when we step inside and I see the scowl on her face as she paces the room like a caged lion.

“He got away?” I ask, and she jerks her head down.

“He disappeared down a side street. We drove around for a while, but he was gone. Spark is checking video cameras to see if he can find where they went.” Chill says.

I nod before turning back to Alisa. “What do you need from me?” I ask her.

She glances around the room and I know she’s considering the needs of the club, so I gently grab her chin so she has to look at me. “We’ll have Church soon and discuss

what happened. But right now, I need to take care of you. What do you need from me?" I repeat.

I see tears threaten, but she fights them back. "I'm alright." She says as she places her hand on my chest. "Really. We're safe here. I'll help Mal and Corinne get their rooms set up. Unless you need me to go over what happened and what he said to me."

"Let's see what Showtime's phone caught and I'll come find you if we need more. How does that sound?"

"Good. Thank you, Puma. I love you."

"I love you, too, baby. With all my heart." I kiss her and watch her follow Max down the hall. He's carrying several bags and I take a moment to feel some happiness that Corinne and Mal did as I asked and bought enough stuff to turn the club rooms into their rooms. I really need to bring the idea of building homes on the property to a vote. But that likely won't be today.

I turn toward Church in time to see Showtime come out. I hold out my fist and she bumps it with her own. "Thank you for taking care of them and calling me."

She grins. "Of course, Prez. I'd do anything for them and you."

"Your phone?" I ask as she heads toward the door.

"Gave it to Spark." She calls back before stepping outside.

I take my seat and pound the gavel when everyone is in place. "Any update on Juan's location?" I ask.

"I got them on a traffic cam, but lost them when they drove into a subdivision."

Sparks says. “I didn’t find them coming out again, so I’ve asked Maestro to run his program.” Maestro is a prospect out of San Diego. He doesn’t look like a biker, he looks like the type of guy most bikers would make fun of, but he’s wicked smart and a computer genius. He’s developed multiple software programs for our use. One filters through property deeds.

“Any idea how he found the women?” I ask. “Was he following them?”

“Not that I can tell.” Spark says. “I’ve checked a few cameras and can’t pick out a car that might have been tailing them. Smoke is checking them, too. I wanted another set of eyes on it.”

I’m frustrated with the lack of progress, and Spark notices. “We’ll find him. Maestro is looking into Juan’s finances and those of John Spada. But in the meantime, I have the recording from Showtime’s phone.”

“She’s a hell of a prospect.” Dice says and the others nod in agreement.

“I agree. Let’s hear the recording.” I notice a look of frustration cross over Chill’s face and I have to bite back a smile. I know Chill is desperate for Showtime to get patched in. She wants another enforcer.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

Spark hits play, and we hear Juan's threats against Alisa and her responses. I have to clasp my hands on the table to keep from throwing Showtime's phone across the room. We listen all the way through before the questions pop up. Questions that circle around the one key statement of why Juan wants Alisa.

"What does he mean by Alisa's pedigree being the key to him gaining his birthright?" Wildcard asks.

"Let's get Diego in here and see if we can find out." I demand.

"He's not here." Spark says. "He went with Desdemona to 1% to check on the auction items that were delivered yesterday."

"Ok. I'll call Sal and let him know about Juan's attack today. I'll talk to Diego when he gets back." I state. Since we can't make progress right now, I bring up the topic I've been mulling over.

"I have something unrelated that I want to bring to the table." I continue. "When some of us were out in San Diego, we got to see the subdivision they're building out there for their members. I think we should do the same here. Alisa hasn't complained about living in the clubhouse and none of you have complained about having to change your lifestyle because they're here, and I appreciate it. But I want to build us a home. I want to see if anyone else has a similar interest."

"I think that's a great idea." Wildcard says.

I nod. "Good. We own this property, which could give us enough space for a handful

of homes. But I want to look into acquiring land that would give us more options. Maybe see if any of the property next to ours is looking to sell?"

"I can crunch the numbers before we take a vote." Rush offers.

"Good." I end Church with a plan to contact Sal, but when I open the door, I have to change my plans.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: ALISA

As I help Corinne change the sheets on Mal's bed, my mind slips back into the parking lot and my discussion with Juan. I play over his words, but I can't make any sense of them. I try not to think about his threats against Puma and the club, but focus on his crazy claim that I'm the key to his taking over Mexico. Since my father worked for Sal, I can't see how I bring anything to the table. Which leaves my mother. I know very little about her.

"I wonder if he'll ever outgrow the Avengers." Corinne muses, drawing me out of my head.

"What?" I ask her as I glance around the room. A Black Panther comforter covers the bed while lamps with the same theme stand on each nightstand. A Wakanda bookcase sits in the corner next to a Black Panther bean bag chair. Showtime is putting together a cubby while Mal attaches Black Panther decals to the storage bins. "I am sensing a theme."

"Do you think Puma will like it?" Mal asks me.

"I think Puma may kick you out and claim the room for himself." I tell him. He rewards me with a beautiful smile that reminds me so much of his father.

I glance over at Elina, who is sitting on the beanbag chair, flipping through a book. When her eyes droop, I glance at Corinne and grin. “Think we should show them the surprise?”

I laugh when both kids pop up and run to us. “What surprise?” Elina asks.

“Let’s go see.” I tell her, taking her hand while Mal grabs Corinne’s. We lead them into the game room where Max is finishing up the surprise. In one corner is the castle Puma had built for Elina so she can play warrior princess. Across from it now sits a massive tent with two brand new sleeping bags inside.

Both kids squeal and dive into the tent.

“If you get into the sleeping bags and lie down, we have another surprise for you.” I tell them. They both climb into the bags without bothering to unzip them. I nod at Showtime, who switches off the lights just as Max switches on the laser show. Across the canopy of the tent flashes several sea creatures as the kids ooh and ahh.

“It also does galaxies and clouds.” Max tells them, using the remote to change the images. When a galaxy flashes overhead, the kids both yell for him to stop. There is so much to see in the image that I’m afraid it is too stimulating, but I can hear their chatter slow down and soon they’re both asleep.

“Good call on the projector.” I tell Corinne as we leave the room.

“My sister has one and swears by it. I’ve considered buying one for Mal, but it seems I always have other expenses that take precedence.” Corinne says. “Are you sure we didn’t spend too much?”

“Positive.” I assure her. “Puma’s loaded and besides, he’ll have as much fun with what we bought as the kids will. I’m just afraid we won’t get the kids out of that

tent.”

Corinne laughs. “I can’t believe how quickly they’ve bonded. It’s like they’ve known each other their whole lives.”

“Elina loves having another kid around. She had friends back in Yuma, but since we moved here, it’s just been the prospects. Not that they aren’t kids themselves.”

“Puma mentioned Mal asked Elina to be his old lady. Not sure what that means.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it.” Laughing. “I finally agreed to be Puma’s Old Lady today, and the kids overheard us talking. Elina was unhappy because she wanted to be Puma’s Old Lady once she grows up. Mal offered to make her his, and she accepted. Neither of them really knows what it means.”

“But what does it mean?” Corinne asks. “Like a girlfriend?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“More than that. When a biker takes an Old Lady, he’s saying she’s his forever. Similar to a wife, but it is even more binding. At least to a biker.” I explain.

“You accepted this morning. Is it because of me?” Corinne asks as we move to the kitchen.

“Yes, and no.” I tell her honestly. “I’ve been reluctant to let our relationship move forward because I’ve been afraid of putting him at risk. When Juan used you to get to Puma, I realized how stupid I was being. I was letting Juan control me. But worse, I wasn’t giving Puma the credit he deserves. So many people have told me that Juan is no match for Puma. I heard them, but it didn’t stop me from thinking about the worst case. However, I realized that even if Puma had reached your apartment, he would have handled Juan. After all four men attacked him and he still got the upper hand.”

“He is a force.” Corinne says with a chuckle. “I can tell Mal is in awe of him. But what really amazes me is how good Puma is with the kids.”

“Well, he is basically just a big kid himself.” I remind her, which has us both laughing.

“Speaking of kids, I think I’m going to take advantage and take a nap myself.” Corinne says. I smile as she leaves. A nap sounds good, but I need something more.

I make my way to the hallway outside Church and wait. Talking about Puma and thinking about him has my body tingling with need. I’ve never done drugs, but I can imagine this is how an addict would feel. I’ve craved food before, like chocolate, but that feeling pales against how much I need Puma right now.

When the door opens, and he steps out, I feel desire wash over me. His grin widens as he wraps his arm around me and leads me down the hall. He leans down and whispers, "I can smell your arousal, baby. You want me."

I shake my head, but before he can react, I tell him the truth. "I need you."

"You have me." He says as he opens the door to his room. As soon as he closes the door, I climb him like the tree he is.

I suck his thick lower lip into my mouth so I can give it a bite. He moans as I run my hands over his scalp, down his neck, and over his shoulders. I need to touch every part of him and I need him to touch every part of me.

He holds my ass in one of his massive hands while he uses the other to grab the back of my neck so he can take over the kiss. He plunders my mouth, not breaking the lip lock until I'm lightheaded. Then he attacks my neck, sucking, kissing and licking in a frenzy that has my panties soaked. I claw at this kutte, but with his arms wrapped tight around me, I can't get it off.

"Off!" I demand, barely able to get the single word out before I latch onto his earlobe. As I slide my tongue along his earlobe, I feel his hips jerk. "I need you." I whimper, which has him tossing me onto the bed.

He jerks off his kutte and lays it on the chair before whipping off his shirt. I lick my lips as he reveals each inch of glorious skin. I want to drag my tongue over every muscle and through every ridge. Hell, I could spend hours just on his pecs and abs. He raises one eyebrow as he unbuckles his jeans. "Get naked, woman, or I'm ripping those clothes off you."

I grin as I quickly strip off my jeans and shirt, leaving my bra and panties. I move my arms to unhook the bra, but Puma's out of patience. He grabs the bra and snaps the

slim material between the cups so my breasts fall out. Before I can protest, he does the same to my panties. “I liked that set.” I pout as he pushes me flat against the mattress.

He lowers his face to mine. “I’ll buy you a set in every color they have.” He promises. “Then I’ll rip them all off.” He slams his lips against mine before using his tongue to own my mouth. His groan sends shock waves through me as I revel in the intensity.

His hands pass over my body, leaving trails of heat and chills. I crave the feel of his rough and calloused hands against my skin. Wrapping my arms and legs around his thick body, I let my hands explore the soft skin over hard muscles. My mouth is still searching for his when he breaks the kiss. My whimper of complaint turns to a moan as he kisses my neck before worshipping my breasts with his tongue and teeth. I never thought I could cum with just breast play, but damn, Puma is a master. My body is shaking when he makes his way down to my pussy. He only has to bury his face in my folds to have me exploding.

“Fuck!” I scream as my body jerks its way through a powerful orgasm. I’m just coming down off the high when Puma stands and pulls my pussy up to his mouth. Blood rushes to my head as he suspends me over the bed. The feeling is unlike anything I’ve ever experienced. I’m lightheaded and completely at his mercy. Knowing this powerful man has complete control, but using it to give me pleasure has my next orgasm flooding through my system. For too long, I fought my feelings for this man. But now I know he’s the source of my happiness.

“Puma!” I scream as he sucks on my clit like it’s his favorite candy.

“God, baby, you’re so fucking sweet.” Puma groans out before burying his face in my pussy again. He has one arm wrapped around my waist as his other hand slides up my hip, over my ass just before he plunges two fingers inside me, tearing another orgasm

out of me.

“Fuck!” I scream as he lowers my body back onto the bed. My limbs are so weak that he chuckles as I try to touch him. “I need you.” I moan, my heart rate increasing as I watch him stroke his cock. Sculptors couldn’t have created a more perfect dick. One designed to send me into Nirvana. “Mine.” I moan as he lines up to my passage. With a chuckle, he slams into me all the way to the hilt.

“Mine.” He growls as bends my legs so he can bottom out with each thrust. His balls slap my ass and I get lost in the sound. I’m keening as he pounds into me. My back arches as pleasure swamps me. He slides out before flipping me over. I scramble to my knees so he can slide back in. Wrapping his hands in my hair, he pulls me until I’m arching. His hips jerk as his own orgasm takes hold. With a roar worthy of a puma, he shoots streams of cum into me until it drips down my leg.

“Fuck.” We both mutter as he collapses next to me, drawing me close. We chuckle as we struggle to regain our breath and calm our racing hearts.

“Damn, woman, you slay me.” Puma says, kissing my temple before he rises from the bed. He returns with a warm washcloth that he uses to clean me and then himself. I can barely keep my eyes open as he lifts me and places me under the covers. “Take a nap, baby.”

“Puma?” I slur out.

“Yeah, baby.”

“You need to ask my father about my mother. I think she’s the key.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: PUMA

Watching Alisa sleep, I revel in the happiness of having her in my life. Before Alisa, my life lacked substance. I may have had fame and money, but true happiness evaded me. Until this woman and the two kids down the hall changed everything.

Leaving her to sleep, I make my way to check on them. My first stop is Mal's room. He's not in his bed, but I grin at the transformation. Amazing the difference a single shopping trip can make. I doubt they put much of a dent in my card, but even if they did, I don't care. It's worth it to see how he made his room his. I know Mal and his mom won't stay at the clubhouse forever, but the effort they put into converting his room tells me she expects him to visit.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

I find the kids in the playroom. Showtime is on the couch with her eyes closed. I squat down to watch the kids sleeping inside the tent. Their little hands lay next to each other, barely touching. At that moment, I see my future. Whether they just stay friends or become more, these two are a big part of my future. I leave them to dream as I make my way to the common room.

Rush greets me with a tip of his beer bottle as I take a seat next to him at the bar. “I put together some numbers along with some listings for nearby property. The lot across the street is for sale. Thirty-five acres and the price is reasonable. The information is on your desk.”

The surprise must show on my face because he shrugs. “When I heard what Dante was doing, I thought it was a solid plan. I started gathering information in case you or one of the other executives brought it up.”

“Why didn’t you bring it up?” I ask him. “You’re an executive.”

“If I found myself an Old Lady, I might have.”

“Have you spoken to Sal?” Wildcard asks from behind me. I turn to see him sitting with Chill.

“No. I had to take care of my Old Lady.” I say with a grin. “Besides, I want to talk to Diego first. Alisa thinks her mom may be the key.”

“You think her mom is what Juan meant about birthright?” Chill asks and I nod.

“When he gets back, bring him to my office.” I tell Wildcard.

Rush’s folder sits on top of my desk. I pull it towards me and review the contents. As usual, he’s done a thorough job. It’s obvious he has been working on this for some time. He even has notes from our Spock, our Secretary, and from Carver, a member of the San Diego club. Spock listed all the permits we’d need to build homes on the current property and Carver provided costs and lot configurations. We’d only be able to build a handful of homes near the clubhouse, which doesn’t meet my expectations. I just start reviewing the information for the property across the road when Wildcard knocks on my door before opening it. I can see Diego behind him.

“Is now a good time?” Wildcard asks and I nod as I shove all the papers back into the folder before tucking it into a drawer.

Once they take their seats, I turn to Diego. “Did you hear about Juan approaching Alisa, Corinne and the kids today at Bed, Bath, and Beyond?”

“Are they alright?” Diego asks as he moves to stand.

I gesture for him to sit back down. “They’re fine. Thanks to Showtime’s quick thinking, we got a recording of his discussion with Alisa.” I nod at Wildcard, who plays the recording for Diego. I watch Diego’s face and, mostly, the only emotion he shows is one of concentration, but I see the flicker of fear when Juan talks about Alisa’s birthright. “You know what he means, don’t you?” I ask Diego.

Diego looks at Wildcard and then me before slouching back into his chair and rubbing his hands over his face. He then leans forward and rubs the back of his neck. I’ve known Diego for several weeks and I’ve never seen him this agitated. Not even after we rescued him from his brother. “I knew this day would come. Sal’s going to kill me.”

I lean forward at his comment. “What does Sal have to do with this? Is he the reason Juan is after Alisa? If you know anything, you better fucking tell me.”

“Sal wouldn’t know why Juan is after Alisa, because he would never suspect who her mother was.” Diego says. “Even I don’t know who she was.”

“You’re not making any sense.” I snap at him. “What the fuck are you talking about? How do you not know who Alisa’s mother is? I thought you two were married. Was that a lie?”

Diego shakes his head. “This is going to take a while. Can I get a shot of tequila?”

I nod at Wildcard, who leaves and comes back with a bottle of Don Julio and three shot glasses. After he pours out a shot for each of us, we down them. Diego obviously needing the liquid courage, me needing something to keep me from strangling the father of the woman I love. “Now speak.” I growl and try not to roll my eyes when he flinches.

“My father used to work for Sal’s father, which is how I got involved in the cartel. I came to the attention of Sal one night when I beat the shit out of one of his men. I caught him trying to drag a woman out of a bar. When Sal had me brought before him, I thought I was a dead man. But instead of killing me, Sal thanked me and offered me a position under him. I can’t say we were ever great friends, but he trusted me.”

“What does this...” I start, but Diego holds his hand up to stop me.

“I’m getting there. I promise. One day Sal came to me with a request. He wanted me to smuggle a young woman over the border and find her a new identity in the States. While he didn’t tell me her name or why he wanted her out of the country, he told me that her life was in danger. He agreed to smuggle her out and provide her protection.

She was sixteen. I became her ward. I found someone who created her a new identity, and we bought a home in Yuma. She studied, took her GED, and went off to college. I kept in contact, but I didn't see her again until after she graduated."

"What was her name before she changed it? Didn't she ever tell you?" Wildcard asks.

"No." When I raise my eyebrows, he continues. "I know that may seem odd to you, but I knew what was at stake. She was smart and well-educated. This means she came from a family of wealth. So she was either the daughter of a high-ranking government official or..."

"The daughter of a cartel leader." I finish and he nods.

"If I had tried to find out who she was on my own, it would have put her at risk. She understood the need to keep her identity a secret, so she worked hard to put her past behind her and become Carmella."

"Was the plan always for you two to marry?" Wildcard asks.

Diego snorts. "Fuck no. If Sal ever found out, he would have killed me."

"You mean he doesn't know?" I ask in surprise.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“Of course not. For her safety, he only wanted confirmation that I had her in the States and that she had a new identity. Once that was done, he never asked about her again.” Diego explains. “He wanted the trail to go cold. The less information out there about her, the less likely it was for someone to find her trail.”

“How did you two end up married and wasn’t it a risk?” I ask.

Diego nods. “I never planned on falling in love with her. She was only sixteen when we met. She was beautiful, but she was a child. We talked often, but we didn’t meet face-to-face after she left for college. I had no intention of seeing her again until she called me after graduation and asked to see me. She suggested our having dinner at a restaurant at a hotel in Yuma.”

“What happened?” I prod.

“While we were eating, she told me she found a job in Yuma and that she wanted to come back there to live. She also explained how she was still a virgin and wanted me to be her first.” Diego says with a chuckle.

“I take it you agreed?” Wildcard asks.

“No, I choked on a mouthful of steak and the busboy had to Heimlich me.” Diego says shaking his head. “The manager wanted to call for an ambulance, but somehow she talked them into letting us go upstairs to our room.” Diego shakes his head. “I didn’t stand a chance.”

The look on his face has both Wildcard and I laughing out loud. “Women are

sneaky.” Wildcard says, clapping Diego on the back in sympathy.

“I loved her. Still do.” Diego admits. “Alisa looks exactly like her.”

“Then I can understand how hard you must have fallen.” I tell him. “But if she looks like her mother, how did Sal never find out about you marrying her mother?”

“He never met my wife, and he’s never met Alisa. I kept both of them away whenever Sal came to town. Sal and I often met over dinner at a restaurant or at his house. Most of the time, I went to Mexico to see him.”

“Do you really think he’ll kill you after all this time?” I ask him.

Diego shrugs. “Who knows? But it doesn’t matter. If we need to talk to him to figure out how to protect Alisa, I’ll risk it. We should call Sal.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: ALISA

When I wake up, I’m alone but feeling better than I did. I stretch and remember how Puma wore me out. I needed the mental break he gave me as well as the nap. If he hadn’t so thoroughly used my body, I probably wouldn’t have been able to sleep.

Throwing on my clothes, I go check on the kids. They’re awake and busy playing a Lego video game using their new gaming chairs. Corinne is sitting at a table with her laptop. She smiles at me as I take a seat next to her.

“You getting any work done?” I ask her.

“Yes.” She tells me. “I’m used to working at home with Mal. Elina is a wonderful distraction for him. He usually gets lonely and wants me to play with him.”

“That’s one thing I really like about the clubhouse.” I tell her. “Elina can always find someone to play with her. For grumpy bikers, they love having a reason to play. Do you want me to take over for a while?”

She shakes her head. “No, really. I just sat down a few minutes ago and I’m working on a client’s accounts. It will keep me busy and they seem settled. Showtime gave them a snack about half an hour ago, so they’re fine.”

“Ok, I think I’ll find Desdemona. She and my father were at 1% today watching them set up the exhibits. I want to check with her.”

When I enter the common room, I find Desdemona at a table. She has her laptop open. Her concentration is so intense that I don’t interrupt her. As my thoughts drift to my mother, I search the room for Diego. I approach Chill, who is sitting alone, scrolling through her phone and scowling.

“Have you seen Diego?” I ask her.

She nods as she glances up at me. “He’s with Puma.” She says, still scowling.

“Everything ok?” I ask her. “You look ready to chew nails.”

“Men.” she says, shaking her head. “Nothing important. You doing alright?”

“I’m good.” I assure her as I head to Puma’s office. Usually I don’t insist on involving myself with club business, but in this case, it’s more my business than the club’s. When I knock, Wildcard opens the door. I expect him to tell me to go away, but he shifts so I can see Puma. “Don’t you think I should be in on this?” I ask him before glancing at my father.

“Alisa...” My father starts, but Puma interrupts him.

“Yeah, you should.” He admits, turning to my father. “She needs to know. This is her life, and it affects Elina as well.”

Diego nods before leaning forward to pour himself another shot of tequila. I raise my eyebrow at him, but he doesn’t look at me. I study him and realize he looks deflated. For want of a better term. A small trickle of fear passes through me, but I bat it away. I need to be strong and face this. Whatever this is. I move into the room and take a seat on the couch.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

“Want me to bring her up to speed, or do you want to do it?” Puma asks Diego.

Diego shrugs. “I should do it. I should have told you this a long time ago. But in my defense, I never planned on telling you any of it.”

I roll my eyes at my father’s honesty. I love my father, but I often think he still sees me as Elina’s age. He shares the history of how my parents met. I realize as he’s telling the story that I never heard them talk about their history. And with a little sadness, I realize I never asked. What kind of daughter did that make me?

When he finishes, I look at Puma. “You think my mom came from a cartel family?” I ask him and he nods. “And from what Juan said to me today, he knows her identify. He believes that marrying me gives him an advantage?”

Puma scowls at me, but I know it’s because he doesn’t like the idea of me marrying Juan. He looks at my father. “We need to talk to Sal. I’ll ask him to come here, so we can protect you.”

“Do you really think Sal will hurt him?” I ask Puma, glancing at Diego.

“He better not try.” Puma growls out as he picks up his phone. “Sal. Your youngest accosted Alisa. No, he didn’t hurt her. But he said a few things that might explain why he’s obsessed with her. We need to meet.” Puma pauses as Sal speaks. “Because I think you have information we need.” He pauses as he listens to Sal. “No, I think it’s better if you come here. You’ll understand when you get here.” When he hangs up, he gives me a soft look before turning his attention to my father. “He’s on his way over. We’ll meet in here and I will make sure nothing happens to you. Sal won’t be

leaving until he agrees you are off limits.”

Diego shrugs. “I’m not worried. He’ll be mad, but I wouldn’t have changed a thing.” He says, his eyes on me.

“Me either.” Puma agrees with a sexy grin. “We have about twenty minutes before Sal arrives. Wildcard, get everyone who is in the clubhouse into Church. I want to get everyone updated and ready in case Sal loses his mind.”

When they leave, Diego gets up from his chair and takes a seat on the couch next to me. “I’m sorry for all of this.” He starts. “I never considered your mother had anything to do with Juan’s obsession. If I had, I might have been able to put a stop to his harassment. Maybe even stop him from killing Matteo.”

I feel a single tear fall down my cheek, but I don’t wipe it away. “You have nothing to be sorry for. This is all on Juan. I loved Matteo and I will always miss him. But I’m not sorry that I have Puma in my life now. Matteo and I were best friends. But our lives never really meshed. He was gone so much that I felt like a single parent most of the time. My only regret is that Elina will never know her father, but she adores Puma, and he adores her. I love my life right now. I feel like I’m really living and not just existing.”

My father nods his head as he considers my words. “I can understand that. Before your mother returned from college, I was living a good life. I was happy. Content. But the years I had with her were pure happiness.”

“And Desdemona?” I press.

He smiles and I see the warmth and love in his eyes as he thinks about her. “I love her. But our love differs from what I shared with your mother. So I understand what you’re saying. Desdemona is my today. She challenges me and I know she finds me

challenging.”

I laugh with him. “It’s different from what you had with mom, but it’s still love?”

He nods. “It is. When I found her in my father’s house that day, I immediately felt a connection with her. I always hated my father, and seeing what he did to her just made that hate stronger. For many years, I fought my feelings for Desdemona because I feared that when she looked at me, all she could see was my father. It was at her insistence that she saw and loved me for me I finally accepted my feelings for her.”

I chuckle, which has him glancing at me. “You’re my father and I love you very much, but it seems like you always need a woman to help you see the truth.”

“Women are much smarter than men.” Diego admits. “Women think on so many more levels than men. I can’t imagine how you put up with our simplistic natures.”

“Well, we need someone to open jars.” I say with a laugh, standing up. “Speaking of, I’m going to make something for everyone to snack on. It might help keep tempers in check if Sal’s sugar levels are even.”

When I reach the kitchen, I find Corinne baking cookies with the kids. “What are we doing?” I ask as I join them.

Elina lifts her face and grins at me. “We’re helping Corinne make cookies!” She shouts out. I laugh at the dusting of flour on her forehead and right cheek. I lean over to rub my nose against hers. “Are you helping or making a mess?”

“We’re having fun.” Elina says.

“Good.” I reply, standing back up and sharing a smile with Corinne.

“How is everything?” Corinne asks.

I shrug. “Puma is making headway. He’s invited Juan’s father over. If anyone can help us figure out how to handle Juan, it’s Salvador Gutierrez.”

“Who’s he?” Corinne asks.

I frown as I consider how to answer the question without sending Corinne packing. I can see now why Puma and the club members keep their secrets. “He’s a business owner from Mexico, import and export.” I tell her.

Corinne studies me before nodding slowly. “Import and export. Right.” She says, but doesn’t press for more details. “This is a whole different world, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is.” I tell her as I open the fridge and take out everything I need to make sandwiches.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: PUMA

Page 29

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

It's a full fifteen minutes later before I finish updating my club. I barely have enough time to hand out assignments before Mad Max knocks on the door to let us know of Sal's arrival.

Spark heads to his office. He'll be tracking down all that he can find on Alisa's mother. He doesn't have much to go on, but he's never let me down. I'm confident he'll find something. I hope to have more for him to work with after my meeting with Sal.

When I reach the common room, I see Sal with two of his bodyguards. I nod at Chill, who steps up next to me as we approach Sal. I know he won't be happy with my next request, but then I'm not happy with how little he's done to control his son.

"Sal." I start, shaking his hand. "I'm glad you could make it. We can head to my office, but your bodyguards need to stay here and I need you to remove your weapons."

Sal sucks in a breath but doesn't explode as I expect. "Can I ask why?" He says with a calm tone. "I thought we trusted each other."

"We do." I acknowledge, "but I have a reason for the request. A good one. One that you'll understand soon. I'm asking that you trust me. I have no plans on hurting you or your men. But we can't have this conversation with you armed."

"And will you leave your weapons behind?" Sal asks.

"Of course."

“Who am I meeting with? Just you?” Sal asks.

“Diego and his daughter, Alisa, are joining us. I understand you’ve never met Alisa?” I ask him.

He shakes his head. “No. I’ve not had the pleasure. Which is why I never understood Juan’s obsession with her. I don’t think they’ve ever met either.”

“I think you’ll understand when you meet her.” I state. “It will just be the four of us.”

I sense Wildcard shift, but he keeps his mouth shut. As does Chill. They both know that if Sal tries anything, he’ll never leave the compound.

Sal sighs. “I don’t like it, but I do trust you.” He turns to his men. “Sit and stay out of trouble.” He orders them before following me down the hall.

I drop my gun and knife into the box outside my office, holding the lid for Sal to follow suit. He holds his hands palms out.

“I don’t carry. I leave the weapons to my men.” Sal tells me. Not wanting to insult him, I let him pass. If he tries anything, I won’t have a problem taking him down before he hurts Alisa or Diego. I open the door and let him enter before me. He sucks in a breath as I close the door.

“You son of a bitch!” Sal explodes. “You were supposed to protect her, not bed her! She was sixteen! I trusted you!”

Alisa, Diego, and I stand quietly as we wait for Sal to complete his tirade.

“You done?” I ask him when he sputters to a stop.

“You don’t understand...” Sal turns to me. I hold up my hand to stop him.

“I understand. Diego told us about the young girl you left in his care. You think he took advantage of her, but he didn’t. They didn’t marry until after she graduated from college.”

Sal looks as if I’ve hit him with a 2x4. “Carmella was Sofia?” Sal asks Diego, who nods. He turns his attention to Alisa. “You look exactly like her. I can see why we never met. I would have known immediately who your mother was.” He says, looking back at Diego.

“Carmella and I loved each other. I didn’t force her into marriage. Our relationship was platonic until she was well past the legal age. I can’t believe you would think otherwise.” Diego says.

Sal takes a deep breath as he closes his eyes. When he opens them again, I see the calm return. “Was she happy?”

Diego nods. “Very.”

“She died of cancer.” Sal says, a statement rather than a question. “I remember you telling me that your wife died of cancer.”

Diego nods. “She did.”

“I always wondered what became of Sofia. I didn’t want to ask, because I didn’t want to put her or you in danger.”

I guide Sal to the table, where I see a plate of sandwiches with pitchers of tea and water next to them. I go back to my desk and pick up the bottle of tequila.

“Before we discuss Carmella, or Sofia, you need to hear this.” I tell Sal and play the recording of Juan’s tirade. Once it’s done, I turn to Sal. “Since we know Juan isn’t interested in Alisa because of Diego, we’ve decided that it was her mother who he believes holds the key to his plans. Who was Sofia?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

Sal rubs his hand down his face and studies Alisa. “Sofia was a sweet girl who was born into the wrong family.” He begins with a soft chuckle. “Before I married my wife, my father tried to arrange a marriage with Adella Cortez, Sofia’s older sister. Adella was the oldest daughter of Damon Cortez, the head of the Cortez Cartel. Wanting to expand his holdings, he planned to forge an alliance with another cartel by arranging a marriage for his eldest daughter. However, she had other ideas.” Sal shakes his head and takes a bite of a sandwich before washing it down with tequila. “I wasn’t the first man her father approached. There were three men before me. Each of them died within days of meeting her. The first died in a boating accident. The second died during a robbery while the third died of food poisoning. By the time I met her, I was familiar with the rumors that she killed them. Some called her the Angel of Death, others, the Avenging Angel.”

“Did she kill them?” I ask, and Sal nods his head.

“When my father arranged the meeting with her and her father, I didn’t believe the rumors. But I’m not a stupid man. So I approached her and told her the truth. I didn’t want to marry her, and I was certain she didn’t want to marry me. By that time, I had met my Katrina and knew she was the one for me. I suggested we come up with a plan to keep the marriage from happening. One that didn’t include either of us dying. She agreed, but she had another problem. Her father had figured out that she had killed her other suitors. He threatened to find a husband for Adella’s sixteen-year-old sister if Adella didn’t cooperate. Adella loved Sofia, and she would not allow her father to destroy her life.”

“So she asked you to smuggle Sofia out of the country?” Diego asks.

“Exactly.” Sal says. “That was Adella’s price for ensuring that I married my Katrina. She didn’t explain how, but she promised to fix everything as soon as Sofia was out of the country and safe.”

“Did she?” I ask.

He nods. “She arranged the death of my father and hers. At least, I assume she did. My father died in a car bombing two days after Sofia left the country. Her father died in a fire. The authorities believe he started the fire while trying to kill Adella.”

“So she’s dead?” Alisa asks.

“No. Adella disappeared the night her father died. Several rumors existed about her, some I’m sure she started herself.” Sal says with a smile. “There were rumors she died in the fire that took her father’s life. Another rumor was that she was so disfigured, either from the fire or from her father’s attack, that she went into hiding. I don’t know if any of the rumors are true. However, she did disappear from the public eye. Her family owned property throughout the Americas. She could have ended up at any of them. No one knows for certain where she is. I haven’t seen her since the night we smuggled Sofia out of Mexico.”

“But you know she’s not dead?” I ask.

Sal nods.

“Why?” Alisa asks.

Sal sighs and pours another shot of tequila. “What I’m about to tell you could sign my death warrant. But you need to know, and I just hope she understands why I’m betraying her trust.” He stares into the empty glass as if looking for the words. I have to clench my fists to keep from smacking him upside the head. “Fuck. I don’t know

how Juan found out about your connection to Adella. Maybe he doesn't know, but if he does, it explains why he believes marrying Alisa will be his ticket to money and power."

"I take it Adella is wealthy and connected?" I ask.

Sal chuckles. "That is an understatement. Do you know how each cartel behaves like a fiefdom? Every cartel leader manages their organization? That they answer to no one?" When I nod, he continues. "Whatever you believe is wrong. I may be the leader of the Gutierrez Cartel, but I answer to someone. Almost all of us do."

"Adella?" Alisa asks in a whisper. Sal nods.

"Damon Cortez's death left Adella in charge of the Cortez Cartel. Traditionally, only the male heirs inherit. If there isn't one, then someone within the ranks grabs control or another cartel swoops in and takes over. But Adella didn't let that happen. Those who worked for her father rallied around her, and she kept the cartel under her control. But she didn't stop there. In less than five years, she gained control over virtually every other cartel in Mexico and Central America."

I whistle in appreciation. "How the hell did she manage that?" I ask.

"She's brilliant." Sal says and I can tell by his tone that he admires her. "She's brought all the cartels under her leadership by creating a win-win for them and her. Rather than force them to join her, she offers them a deal they'd be stupid to pass up. She offers them not only autonomy, but so much more than they could achieve on their own. She has her own army. One that she uses to keep the peace and to provide protection if a cartel is under any kind of attack. Each cartel pays her a small percentage of their take. She keeps the amount small, so it doesn't cause a hardship. But she also makes the money she collects available to those who need it. When cartels are in negotiations with other cartels or other crime organizations, she assists."

“Sounds similar to how Dante runs our MC.” I muse.

Sal nods. “Very similar.”

“So, somehow Juan discovered the identity of Alisa’s mother and thinks that by marrying her, he’ll be that much closer to taking over the Cortez Cartel?” I ask.

Both Diego and Sal nod.

“It makes the most sense.” Alisa agrees. “Can you reach out to my aunt? I’d like to meet her.”

Sal nods. “I will. She needs to know what is happening here, and I’m sure she’d love to know that she has a niece.” He sighs. “I’ll have to tell her that her sister is dead, but knowing she lived a happy life with the man she loved will help ease the pain.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: ALISA

My brain is on overload. I have an overwhelming need to find my daughter and hug her tight. Puma stands as well, but when my father shifts, Sal reaches over and touches his arm.

“I’d like a few minutes.” Sal asks and Diego nods. I see the wariness in my father’s eyes, so I look at Puma.

“No trouble.” Puma says to Sal.

Sal raises his hands and chuckles. “No trouble. I promise. I know I was angry before, but I’ve had time to think about Diego and Sofia, and I realize I reacted harshly. My initial thought was that I delivered her to the same fate her father threatened. Even though I know you are not that type of man. The young girl was the only one I

remember. I didn't consider the actions of the young woman. Six years passed between the night I handed her to you and the day you two married. I remember how much you loved your wife. Knowing the woman you adored was Sofia, makes me happy. I simply want a chance to catch up with my old friend here and hear about Sofia's life. I cared about the girl."

Page 31

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

Diego glances at me and then Puma. “We’ll be fine.” He assures us.

Puma studies Sal’s face, then Diego’s before nodding and guiding me out the door.

When I glance back, Puma runs his hands up and down my arms. “I’ll have Wildcard check on them soon, just to make sure they’re behaving themselves.”

“Thank you.” I tell him, shifting up so I can lay a kiss on his soft lips.

“I need to talk to Spark. What are you doing?” Puma asks.

“I need to find Elina. I need a hug.” Puma chuckles as he gives me a hug and kisses the top of my head.

“Give her a hug for me.” Puma says. “I’ll find you later.”

I smile and watch him walk down the hall to Spark’s office. He glances at me before going in and gives me a sexy grin. I feel the promise of that grin down to my toes. Grinning, I turn and search for my daughter.

I find Corinne and Desdemona in the kitchen with the kids eating spaghetti. Or in the case of Elina, wearing it. I lean over and find the only clean spot on her face to plant a kiss. “You’re a mess.” I tell her.

“This is how I show how much I love it.” Elina tells me. “It’s a compliment on Desdemona’s cooking.”

Desdemona gives her a small bow as I chuckle and shake my head. Mal has a small amount of red sauce at the corners of his mouth. He's watching Elina, and I have to stifle a smile when I see him rub a little sauce on his cheek. I glance at Corinne, who is also hiding a smile. When I roll my eyes, she loses the battle and chuckles.

"Once you're done, it's bath time." I tell my daughter. She groans before sending me a speculative look.

"Bubble bath?" She asks.

"What else?" I reply, receiving a brilliant smile in return. "If you two wanted some time to yourselves, I can take care of them. I'm sorry about not being around much this afternoon."

Corinne waves me off. "No problem. The kids have been great. I got more work done and Desdemona and I have been discussing the charity event."

"I was hoping the three of us could sit down together this evening." Desdemona says. "I have some numbers to run by you both and I've found two more artists with some excellent pieces that I want to include in the program."

"Let's go clean up the hooligans and get them to bed." I say, taking Elina's hand and leading her to her room. All the guest rooms have their own bathroom, which is nice. That way I can keep her bathroom stocked with all the supplies I need to wash off a layer or two of spaghetti sauce. I smile as I think about Mal. He's enamored with her and following her lead. I sincerely hope this is temporary. Elina does not need more men catering to her every whim.

I pull her pajama top over her head as Puma comes into the room carrying Mal. "I need some kid time." He says, kneeling to let Elina climb into his other arm. "The three of us are going to watch a movie. No adults allowed." He says, leaning over to

give me a kiss. I watch all three of the kids leave the room, shaking my head as Mal and Elina bombard him with movie suggestions.

I find Desdemona and Corinne hard at work. I sit and listen to their conversation, getting the reprieve I need after this strange day. We've just discussed the additional artists Desdemona found and the possibility of adding another room to handle the extra exhibits when Diego steps in. I glance up and see the exhaustion on his face. Desdemona must see it as well, because she hurries to him and offers him a hard hug.

"I'm ok." He tells her, stroking her back. "It was just more emotional than I expected." He says, sitting down.

"Do you need something to eat or drink?" I offer, but he waves me off.

"No. We finished the sandwiches and the bottle of tequila. I think I'm set." He says with a chuckle. "I forgot how much Sal can drink."

"You two alright?" Desdemona asks, and he nods.

"We're good. We talked about Carmella and our life together. He knows how much we loved each other. So no hard feelings."

Corinne looks confused, so I give her a quick rundown on what we learned from Sal about my mother.

"So that's what Juan wants? He thinks marrying you will give him access to another cartel through your aunt?" She asks. We didn't share that my aunt is the leader behind many cartels, but let her believe that she only leads one of the larger ones.

"Looks like it." I admit. "Is that all you talked about?" I ask Diego. "Did he have any insights about where Juan is hiding out or his next move? We didn't really talk about

him.”

“He has nothing to add. We talked about John Spada. I told him how Juan pretended to be Spada and worked for me for a short time. It was John’s brother, Greg, who died in the car bomb meant for Sal.”

“We need to tell Puma.” I say.

“Need to tell me what?” Puma asks, entering the room. When I frown at him, he explains. “The kids fell asleep about twenty minutes in. I got them both tucked into bed. Now, what do I need to know?”

Page 32

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

Diego tells him what he discovered from Sal about Greg. When Puma doesn't look surprised, I ask him, "you knew?"

"I did."

"Sal believes Juan acted when he did because Sal and Sal Jr were in Chicago." Diego adds.

Puma's expression shifts slightly. I don't think any of the others saw it, but I know my man. I also know why the mention of Chicago would cause a reaction.

"Why was Sal in Chicago?" I ask, so Puma doesn't have to draw attention to his interest.

Diego shrugs. "He didn't say, only that it was a business meeting. The odd thing is that he mentioned he and Sal Jr. flew out the morning Josef grabbed you, but came home the same day. Something about the meeting being cancelled."

"Cancelled, huh?" I say. "Wasted trip." I glance at Puma and I can see he's thinking. I'm not surprised when he stands to leave.

"I have to check on a few things." Puma says, leaning over to kiss me. "See you in a few minutes?"

I nod.

"Something's going on." Corinne says. "Wasn't Puma in Chicago?"

I narrow my eyes at her. “What makes you think he was?”

Corinne gulps. “That’s what that man said, Juan. He said something about Puma being back from Chicago, so I should be able to reach him.”

I frown at that. How did Juan know about Puma’s movements? Was he watching Puma? Likely. But is it more than that? Could he have a spy? Not so likely. I need to tell Puma about what Corinne heard. Her comment has me wondering if she’s as innocent in this as we all assumed.

“It’s club business.” I tell her. “It’s frustrating, but the members keep some details away from us for our protection and theirs. You need to forget about Chicago. Can you do that?” I ask her.

She studies me and nods slowly. “I understand, and I won’t mention it again.”

“Thank you.” I tell her, rising. “I need to check on Elina.”

I leave them and do a check on my daughter. After tucking her leg back under the covers, I brush my hand over her hair. Matteo and I were best friends who made this amazing little girl. I will always love him for that reason alone. When he died, I grieved, but I carried on. Juan killed Matteo. I’m certain of it. The thought of him killing Puma terrifies me. I know in my heart that if I ever lost Puma. I wouldn’t survive.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: PUMA

My first stop is Spark’s office.

“Still looking into the attack on Sal’s driver.” He tells me. “We have a video of the incident, but we can’t see the attacker’s face. He keeps his back to the camera. But I

think they knew each other.” He shows me the video and I see what he means. The driver greeted his attacker. He seemed surprised to see him, but not afraid. Not until the pipe comes down on his head.

I nod. “Send Sal the video. Maybe he can recognize the attacker. I also need you to sweep my office for bugs. Sweep the common room and anywhere else Sal’s guards may have accessed.”

He stands and grabs a device off a nearby table. “I can do that. But I scanned your office, the common room, and the restrooms after they left.”

I grin at him. “Damn. Now I know why I keep you around.”

He snorts. “I’ll do it again, doesn’t hurt to double check. And you keep me around so I can shield you from all that pussy. Don’t want to piss Alisa off.”

I shake my head. Spark does fine with the ladies, but he’s not the one I’d turn to help deflect pussy. Most of the time, he only gets laid because the girls hunt him down. He’s the type of guy who needs an Old Lady. One who makes sure he eats and gets sleep. Fuck, maybe he just needs a mommy.

After he checks my office for bugs and calls the all clear. I close the door to make a call. Dante answers on the second ring.

“Puma. Problem?”

“Don’t know.” I fill him in on what Diego said about Sal being in Chicago for a meeting. “I don’t think Sal is involved with Standish, but if he is...” I trail off.

“We need to know.” Dante finishes. “We’ve spent some time with our guests and have a list of those with the special invitation to the sex club for that night. Sal isn’t

on it. Chrome has been doing some digging on his end, as well. I'll patch him in and see if he's found anything that says differently." A few minutes later, Chrome, the President of the Chicago chapter, comes on the line.

"Dante, my man. How's the Old Lady and her crew?" Chrome asks.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

Dante chuckles. “Taking over our world. Puma’s on the line. He knows of a cartel member who was in Chicago a few nights ago. We want to see if he’s a potential problem.”

I fill Chrome in and wait.

“Our guests haven’t given up his name. But I wanted to see if you found anything in the evidence you’ve uncovered.” Dante instructs.

“We found a list of all the men invited to the sex club that blew up.” Chrome says. “I think I remember a Junior on the list. I’ll see if it’s him.”

“Thanks Chrome.” I say and expect Dante to end the call, but he doesn’t.

“Chrome, fill our friend in on the good news you gave me earlier.”

Chrome chuckles. “The CPD and FBI have filed their initial findings. Based on conversations with Standish’s wife and a few of his associates, they believe Standish may have invited the various crime families to Chicago intending to kill them.”

“What the fuck?” I ask. “How did they come to that conclusion?”

“Standish has been running a hard line campaign against crime in the city.” Chrome says.

“But only against those he wasn’t benefiting from.” Dante adds, and Chrome laughs.

“Most likely. Asshole. Since they have proof Standish, his son, Colin Chambers and Dr. Vivian Chambers all flew out of Chicago shortly after the explosion, they’re convinced he and the others are on the run from associates who died in the explosion. Standish’s wife and Dr. Vance Chambers have both given statement to police. They claim Gerard and Vivian have been having an affair for years.”

“So they don’t suspect that we had anything to do with it?” I ask, flabbergasted.
“What about the hits on the brothels and auction houses?”

“Funny thing about that. All the rescued women claim they didn’t get a good look at their rescuers. They thought the men were just good samaritans helping a bunch of women.” Chrome says.

I’m happy to hear that we seem to have flown under the radar, but a sudden thought has me realizing we aren’t out of the woods. “Were there any cartel members on either list?” I ask.

“A few. Why?” Dante asks.

I debate telling Dante and Chrome about Adella and the Cortez Cartel. Since my loyalty is to my President and my club, I give them a summary on Adella Cortez and her empire. “I’d like to keep this between the three of us for now. Sal put his life on the line to tell me. He needs some time to reach out to Adella, so she understands why he betrayed her confidence.”

“Damn, she sounds like an amazing woman.” Chrome says in appreciation. “You thinking she’ll be out for revenge if any of the dead guys are part of her organization?”

“Yeah, I do. And it sounds like she’s someone who works more in the dark than we do.” I admit.

“How will we know if she’s a threat?” Dante asks.

“Not sure. I don’t know if there is a way to discover which cartels are under her control. I could ask Sal. He gave me this information because Alisa is this woman’s niece. Adella loved her sister enough to get her out of the country. I’m hoping she cares about her niece once she discovers she has one.”

“You think we can trust Sal?” Dante asks and I can hear the skepticism.

“Not sure.” I repeat. “He put his trust in me by telling me about Adella. I don’t see him working with Standish. He’d never get involved in human trafficking. He lost his daughter a few years ago. Someone took her from her apartment after killing her guard. Since he never received a ransom note, he believes someone tossed her into that world. It broke his heart. So yeah, I trust him enough to discover if anyone from the Cortez Cartel died in Chicago. And if she’s looking for revenge.”

“If you feel confident. Go ahead.” Dante says. “Keep me updated.”

He ends the call, and I debate phoning Sal when there is a knock on my door. I answer it to find Alisa and all thoughts of Sal fly out the window.

“Are you here selling Girl Scout cookies?” I ask her as I let my eyes wander over her luscious body.

“I’ve got something better than cookies.” Alisa purrs as she places her hands on shoulders. I chuckle as she adds pressure, letting me know she wants me to lean down. In my wilder days, I preferred women who I didn’t have to bend myself in half in order to kiss. But Alisa makes it worth it. I lean forward so she can lay her lips against mine. She licks my bottom lip before nibbling it with her teeth. She does the same to my upper lip. My cock hardens until its digging painfully into the zipper of my jeans.

“Better than cookies, huh? That’s some pretty big talk.” I tease her. “May need to sample the wares to verify your claim, young lady.” I slide my hands down her back to cup her curvy ass, lifting her so she can slide her legs around my waist. Her core brushes up against my bulge and I moan at the heat coming off her.

We pass through the common room, ignoring the catcalls and whistles. I pay them no mind because I’m lost in the eyes of my girl. The desire reflected in her chocolate brown orbs has me completely under her spell. I know my eyes reflect the same need and desire that I see in hers. Once we’re in my room, I slam the door shut and walk to directly to the bed. “How do you want it?” I ask her, grinning. “Hard and fast or slow and tender?”

“I want you to give it to me hard and fast, then I’ll give it to you slow and tender.” She tells me with a wink.

“Alright then.” I toss her on the bed, causing her to laugh as I strip her. She’s bouncing all over the bed as I flip and shift her to remove her clothes until she’s lying naked in front of me. Dropping to my knees, I pull her toward me so I can bury my face in her pussy. “Fuck yeah, much better than cookies.” I growl, causing her to let out a giggle that quickly turns into a moan as I latch onto her clit. Her scent drives me wild and I’m grateful she wants it hard and fast, because I’m incapable of holding back. Sliding my finger into her velvet passage, I’m rewarded with a flood of her juices on my tongue. Her hands glide over my scalp as her moans and whimpers grow in length and decibels. I love how loud my girl gets. Nothing excites me more than her screams of pleasure. With that thought in mind, I curve my finger and find that perfect spot as I bite down her clit. She detonates with a roar worthy of a Puma’s mate.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

As her body shakes through her orgasm, I strip off my clothes. I stroke my cock while I watch her rub her hands over her body, as if checking to see if she's still in one piece. "Baby, I need you." She moans as her eyes lock on my busy hand.

"I need you, too." I tell her as I rub my rigid cock against her wet pussy. Her soft skin envelopes me in a caress that has him leaking. Our juices mingle as I continue to rub against her.

I tease her until she digs her nails into my biceps. "Hard and fast, mister." She orders, and I smile as I drive myself home. "Oh, fuck yeah. That's what I'm talking about." Alisa cries out as I slide out and slam back in. The movement shifts her further up the bed, so I kneel between her legs, lifting her ass off the bed so I can get a better angle. She reaches her hands back toward the wall because every penetration drives the top of her head closer it. Taking pity on her and wanting to give her what she wants, I lean forward and place my hands on either side of her head so my arms keep her in place. Knowing she's completely at my mercy, I ramp up the pace. Our grunts are loud. I can barely hear hers over mine. Our bodies are slick with sweat. All I can see is the beauty under me, and all I can feel is her hot velvet glove clamping down on my dick. I'm so close. The tingle is gaining strength and I'm so fucking close to exploding I'm going blind.

"Touch yourself, baby. Make yourself come. I'm close." I order her, but instead of reaching for her clit, she digs her nails deeper into my biceps.

"Don't fucking have to. I'm coming." She screams as I feel her orgasm rip through her, dragging me along for the ride.

CHAPTER TWENTY: ALISA

I lay under Puma as the aftershocks fade away. Before Puma, I never knew sex could be so all-consuming. When I'm with him, the clubhouse could burn down around us and I doubt I'd notice. When he rolls off me, he lands on the bed with his arm over his face. "Fuck, woman, you were right. That was much better than cookies."

I chuckle and roll to place my cheek on his chest. From this angle, I can look up into his handsome face or down to his cut body and massive dick. I lick his nipple and give it a little bite, making him moan. Grinning when I see his dick jerk appreciatively. My man has very sensitive nipples. I shift to straddle him before leaning over to kiss his neck and along his jawline. He shudders under me, making me smile. "Now it's time for slow and tender." I tell him as I capture his lips with mine and explore his mouth, just enjoying the taste of him. After several minutes of kissing, I shift and kiss my way down his neck until I reach his impressive chest. Using my tongue and teeth, I play with his nipples and revel in his groans of pleasure.

"I may need a minute." He says, but I feel his dick harden under me when I roll my hips while sucking hard on his right nipple.

"Don't worry, baby, I'll get you ready." I promise him with a grin.

He grins back, but it's the lust in his eyes that hits straight to my core. Using my tongue, I lick my way to his belly button. I explore his abs and the feeling of those hard muscles under his smooth skin has my pussy throbbing. He may have just pounded her hard, but she always seems ready for more where he's concerned. I don't blame her. I close my mouth around the tip of his cock. With gentle but firm strokes, I work every inch of his perfect cock. I switch off and use my hand while I suck on his balls. It doesn't take long before he's standing tall and ready for me. But we're going slow and tender. I shift my attention from his dick to kiss his inner thigh, he causes me to squeal in surprise when he reaches down and lifts me until I'm

positioned right over his weeping cock. I reach down to open my slit, giving him a target. He impales me.

Waves of pleasure spark through my system, making my skin tingle as if I've been electrocuted. With his thumbs on my hips and his fingers digging into my ass, he lifts me until just his tip remains inside before slamming me back down again. I feel his legs and gluts work as he bucks his hips up so he bottoms out each time. My fingers curl into his chest as I try to stay on for the ride. His cock glides over my G-spot with each move until I feel my orgasm building. Breathless, I can't get the words out. I silently scream as I feel him tense before flooding my passage with his cum. I collapse on his chest and suck in oxygen.

"What happened to slow and tender?" I ask him when I finally find my voice.

He chuckles. "Fuck, slow and tender. We can do that when we're eighty."

With a laugh, I kiss him. "I love you." I tell him. Pleasure courses through me at the love I see in his eyes.

"I love you, too, baby." He says, cupping my face in his massive paw. We stare at each other for several seconds before he gives me a quick kiss and shifts me over so he can stand up. He goes into the bathroom and returns with a warm washcloth. He cleans me up with such care that I feel my throat tighten. I've never had a man care for me the way Puma does. After he cleans himself off, he returns to the bathroom to drop the cloth into the laundry basket. Before he returns, there's a knock on the door.

"Mommy? Puma?" comes the voice of my angel.

Puma reaches back into the bathroom and tosses me my robe as he reaches down to pull his jeans back on. He has his shirt over his head as he opens the door, after checking to make sure I'm covered.

Elina rushes into the room and jumps on the bed. Her cheeks are red and I see tears.

“Baby, what’s wrong?” I ask her, sharing a look with Puma. He sits behind Elina and strokes her back as she burrows into me.

“I don’t like him looking through my window. Can you make him stop?” She asks.

I gasp and look at Puma, who is already up and moving to the door. Another wave of love passes through me when he bellows for Chill and Dice, who come running into the room. Instead of trying to assure Elina that she was just dreaming, Puma proves that he’s a man of action who will do whatever he has to for those he loves.

“Check the perimeter, especially around Elina’s room. She says she saw someone.” I see Chill glance at Elina and nod. I see the doubt in her eyes, but she doesn’t argue. She simply runs out of the room with Dice right behind her.

“It could have been a dream…” I start, but Puma puts up his hand.

“Doesn’t matter. We check and verify.” He states before coming back to sit on the bed. Elina feels him behind her, so she shifts and jumps into his arms. “Did you recognize the man?” Puma asks her. “The guys are patrolling outside. Maybe they looked in to check on you?”

“It wasn’t one of them. They would never scare me. It was that man from today. The one in the parking lot.” Elina says and I feel my heart stop.

Juan. I glance at Puma, who is watching me. “Let’s see what they find, and I’ll have Spark check the cameras.” He says. “If it was him, he wouldn’t have been able to get into the clubhouse.”

I nod because I know he’s right. The windows are bullet proof and wired to an alarm.

But the thought of that bastard watching my daughter, scaring her, is enough to make me want to hunt him down and kill him myself. Puma must see the anger on my face, because he shifts one hand off of Elina to pull me into him. This right here is where we're safe. In Puma's arms.

I hear a sound near the door and glance to see Chill. She glances at Elina, then me, and finally Puma. I can see by the look on her face that they found something. I tense, but Puma hugs us tight before releasing us.

"Why don't you two crawl into bed? I'll talk with Chill and join you soon." Puma offers. Elina doesn't need to be asked twice. She dives under the covers and burrows in. I see the love for my little girl in his eyes as he smirks at her before leaning over to give me a kiss. "I'll be back and I'll let you know what we find. Ok?"

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:26 pm

I nod and accept his kiss before getting up to pull on a pair of pajamas. I crawl into bed and wrap myself around my angel. Her quiet breathing tells me she's already asleep and I can't help but feel another wave of gratitude toward Puma and the club. Because of them, she feels safe enough to fall asleep so soon after a fright. She trusts them to protect her. I guess I feel just as safe, because the next thing I know, I awaken to feel Puma wrap his arms around both of us. I turn slightly to see if he wants to talk, but he just kisses me and whispers, "sleep. We'll talk in the morning." I hesitate, because I really want answers now, but the warmth surrounding me pulls me under.

I awake to a gale of giggles. Shifting, I turn to see Elina jumping on the bed and diving toward Puma, who catches her and lifts her high into the air. He glances at me and gives Elina a look. "We woke up your mommy."

"Finally!" Elina says as she snuggles in between us. "We tried everything to wake you."

I laugh. "Oh, yeah? Sorry, I'm such a heavy sleeper." I tell her, tickling her.

"Must be the exercise you had last night." Puma says with a smirk. I want to punch him, but Elina reaches over and pinches his side.

"You need to exercise." She tells him.

His mouth drops open in shock as he reaches over to tickle her before blowing on her belly. "Are you saying I'm fat?" He asks with a growl. She squeals as she bats away his hands.

A knock on the door interrupts the fun.

“Yeah.” Puma calls out as the door opens and Showtime walks in.

“There you are.” She says when she spies Elina. “I have a young man out here searching high and low for his friend. He’s hoping she’ll join him for breakfast.” Elina squeals again and climbs out of bed, racing for the door. “Oh, you two are welcome to join us.” She says with a smirk.

“Gee, thanks.” Puma says, shaking his head. “I guess we know where we stand in this club.”

“Come on, you know the princess has all the power.” I tell him as I climb out of bed. Showtime laughs as she closes the door behind her.

“Shower first.” Puma growls, grabbing me and carrying me into the bathroom so we can both get more exercise.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: PUMA

I watch Alisa pull on a pair of jeans and my cock throbs at the sight of her luscious ass. My woman has curves.

“Stop that.” She says with a laugh. “I’m hungry for actual food.”

I grin at her. “Probably for the best. Pretty sure you sucked me dry. I won’t be able to get it up for a few hours.”

She rolls her eyes at me and grins. “You’re just trying to challenge me to prove you wrong. It won’t work. At least not right now. Before we go out there. What did you find last night?”

I sober and pull her into my arms after she shrugs into her shirt. “Someone was outside her window. We found footprints. It looks like Juan. Even though we didn’t get a clear image of him.”

I tense and look up into Puma’s face. “How the hell did he get inside?”

“He didn’t get inside. He can’t. I promise you.” I tell her, rubbing her back.

“But he got onto the property.” Alisa persists.

“He did, but not via the gate or the wall.” I tell her. “Spark checked the security feed. Juan was hiding in the back of Sal’s limo. I don’t think Sal knew, but I’m going to follow up with him. Juan stayed out of sight, especially when Sal left with his bodyguards. Chill found evidence of him hiding in a shed on the property. He’s on the feed looking into a few windows before he reaches Elina’s. I don’t think he was trying to spy on her or scare her. He wasn’t there for long before he took off running. Motion sensors caught him jumping the north wall.” I feel her tremble and I want nothing more than to rip the asshole apart, so he’s no longer a threat. “I’m sorry, baby. It’s my fault. I should have met Sal outside the compound.”

Alisa leans back and gives me the look that sends a chill down my spine and fires up my cock simultaneously. Alisa doesn’t have much of a temper, but when she’s pissed, the entire world knows.

“Don’t you dare blame yourself.” She snarls at me. “You always protect us. You and your club go above and beyond to keep us safe. This is not on you.”

I can’t help but grin, which causes her eyes to spark. “Thank you, baby. I’m glad you feel safe here. I can’t help it if I don’t want you and our princess to feel fear, especially inside my clubhouse.”

“Let me tell you something.” Alisa says, placing her hands on my face. “I watched my little girl come to you because she was frightened. As soon as you took over, she climbed into bed and fell immediately to sleep. She feels safe here. She trusts you. I can’t tell you how grateful I felt watching you and your club jump into action. You didn’t question her or placate her. You protected her and fought for her.”

Fuck. I have to swallow through the lump forming in my throat. All my life, I’ve had multiple milestones that I thought were huge. School championships, earning a full basketball scholarship to Arizona, getting drafted by the Suns and then getting voted as President of this chapter. All those accomplishments pale compared to hearing how one little girl has complete trust in me to keep her safe.

“Damn, baby. How can I be a badass biker when you make me cry?” I ask her and I see her smile through my watery eyes.

“Because you are you, baby. You’re always a badass biker.” Alisa says, stretching to give me a kiss, before taking my hand and leading us toward the door. “But this badass biker momma needs food.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Need to talk to Sal again today.” I tell Alisa as we pass through the common room to get to the kitchen. “I need to confront him about Juan.”

“And about what he was doing in Chicago?” Alisa asks. When I narrow my eyes at her, she simply rolls hers. “I’m not an idiot. I saw you tense up when Diego mentioned it.”

“Well, don’t say anything...” I start and bite off the rest of my sentence when her eyes narrow. Fuck, she’s hot when she’s pissed at me.

Inside the kitchen we find two kids eating French Toast and I’m pretty sure they poured the syrup directly onto their faces and down their pajama tops. When Elina lifts her arms up to offer me a hug, I shake my head. She gives me a sweet pout and I laugh. “As much as I love you, I can’t carry you around today and if you hug me, we’ll be glued together.”

Elina laughs as Mal studies me. “Do you love me, too?” He asks, and I grin at him.

“Absolutely. But I’m not hugging you either.” I tell him. He gives me a grin that has my heart constricting. I turn around to grab a mug of coffee in order to clamp down my emotions. How can two little imps, who, combined, weigh less than a quarter of my weight, have such a big impact on me? They’re turning me into a sap. As I sip my coffee and watch them lay hands on each other’s faces and pretend to be stuck, I realize I’m pretty happy being a sap.

“Where’s Corinne?” Alisa asks Showtime.

“Drawing baths.” She says with a grin. “I’ll take care of Elina for you while you two eat.”

“Thanks, Showtime.” Alisa says, as she piles a plate of food for me and one for herself. I grab her a mug of coffee and follow her out to the common room.

I wave down Wildcard, who is walking toward the kitchen with his empty plate. “Church in an hour. See who all can make it. I need Spark there.” I tell him. He nods.

“You got it, Prez.”

I turn to Alisa. “Were you and Desdemona going to 1% today?” We’re only a few days away from the charity event and I know Desdemona has been spending more and more time there.

Alisa nods as she swallows a bite of French Toast. “We are. The last of the auction items come in today. We need to verify that we have all the pieces and update the catalog. Why?”

I chew my food as I consider my response. Normally, I wouldn’t involve the women in my plans, but I need to talk to Sal in person and away from his bodyguards. I also want him away from his office. Knowing how much interest Sal has in the auction, I consider using that interest as part of my plan. He once asked about the possibility of viewing the items prior to the event. I can do him a favor and get him alone.

“Would you be willing to let Sal have a sneak peek at the items up for auction?” I ask her.

“You need to talk to him?” Alisa counters and I nod. She grins. “Oh, baby. You only have to ask.” She leans over and kisses my cheek before taking our plates into the kitchen.

I go looking for Spark. I need him to put together a few things.

I start Church even though several of the members are missing. I know most are working and the others probably didn't have enough time to make it in. That's ok, because the members I need are here. Spock, our secretary, is taking notes so everyone will know the details, eventually.

"Most of you know we had two visitors yesterday. One I invited and the other not so much." I start. "After Juan accosted Alisa in the parking lot, I asked Sal to come to the clubhouse so he could listen to the recording. I thought he might have insight into what Juan's claims about Alisa. It turns out Alisa's mother has ties to another cartel and Juan believes marrying her will gain him control of that cartel."

"Do we know how?" Wildcard asks.

"According to Sal, Alisa's aunt is a major player with influences that cross several cartels." I tell them. "No one knows how Juan figured it out. Diego smuggled Alisa's mother into the country and gave her a new identity. One that no one but the two of them knew." I glance at the stunned expressions on everyone's faces and nod, knowing they get it. "Juan has access to information, but we don't know his source or sources. Which leads me to our second visitor last night. Juan hitched a ride in the trunk of Sal's car. He didn't get into the clubhouse, but he scared Elina. He escaped before we caught up to him."

"Did Sal bring him?" Dice asks, and I shake my head.

"I don't believe so, but I'll find out."

"How did he know Sal was coming here?" Chill asks. "Your request was out of the blue and he arrived within minutes." She glances at Spark. "We checked for bugs, right?"

He nods. “We’re clean on our end. I think the leak is on Sal’s side, but I can’t prove it unless he grants us access.”

“He could have a rat, or Juan may have bugged Sal’s office or phone.” I say. “Which is why I’m having Desdemona invite Sal to 1% today. He’s interested in the art, so he’ll show. If Juan is tracking him, he may or may not follow him to the casino. I want everyone alert and looking for him. In the meantime, I’ll have the women get Sal alone so we can scan his phone and his person before we let him know what we suspect.”

“We could ask Trouble and his crew to help secure the casino.” Chill offers. “If Juan does show, he’ll be on alert for our kutties. He may not be looking for the Shadow Borns.”

I nod. “Good thinking. I’ll reach out to Trouble. One more item before we break.” I continue. “I’ve learned that Sal and Junior were recently in Chicago for a meeting.”

“How recently?” Wildcard asks.

“They returned the day Josef grabbed me.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Son of a bitch!” Wildcard explodes. “Was Sal working with those bastards?”

“I don’t have enough information yet. I talked with Dante and Chrome. They had a guest list for the sex club where Standish planned on taking the women. They’re checking to see if either are on it. But I plan on asking Sal about his trip today.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: ALISA

“Sal!” Desdemona calls out, greeting the cartel leader like an old friend. She’s playing the part well and I’m grateful. I know Puma is counting on us to get Sal alone and the only way his bodyguards will agree to it is if we can show we’re not a threat. “So glad you could make it. I can’t wait to show you the beautiful items we have.”

Salvador greets Desdemona with a kiss on her cheek before turning to me and giving me the same treatment. “I appreciate your letting me see them before the show. When I asked Puma, I didn’t really think he’d make it happen.”

As Desdemona leads us toward the exhibition rooms, I ignore the two hulking bodyguards following behind us. We have a plan and for it to work; we need to make sure Sal doesn’t suspect we have ulterior motives. Desdemona and I take turns showing Sal the paintings and sculptures. The guards trudge along behind us, showing no interest in the art. However, when any of the workers pass through, their interest peaks. When I spot Sal using one of the older catalogs, I get an idea.

“I’ll be right back.” I tell Sal before heading out of the room. Going to my office, I pick up an updated catalog and write a quick note on one page. Returning to the group, I offer Sal the newer catalog. “We just received these and will hand them out

the night of the auction. I thought you might like an advanced copy.” I tell him, smiling and handing the catalog to him.

“Thank you.” He frowns when I don’t immediately release it. Looking down, he spots my finger stuck inside the catalog. He slips his finger into the spot and nods. “This is most kind of you.” He says, opening the booklet as he walks away from his bodyguards to stand in front of another painting. I watch him glance down and read the note I left him.

Puma wants to speak to you alone, without your bodyguards. Please.

He doesn’t show how he feels about the request, but continues studying various pieces. “I’d like to sit down somewhere and talk about the possibility of acquiring a few of these pieces prior to the auction. Is there somewhere private where we can talk?”

I glance at Desdemona, and she beams at him. “I think that is a great idea and I have just the spot.” She leads the way down the hall to our office. After unlocking the door, we follow her in. The bodyguards follow and take sentry on either side of the door while we take seats around the small conference room table.

“I’m starving.” Sal says. “How about you ladies? Do you think we can get some lunch brought in here?”

I glance at Sal and then at Desdemona. “I think I can arrange that. Let me see if one of our workers can go pick up an order at Blacktop.”

“Oh, no, we don’t want to interfere with their work.” Sal says, grinning at me. “Marco and Gregor, you go pick up the order and bring it back here.” He says to his men.

“Boss?” Marco or Gregor asks.

“I’ll be fine in here. We’ll lock the door behind you. These two mean me no harm.” Sal says, standing and shooing the men out of the room. “I’ll have their lobster bisque and crab pasta.” He says. “Ladies?”

I smirk and reply for us. “Same.” Since preparing the bisque takes close to an hour, we have plenty of time before the bodyguards become suspicious. Only minutes after they leave, Puma and Spark enter the room. I see Sal open his mouth, but Puma holds up his hand to stop him while Spark places one of his devices on the table before nodding at Puma.

“Ok, no one can listen in.” Puma tells Sal. “We’d like to look at your phone, and Spark has a device you can use to check your office for bugs.”

Sal frowns. “What makes you think I have a bug problem?”

“Because Juan hitched a ride in your trunk yesterday and gained access to our compound. He frightened Elina when he looked into her room.” Puma tells him.

Sal swears in a combination of English and Spanish. It would be humorous if I didn’t still have the image of Elina’s tear-stained face forefront in my mind. “How do you know he arrived in my trunk?” Sal asks. Spark is ready for the question and uses his laptop to show Sal the video while he examines Sal’s phone.

Sal buries his head in his hands and rocks. “This is not good.” He groans. “How did he know I was coming to see you? How did he get in my trunk?” He drops his hands and stares at Puma. “I swear to you, I didn’t bring him.”

Puma shakes his head. “Sal, do you think we’d be sitting here if we thought you betrayed us? Your men could have parked anywhere. There are plenty of spots which

would have given Juan more cover. But the timing of it all is what makes me believe you either have vermin or insects.”

Sal nods slowly. “Thank you, Puma.” He turns to me and takes my hand in his. “I’m so sorry about your daughter. Is she ok?”

I smile and squeeze his hand. “She is. She came to Puma, and he calmed her fears.” I say, sending Puma a smile. I enjoy the heat in his eyes as he casts me a look of appreciation mingled with pride.

“What do we do?” Sal asks.

“I can go with you back to your office to scan it for bugs.” Spark offers. “Or maybe Sal Jr. or Josef can handle it?”

“You don’t suspect them?” Sal asks and my heart hurts to see the hope on his face.

“I don’t. But you need to make that call.” Puma replies. “I don’t believe Josef knew he was working with Juan when he abducted me. In fact, it wouldn’t surprise me to learn that Juan hoped we’d kill each other. I know Juan wants me out of the way, so I can understand him setting me up. But he’s the one who brought his brother into it. He had to have known he was putting him at risk. The plan was rash and not well thought out.”

Sal nods. “I know. If I had been in town, the whole thing would never have happened.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Where were you?” Puma asks.

“On my way to Chicago. We were supposed to be meeting with representatives from other organizations.”

“Supposed to? You contacted me the following day. You didn’t stay in Chicago for very long.” Puma says.

Sal runs his hand down his face. “Fucking disaster. I feel like this entire week has been full of them. When I got to Chicago, I learned that several of the representatives died in a bombing. Fuck, it’s a mess. Those of us that weren’t there are now looking at each other with suspicion. Even though the cops have a suspect in mind, it doesn’t stop the families of the victims from suspecting those of us without losses for being part of it.”

“You said, when you got to Chicago.” Puma says. “I thought Sal Jr. was with you.”

Sal flinches and his face goes gray. “Fuck. It’s such a mess.”

Puma glances at me, and I take the hint. Tapping Desdemona on the hand, we both rise.

“I think you guys need the room. Sal, I know this may not be the right time, but we’ll talk again soon about the pieces you want. We have some time before the event.” Desdemona tells him.

Sal gives us a sad smile and nods his head.

“I can go head off the bodyguards.” I offer, although I doubt they’ll listen to me.

Sal picks up his phone. “I’ll call them. Let them know that I’m in a meeting and not to disturb me. Don’t worry.”

I nod and give him a smile. We step out of the office and make our way toward Blacktop. I still want my lobster bisque.

We spy Sal’s bodyguards heading our way carrying our food. The look on their faces has me contemplating dumping the containers they hand over. In case they poisoned it. When I take the containers, they don’t keep moving but continue to glare. I feel a spot of worry until I hear a familiar voice.

“Your boss is waiting for you, you better run along.” Chill says as she steps between us and the guards. “I’d hate to send you back to Sal bloody and bruised.”

“You think you can take us both?” One guard asks.

“I do.” Chill replies cheerfully.

“But she won’t have to.” Comes another voice. I shift and see Trouble take a stand next to Chill. Corinne joins Desdemona and me.

The guards grumble, but back off.

“I’ll take you to your leader.” Chill says with a smirk.

“No need.” The first guard grumbles.

“But I insist.” Chill responds using her arm to gesture them in front of her. “Can’t have you losing your way.”

Trouble chuckles as Chill sends him a wink. The four of us find a table nearby and sit. “Are you two hungry?” I ask Trouble and Corinne.

“We already ate.” Corinne asks watching Chill guide the guards through the casino. “They don’t look too happy.” She comments.

I shrug as I open the container and breathe in the luscious scent. “Their boss purposely sent them off and exposed himself to danger. Not that Puma means Sal harm. It’s the same look Chill gives Puma when he puts himself at risk.” I take a bite of the bisque and savor the flavors.

Desdemona chuckles. “Poor Chill. I sometimes think she’d like to strangle everyone in the club, including Puma. But she’ll kill anyone who tries to hurt any of them.” She moans as she takes her own bite.

“She’s interesting.” Corinne comments. “Female bikers aren’t the norm, are they? What’s her story?”

Trouble chuckles. “Chill is the stuff of legends.” He says. “She’s unique. She’s also one reason Dante has so much respect for Puma.”

“Do tell.” Desdemona encourages him.

I smirk at her request, but turn my attention to Trouble. I love hearing stories about the club. But before he begins, I feel a tingle along my spine. You know the feeling you get when someone is watching you? Yeah, that one.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: PUMA

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Chicago?” I press after the women leave. I glance at Spark, and he nods back. He’s recording our conversation.

“About once a year, several of the various crime organizations get together to discuss business.” Sal says. “It’s usually held on neutral ground, meaning not at any buildings or sites owned by any of the participants. We meet to keep the conflicts down to a minimum. None of us wins if the violence takes over. We move the meetings around each year. They’re usually held by someone who wants to curry favor with any or all of us. This year we were meeting in Chicago.”

“Do you usually attend?” I ask.

“Not always. But this year, Adella asked several of us to go. The man who was hosting it, a Gareth Standish, was looking for contacts to expand his human trafficking business. Adella wanted us to find out what we could about him and his operation.”

“Why?”

“She despises the practice. It’s her one hard and fast rule. She doesn’t care if we deal in guns, art, secrets, drugs, whatever. Except people. She promises to destroy cartels if she discovers them even considering it.”

“What did she want you to do in Chicago?”

“She wanted us to gather as much information as we could and report back to her.”

“What happened?” I ask, not ready to show my hand.

Sal shrugs. “Chaos. I arrived to discover that several of the attendees died in an explosion the night before at this new sex club Standish was opening.” He takes a shaky breath. “I almost lost Junior that night.”

“How?”

“Standish invited several of the men to a private party at a sex club. I never go to those parties. I have my Katrina and have no desire to be with another woman. Junior went because he’s still looking for his match. I keep telling him he won’t find them in places like that.” Sal gives a sad smile. “He knows it. He just isn’t ready to settle down. Although after that night, I think he may change his mind.”

“What happened?” I press. I’m trying to stay calm. To keep my anger from seeping into my tone. If Sal or his son had any foreknowledge of Standish’s plan, I’ll kill them both.

“Junior called me after he left the party. Something he overheard had him bailing. He heard a comment made by one of the Bratva men that there were only going to be four women. That the men could do whatever they wanted to them, even kill them. Junior freaked. He grabbed his friends and left. He called me as they were on their way back to the hotel. They were only a block away when they heard the explosion. I flew out immediately, picked up Junior, and brought him home. Now I’m afraid I’m going to lose him.”

I study Sal as he struggles to control his emotions. “Why do you think you’re going to lose him?” I finally ask.

“The families who lost people are obviously upset. They think someone set them up. They’re looking at those who survived the bombing. Specifically, those who were at

the club and left prior to the explosion.” Sal explains.

“What about the women?” I ask, although I know the answer. “Did he even try to save them?”

“Junior was certain the women weren’t in the building yet.” Sal explains.

“Does anyone know what happened in Chicago?” I ask him. “You mentioned a Standish who was hosting the meeting. Was he at the sex club when it blew?”

Sal frowns. “I don’t think so. Junior said Standish was bringing the women, and they hadn’t arrived before he left.” I say nothing as I watch Sal work it out in his head. “Fuck. He’s probably the one who set the bomb. He wasn’t trying to make contacts, he was trying to kill his competition.”

I don’t let my expression change, but inside, I’m grinning. “Where is he? This Standish person? What was his full name?”

“Gareth Standish.” Sal growls out. “I don’t know where he is, but we’ll find him. I’m taking this back to those who lost their family members.” Sal leans back in his chair. The man looks older than his age, which is rare. “I could have lost two of my sons in less than twenty-four hours.” Sal admits. “Thanks for not killing Josef. I’ve got my men searching for Juan. I’ll do what is necessary to keep him from hurting Alisa. You have my word.”

“Thanks.” I tell him. “How did he get you into your trunk? Does he have keys to your cars?”

“No, of course not. Only my driver.” Sal frowns. “Well, shit.”

“You said someone mugged your driver, right? Do you think his mugger took the

keys?” I ask.

Sal nods. “Yes. Damn. I didn’t think. With everything that’s happened, I can’t believe I didn’t put that together. I saw the video of the mugging, but I didn’t recognize him. Of course, I only saw him from the back?”

“So, it wasn’t Juan?” I ask, and he shakes his head. “Could it have been someone working with him? I admit I saw the surveillance footage as well. It looked like your driver recognized his attacker. Have you been able to speak with him?” I ask. “Can he identify him?”

Sal shakes his head. “He’s still in a coma. The attack was brutal.”

“And no one from your organization recognized him?” I ask.

Sal opens his mouth and closes it again. “You think someone from our organization did this?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

I shrug. “It could have been someone you know who is now working with Juan. I’d say it’s worth a look.”

“You’re right. I just assumed.” He gives a dark chuckle. “Well, we know what they say about assumptions. God. I’m tired. I’ll follow up. Let you know what I find.”

I nod and shake his hand as we both stand. Sal walks out of the room after pocketing the device Spark gave him. If he finds bugs in his office, well, it’s likely heads will roll. I’m not much of a gambler. I like my money to earn me a guaranteed return. But I’d be willing to take a bet on Sal having a rat in his nest. The odds are just that high.

I pull out my phone and hit the call button.

“Puma.” Dante’s voice comes through.

“Had a meetup with Sal.” I tell him, then give him the lowdown of Junior’s near-death experience.

“Fuck, it’s a good thing he got out of there when he did.” Dante says, but then goes quiet.

“He’s not the only one who left. He grabbed his friends, told them what he heard, and they bailed.” I tell him.

“Doesn’t mean that there might have been others who didn’t know what Standish had planned.” Dante says. “Fuck. I just assumed...”

“Yeah. We all did.” I tell him. “I don’t want to consider that some who perished in that bomb were innocent.” Chuckling when Dante snorts. “Yeah, yeah. Innocent of the plan to hurt your women. But you’re right, they weren’t innocent men.”

“You’re certain this Adella person isn’t looking at us?” Dante asks.

“I don’t think so. Sal was worried because the other families were looking at Junior and his friends since they survived. I suggested Standish set them up so he’ll go back to Adella and the other families with the idea. Since the cops are looking for Standish and won’t find him, they’ll likely buy it.”

“Good.” Dante says before signing off.

“Do you think Sal is going to find Juan and stop him?” Spark asks.

I shrug. “Maybe, now that he’s entertaining the possibility of Juan being a threat to his other sons. Do me a favor. See if you can track the attacker’s movements before and after the attack. Maybe you can get a clearer image of him. The cops may not be as diligent. Considering he’s the driver of a cartel boss.”

Spark nods. “I’m on it. Anything else?”

“No. I’m getting the women and taking them home.”

Spark chuckles.

“What?”

“Maybe we should change your name to Lion.”

“Why?”

“You’re building a pride of females.”

“Fuck you.”

We leave the office, locking it up to protect Alisa’s and Desdemona’s things before going in search of my pride. I shake my head. I’m a one woman man and that woman is Alisa.

Spark and I part ways when I spot Alisa, Desdemona, Chill, and Corinne sitting at a table with Trouble. The four women are laughing at something Trouble’s saying and I feel a twinge of jealousy shoot through me when I see my woman laughing.

As I approach them, my temper spikes when I hear Trouble’s comment.

“It’s Puma’s story to tell. Not mine. But you should ask him to tell it. It’s a good one.” Trouble says, grinning at me.

What the fuck?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: ALISA

I glance around the casino as Desdemona and Corinne pester Trouble for Chill’s story. I don’t see anyone paying us any special attention. Not right away. But just before I turn my attention back to my friends, I spot him. He’s standing in the shadows near a small palm tree, leaning against the wall. He’s watching us. And he isn’t hiding the fact. I consider standing up to face him, but before I decide, Chill sits down. Shifting my eyes to her, I consider telling her about our audience, but when I look back, he’s gone. I didn’t get a good look at him, so I don’t know if it was Juan. He’s gone now, so I shouldn’t have to worry about him. At least that’s what I’m telling myself.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“What are we talking about?” Chill asks.

“How you joined the club.” Desdemona says. “Trouble says it’s a good story and we want to hear it.”

Chill rolls her eyes. “It’s not that interesting, and it’s a little embarrassing.” She admits.

“Well, now we have to hear it.” I laugh.

“Why would that story embarrass you?” Trouble asks. “The way Puma tells it, you were fucking brave and a total badass.”

Chill shrugs. “I should have done my homework. After I retired from service, I had a hard time figuring out what to do with myself. I enlisted, intending to earn money for college. By the time I was out, my need for adrenaline was so high that the thought of sitting in classes all day had me breaking out in hives.”

We laugh as she grins.

“I considered being a cop for about ten minutes.” We laugh at her shudder. “I then talked to a couple of guys I served with who joined an MC back east. They talked up the thrill of riding and belonging to the club. Said it was the closest thing they found to being in the military, minus the red tape. That sold me, so I started looking for a club closer to home.”

“Were you already a rider?” I ask. She nods.

“Riding a motorcycle is a must for those of us who like our spikes of adrenaline.” Chill says. “I had a nice ride. It wasn’t a Harley, but what they call a crotch rocket.” Chills says and chuckles at Trouble’s eye roll. “Yeah, yeah, I had a lot to learn. Which is why I made the biggest mistake of all.”

“What?” the three of us ask. Chill has our rapt attention. In the few weeks since meeting her, this is the most I’ve ever heard her talk. And the first time she’s spoken about herself.

“I looked into clubs on the West Coast and found a few. I found one that was all female and considered visiting them. But then I saw the Demon Dawgs and thought it was a sign since I’d been in the Marines. I figured I’d try them first. I rode to the chapter in LA...”

“LA?” I ask and Chill laughs.

“Exactly.”

“Why? What’s wrong with LA?” Corinne asks.

“The LA Chapter has some problems.” Chill says and Trouble barks out a laugh.

“Yeah, their names are Acid and Roadkill.” Trouble adds. “Acid is the President, Roadkill is his VP. Acid is the fucker who gave me my road name and why I joined the Shadow Borns instead.”

Desdemona frowns. “I kind of remember meeting Acid when I was younger.” She admits. I knew Desdemona was Dante’s high school girlfriend. Until his father kidnapped her, along with her friend, when he needed two more girls for a shipment of women. Bastard. “He wasn’t someone I wanted to be alone with. Ever.”

Chill shakes her head. “No, you do not. I shouldn’t say anything because he is a club President. It’s disrespectful.”

“You may not say it, but I can. The guy’s an asshole.” Trouble says, causing us to laugh.

“What happened?” I ask her.

“Well, I arrive at the club and ask if I can prospect. He and Roadkill tell me I can start by giving them each a blow job. When I explained I wanted to be a member, not a club girl, they told me that the only women that get through the doors do so on their backs or on their knees. Their attitude turned me off, so I got back on my bike to leave. That’s when Roadkill grabs me and tells me I’m not leaving until I give them what they want.”

“Bastard.” Desdemona snarls, and I nod in agreement.

“What did you do?” I ask.

“Took him down. Nailed him in the jewels and held him in a chokehold until he passed out. By that time, I had several guns aimed at my head. I figure I’m dead when Puma strides out of the clubhouse. He looks around as he steps up to me. He glances down at Roadkill and smirks before asking me what I wanted. When I tell him I wanted to prospect with the Demons, he asked me how I felt about moving to Las Vegas. He explained he was on his way back to Vegas and I could tag along if I was interested. I hopped on my bike and followed him.” Chill concludes. “Of course, one of his pre-requisites was that I had to buy a real bike.”

“I can’t imagine Acid was happy about Puma taking you into his club.” Desdemona says and Chill chuckles.

“He was furious. He tried to get Dante to intervene, but that was just another mistake on his part.”

“Why?” I ask.

“Because Dante has too much respect for Puma, especially after the crap Acid pulled when Puma took over the Vegas Chapter.” Trouble says.

“What crap did he pull?” I ask.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“It’s Puma’s story to tell. Not mine. But you should ask him. It’s a good one.” Trouble says, grinning over my shoulder.

“What the fuck?” Puma asks from behind us. “What story are you talking about?”

“I was telling them about how I joined your crew.” Chill explains. “I mentioned how angry Acid was that you took me on and how he reached out to Dante.”

“And I was just explaining how much Dante respects you, but the reason for that respect is your story to tell.” Trouble adds. “You should tell it. It’s one of my favorites.” The grin on Trouble’s face has Puma rolling his eyes.

“Please?” I ask, batting my eyes. I’m enjoying this outing and not ready to go back to the clubhouse. Plus, it’s fun hearing about Puma’s earlier life. “I just want a little more time out of the clubhouse.”

Puma frowns at me but sits down. He turns to Trouble. “You only like that story because I look like an idiot and you like a hero.” He complains, but then grins when we all beg. “Fine. I’ll tell you the story. But I’m starving.” He waves over a server who takes our order for a couple of pitchers of beer and several appetizers.

“After my accident, I moved to Vegas. My career was over and I didn’t know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I missed the excitement of playing ball and missed the camaraderie of my teammates. Even though I still got invitations to various parties and events. I tried gambling, but found it boring. In Vegas, something is always happening, but even here, I felt like I was in a rut. One day I saw a group of bikers pass by and I realized that I’d never tried a motorcycle before.”

“Really?” I ask. “That doesn’t sound right.”

He shrugs. “Your typical player contract doesn’t allow for motorcycles. Or skiing, waterboarding, etc. The possibility of injury is too great.”

“They probably should have listed driving fast cars on that list.” Trouble adds with a smirk. I scowl at him while Puma shrugs.

“Anyway.” I say, causing Puma to grin at me.

“I went out shopping for a bike. Wound up at a Harley dealership and got to talking with a biker. It was Wildcard. He told me about the Demons and what it was like being part of the club. It sounded appealing. But what was more appealing was that Wildcard didn’t know who I was. It was one of the few times where I had a conversation that was about something other than my career or my accident.”

“I didn’t know it was Wildcard who got you into the club.” Chill says.

“He invited me to some parties and introduced me to the executive team. The President at the time was an old guy, name of Squiggy. He was a friend of Dante’s father, Dale.” Puma says with a glance at Desdemona. “Squiggy was an asshole, but he took a shine to me. Probably saw me as a future SOA or Enforcer because of my size. He was a racist and a bigot, but he minded his manners when I was around.”

“Probably because you could snap him in two if you wanted.” Trouble adds and Puma shrugs.

“He was fat, so more likely I would have just ripped off his arms and legs.” He says with a smirk. “I prospected for about a year. Met and spoke with Dante a few times and we hit it off. Pretty sure the old asshole didn’t like that, but he wasn’t about to cause problems with Dante. Or me. Squiggy scared most of the members, but not

me.”

“Most of the guys fear you, too.” Chill says and Puma glances at her. “But that isn’t why they follow you or respect you. I heard what happened to Squiggy. If it hadn’t been for you, the chapter would have folded and likely taken the rest of the chapters with it.”

“What did you do?” I ask.

“I killed my President.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: PUMA

I say the words with no remorse, even though Squiggy was the first person I killed. I may not have pulled the trigger, but it’s my fault he’s dead. “I learned he was setting Dante up to take the fall for crimes committed by Dale.” I glance at Corinne. Not sure how much to share with her. But if she’s part of my life now, she’ll learn the truth, eventually. “Dale was involved in human trafficking.” I tell her. Corinne gasps. I plan on leaving it there, but Desdemona doesn’t.

“I was one of his victims.” Desdemona tells her. “Dante and I dated in high school. After graduation, he prospected with the club while I went on to college. One night, Dale invited me to the club for a party, suggested I bring a friend for company. He told me it was a party for Dante. So I went. Brought my best friend and roommate. He gave us each a drink and the next thing I know, I’m auctioned off to a man who kept me prisoner for eight years.”

Corinne reaches over and snags Desdemona’s hand and squeezes it.

“I’m ok. Now. I’m free and happy with my life.” She looks at me. “Was Squiggy part of it?”

“I don’t know for certain. Although I wouldn’t have put it past him. He was all about the money. Dante never found evidence pointing to him or any of the other chapters. And he looked. Tore Dale’s office apart when he first learned what his dad had done.” I say. “If he had found evidence against Acid or Squiggy, neither would be around.”

“But Squiggy had evidence against Dale?” Chill asks.

“He said he did.” I say before leaning back to allow the server to place down our order. I pour myself a beer and snag an egg roll before continuing. “It was just chance that I overheard him talking to a Fed. He told the agent he had evidence that would help him take down the entire club, every chapter. He assured the agent that he had the evidence locked away in his safe. That once the agent had the search warrant, he’d come to the club and get the evidence.”

“What did you do?” Chill asks.

“I went to Wildcard and told him what I heard. He was ready to kill Squiggy. Neither of us knew who to trust, since most of the guys were loyal to Squiggy. We decided the best thing to do was find the evidence first and destroy it. I reached out to Dante to see if he knew of a safecracker. When I couldn’t reach him, I tried Acid. Acid pointed me to Trouble.”

“Why?” Alisa asks.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Because I’m a master safecracker.” Trouble says. “It was why Acid wanted me as part of his club.”

“So Acid sent you to Trouble?” Corinne asks.

I nod. “He did. The fucker. Didn’t warn me that Trouble wasn’t fond of Demon Dawgs. I went alone because Wildcard had to stay behind and watch the safe. That was the last time I trusted Acid.”

“What happened?” Corinne asks.

“I was still new to the MC world. I knew the Demon Dawgs had enemies, but no one mentioned the Shadow Borns. Acid told me that Trouble couldn’t cut it as a 1%. Said Trouble and his crew were hobbyists, weekend wannabe warriors. I had no reason to doubt him. Until I park in front of their clubhouse and have half a dozen guns trained on me before I cut the ignition.”

“Lucky for your man here, I may not have been a fan of the Demon Dawgs, but I was a fan of Maklin Brooks. He earned me some good money while he ran the boards.”

“One of the few times since joining the Demon Dawgs that I was glad someone saw past the kutte and recognized me.” I admit. “Once I explained why I needed help and who sent me to find him, we established a friendship.”

“I hated Acid, but I always had respect for Dante. I considered finding a different chapter after I left LA, but decided, instead, to avoid the problems Acid could cause me. So I joined the Shadow Borns. We aren’t hobbyists, but we aren’t murderers

either.” Trouble says. “I heard Puma out and offered my help.”

“You opened the safe?” Corinne asks and Trouble nods. “How do you know how to do that?”

“It’s a skill you can learn. You can even get certified. Not all safecrackers are criminals. I used to work for a security firm. I liked the idea of being in an MC and I could bring my skills to the club. The Shadow Borns run a security business where I can use my talent.”

“Trouble and his team are providing additional security for our charity event.” Desdemona tells Corinne.

Corinne nods and I can see interest in her eyes. I’m not sure how I feel about my son’s mother hooking up with the President of another club, but then again she could do worse. And I know Trouble would do everything in his power to protect Corinne and Mal. Maybe them hooking up isn’t such a bad thing.

“What happened with Squiggy?” Chill asks, drawing me back into the conversation.

“Trouble rode with me back to the clubhouse and opened the safe. We used a prospect to smuggle the evidence off the property. He went to San Diego with instructions to deliver the package to Dante.”

“So the Feds showed up, but found no evidence?” Alisa asks.

“Yep.” I say, my mind playing out the events of that day. “Once we had the evidence out of the way, we waited. We weren’t certain if Squiggy would check the safe before the Feds arrived or not. We had a contingency plan for that scenario. Turns out we didn’t need one. Squiggy took care of it himself.”

“How?” Alisa asks.

“He held a party. Had everyone there when the Feds arrived. Squiggy put on one hell of an act. He postured and protested, but eventually took the agent to his office.” I chuckle at the memory. “A few minutes later, Squiggy comes storming out and grabs his VP, hoisting him up by his kutte. Squiggy screamed at him, demanding to know what he did with the evidence in his safe. The VP was the only one besides Squiggy who had the combination. When the VP protested his innocence, he asked what was in the safe. Squiggy tried to backpedal. Unfortunately for him, the agent was even more pissed than Squiggy. He told everyone what Squiggy offered and what he expected in return.”

“Damn.” Desdemona says. “That was cold.”

“Turns out the agent called in a few favors and made some promises he couldn’t keep. He was in as deep as Squiggy. The VP attacked Squiggy. It was a fucking circus. Agents lost control as the members brawled. In the end, Squiggy, the agent, and our VP were all dead. They tried to pin the agent’s murder on the club, but in the end, they worked it so Squiggy and the VP shot the agent and the agent defended himself. It was the first time I ever saw someone shot, since I was responsible...”

“Fuck that.” Trouble says, slapping me on the back. “You weren’t responsible. That was Squiggy’s doing. You did what you had to do to protect the club. To protect your family. It’s why Dante recommended you as President and why the others voted you in. None of them regret that decision.”

I know he’s right. Dante and I have only spoken about that incident once and he stressed how I should see my part in taking Squiggy down, not as a betrayal against the club, but as its defender. That Squiggy betrayed the club, and I acted to protect it. Even though I know logically, he’s right. I still question if I did the right thing. I glance at Alisa and the look of approval and pride in her eyes soothes me. If I hadn’t

done what I did back then, Alisa wouldn't be safe today. Maybe that's enough.

"Don't worry, Puma. If you decide to go rogue, I'll take you down." Chill tells me as she stands up.

I chuckle. "I'm sure you will."

I have my arm around Alisa's shoulders as we step outside. When she raises her face to the sun, I get lost in her beauty. I want to take her back to the clubhouse and do unspeakable things to her body. But I also know there is no guarantee we'll be alone long enough to sate my need. I glance at my bike and have the best idea I've had all day.

"How about we take a ride?" I ask her. She rewards me with a smile and a nod.

"Let me call Showtime and make sure the kids are alright." She says, pulling out her phone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: ALISA

When Showtime answers, she assures me that the kids are fine. Diego is feeding them lunch and then he has their afternoon planned. Napping with a chance of a board game or two.

"I thought you were with Corinne." Showtime says. "I just got off the phone with her and told her the same thing."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

I glance around the parking lot until I see Corinne standing with Trouble next to his bike. He's helping her fasten a helmet on her head. I glance up at Puma, but I don't think he sees them. I'm debating on pointing them out, but decide to wait. If Trouble and Corinne are building a relationship, they should have some privacy before Puma charges in with his opinion. I love the man, but he can be controlling.

"We were, but I'm with Puma now. Thanks." I tell Showtime and end the call.

"Everything good?" He asks me and I nod.

"We have at least two hours. Diego is fixing them lunch, and then they'll take a nap." I tell him.

"Good, that will give us plenty of time." He says with a grin.

"Plenty of time for what?" I ask.

"You'll see." He says as he straddles his bike after handing me my helmet. I fasten it before swinging my leg over and wrapping my arms around him. Snuggling into his back, I breathe in his scent, leather with a dash of spice. Prior to meeting Puma, I had never ridden on the back of a bike. The feeling is indescribable. It's both terrifying and relaxing. The sense of freedom is powerful, so is the feeling of imminent death. But Puma is not an average man. If anyone can control the monster bike, it's him.

As we ride down the strip, I keep my eyes peeled for Trouble and Corinne, but I don't see them. I've never been to Trouble's clubhouse, so I don't know what direction they may have gone. Of course, I'm assuming he took her there. He may have taken

her back to the Demon Dawg clubhouse or just out for a ride, like us. I put them out of my mind. I shouldn't be wasting my time thinking of them when I'm wrapped around my man.

Soon Vegas and all thoughts of Corinne and Trouble are behind us as we fly through the desert. For many, the desert is boring, but I find it majestic with all its colors and secrets. The heat causes the air to shimmer. Watching the shifting shapes, it's easy to lose oneself in the possibilities. When Puma exits the highway, I expect him to turn around and head back into town. But he doesn't. He follows a barely there trail behind a standing of rocks. He maneuvers the bike so that we're invisible from the road. My panties flood with anticipation.

After checking the ground for rattlers, he helps me off the bike. His eyes roam over me, causing my skin to break out in goosebumps. Every look is a physical touch.

"I'm going to fuck you." He tells me. His deep voice rumbles and echoes off the rocks. "I'm going to fuck you hard. You have a problem with that?" He asks and I shake my head as I lift my shirt up and off.

"You planning on fucking me with your pants on, mister?" I ask, and he laughs.

"I'll strip in a minute. I'm having too much fun watching you right now. Don't want to miss any of the show."

As I remove my bra and then unfasten my jeans, Puma lays down a blanket for me so I can stand on it after removing my shoes. Once I'm naked under the high sun, Puma moves. He shifts his powerful body off the bike and I watch in awe as he strips down to nothing. A naked Puma under the sun is a beautiful sight. His muscle definition is perfect, as if hand-sculpted by the finest artisan. His skin glows in the light. Muscles ripple under smooth skin. He looks so much like his namesake that it's almost frightening. But the best part is hanging between his legs. His cock is as beautiful as

he is. Long and thick. My mouth goes dry at the sight, so I lip my lips. I watch the heat spark in his eyes as they follow the motion.

“Bend over the bike, baby.” Puma says and I lean forward. I feel him kneel behind me and, with a single flick of his tongue, my body responds with a flood of juices. The sounds he makes as he laps my arousal has my head dizzy with need. I can’t see him, but I can feel him. But that isn’t enough. I turn my head to the right and am rewarded with a view in the mirror. I see his face buried in my pussy and watch his fingers knead my ass. It’s like watching porn but feeling it at the same time. Fuck, the sensations build on each other until I feel my first orgasm barrel through me.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” I chant as the pleasure rolls through. “Fuck!” I shout when he jams two fingers into my tunnel and finger fucks me so hard that my second orgasm sends me right over the cliff.

I hear his chuckle as he uses his other hand to keep me in place. I can’t feel my legs, so I’m grateful he’s keeping me from sliding into a puddle at his feet. Lifting me, he carries me over to the rocks. My back slides against the stone as he lowers me onto his pulsating cock. He starts out slowly, letting each inch slip inside as my body stretches to accommodate him. The slow, persistent pressure is a stark contrast to the power he used with his fingers that I’m finally able to catch my breath. We get lost in the eyes of the other. My arousal builds as I accept each inch.

Once he’s fully seated inside me, I feel his powerful thighs holding me in place. He leans down to capture my mouth, and I slide my tongue into his. As we kiss, he pulls out and then slides back in. I pick up the speed of my tongue thrusts and he matches them with his hips. It’s like playing with cause and effect, but so fucking hot that I refuse to break the kiss even though I’m light-headed. When he takes control of the speed, I break off and just stare at him as he plows into me again and again until I feel my pleasure peak. I watch his gorgeous face as he climaxes and I feel as if my body can’t contain the enormity of my love for this man.

“I love you.” I tell him after we dress. He graces me with a smile that causes my heart to constrict. It’s a look of pure happiness. He shrugs on his vest before leaning over me and cupping the back of head with his hand.

“I love you.” He whispers, leaning down to kiss me. As our lips touch, he stiffens. He spins around, pushing me behind him. Yanking his gun from the waist of his jeans, he shifts us around the rock just as someone steps into view. He and Puma fire at the same time. The sound of the gunfire echoes around us, deafening me, but I can still hear the man grunt and curse before disappearing from view. “Stay here.” Puma orders as he takes off after the man.

Ducking around the other side of the rock, I watch the man run toward a motorcycle parked about a hundred yards away. It’s then that I see he’s wearing a kutte. I can just make out the logo. The sight of it has me sucking in a breath. It’s a Shadow Born kutte. I hear another shot as the man races off. Rushing back to Puma’s bike, I yank the blanket off the ground and stuff it back into his saddlebags just as Puma rounds the corner. Shoving my helmet on, I climb on the back. He guns it and we’re off.

Puma squeezes my leg as he takes off after our attacker. He speeds down the highway until we can see the lone motorbike ahead of us. Puma closes the distance, but keeps space between us and him in case he shoots again. But soon it’s clear that the man’s focus is only on his escape. Puma moves closer and I have an idea. Giving his gun a gentle tug, I convey that I’m ready to help, but Puma shakes his head. Likely because of the increase in traffic up ahead. Once we hit the busy streets, the biker slides in and out of traffic with an occasional glance back at us. Each time he takes his eyes off the road, the bike wobbles. When he realizes he can’t lose us, he cuts across the road into oncoming traffic, disappearing down a side street. If I wasn’t on the bike, Puma would have followed. But I know my safety is always his priority.

I feel his diaphragm shift under my hands and I figure he’s talking to someone over bluetooth. I expect him to turn toward the clubhouse, but he drives down the strip and

turns toward the airport. He cuts down a few streets and by now I'm lost. Until we pull up to a guardhouse similar to the one at our clubhouse. The gate opens and I know where we are. We're at a clubhouse, just not ours. This one belongs to the Shadow Borns.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: PUMA

As I slide to a stop in front of the Shadow Born clubhouse, I second guess my assumption that the person who fired at us wasn't one of Trouble's men. I recognized the kutte, but the way the rider handled the bike told me another story. The bastard may know how to ride a bike, but Harley's are a different beast. It takes muscle and skill to master one. He didn't have either. I'm likely taking a chance here, but deep down, I know I'm right.

I feel Alisa disembark, and I follow suit. She hands me her helmet so I can hang it on the handlebars next to mine.

"Are you alright?" I ask her, looking her over as she does the same to me.

"I'm fine. He didn't hit me. Are you hurt?" She asks.

I shake my head. "No, he missed. I don't think he meant to hit us."

She looks confused, but before I can explain, the gate opens again to allow Chill and Dice to ride in. They park next to me. The door to clubhouse opens and Trouble steps out. His expression is a mix of confusion and annoyance.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Puma.” He starts, holding out his hand as I reach him. I shake it, even though we just saw each other a couple of hours earlier.

“Sorry to crash the gates.” I tell him, making him smirk. “But we have a problem. Someone wearing a Shadow Born kutte just shot at me and my woman.”

“What the fuck!” Trouble shouts, getting up into my face. Or at least trying to. I’m a good five inches taller than him. “You come here, accusing me...”

I cut him off. “I’m not accusing you. Pretty certain he wasn’t one of yours. But he was wearing one of your kuttes. Missing anyone?”

Concern replaces anger as he swings around to re-enter the clubhouse. I follow him with Chill and Dice behind me, flanking Alisa. I probably should call a cage to pick her up and take her back to the clubhouse, but I need her close. Need to know that she’s safe.

“I need a roll call.” Trouble bellows. “I need a location on every member.”

I frown when I see Corinne enter the room as Trouble’s VP leaves it. She heads for Alisa. I see them talking, but I keep my focus on Trouble. Only a few minutes go by before his VP comes back and I can tell by the look on his face he doesn’t have good news.

“Everyone checked in but Toga. He went out on a run a week ago. I checked with our contact. He didn’t show.” He tells Trouble. “I’ve tried his phone, no answer. We pinged it, but there’s no signal. We got a ping on his bike, though. I have Monty and

Plymouth checking it out. I'm also checking the databases between here and the meet."

I know that means they're hacking into hospital and police servers to see if they can find their missing member.

"Do you have a picture of him?" I ask. I don't think the guy who shot at us is their missing man, but an image might prove it.

Trouble walks over to a wall covered in framed photos of the members. Some are individual shots, almost like mug shots. Most of them are group shots. Pictures taken during a run or a party. Four or five guys standing with their bikes and holding a beer. Others with women and lots of food. Trouble points at one of the group shots, his finger on the large guy in the center. He has long grey hair that falls past his shoulders and a beard almost covering his beer belly. Not the guy who shot at us.

"Yeah, that's not him." I say, as Alisa comes to stand next to me.

"No, it isn't. He had short black hair and no facial hair." She confirms. "He was thinner, too. He had a hard time handling the bike."

"I noticed that, too." I agree with her. "Speaking of bikes, what does Toga ride?"

Trouble gives me the description of the same bike we saw. Alisa and I trade a look.

"Fuck, man. I think he stole Toga's kutte and bike. If he killed him..." I start as Trouble turns and kicks a chair out of the way, roaring with anger.

"Son of a bitch. Fucking motherfucker, fuck." He bellows. "Who the fuck would be stupid enough to kill one of my guys and then go after you?"

“He wanted me to see the kutte. Made sure I saw it. He didn’t kill me, didn’t even come close. I hit him, though. Pretty sure I got him in the leg. He was limping. I think he wanted me to believe one of your guys came at us.” I tell him.

“Why?” Trouble asks and I hear the other guys murmur the same question.

“I don’t know.” I tell him. “But I don’t think it was a biker. He could ride, but not well. It wasn’t his first time on a bike, but he could barely control it.”

“You said you shot him.”

“Yeah, I did. Maybe he was just in pain, but the bike wobbled when he looked back at us. Like he wasn’t used to the weight. He never tried to shoot at us. Hell, he barely glanced back at us. He didn’t speed. I could have caught up with him if I didn’t have Alisa with me. He swerved lanes, but he wasn’t smooth. He finally ditched us by crossing over traffic. I expected him to dump the bike, but he got lucky.”

Trouble nods, but seems lost in thought.

“Spark pulled the traffic cam footage.” Chill interrupts. “See if you either of you recognize him.”

We both watch the feed, but neither of us recognizes the asshole.

“What the fuck was he after?” Trouble demands.

“Enemy of my enemy.” Alisa muses and we all turn to look at her.

“What?” Trouble asks.

“Some say the enemy of my enemy is my friend. What do you do if your enemy

doesn't have an enemy nearby, but has a friend?"

"Turn the friend into an enemy." Corinne finishes.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

Trouble and I look at each other with both our eyebrows raised. Is that it?

“Would be efficient.” I say and Trouble nods.

“But who?” He asks.

I look at Alisa. “Juan.” We both say.

“Juan?” Trouble asks.

“Juan Gutierrez. Sal’s youngest.” I tell him. “I don’t know if he’s behind this or not, but he’s the one who held Corinne prisoner and made it possible for Josef to grab me. He threatened Alisa and Corinne yesterday, and he terrorized my little girl last night.” I tell him.

“Is she alright?” Trouble asks, pulling Corinne to his side.

I send him a questioning look, but I respond. “She’s fine. He frightened her by staring at her through her bedroom window. But he couldn’t get in.”

“How the hell did he get near your clubhouse?”

“He hitched a ride with Sal, without Sal’s knowledge.” I explain. “He’s a sneaky bastard who likes to play games. This sounds like something he’d do.”

“If he killed Toga, it’s no longer a fucking game.” Trouble snaps.

“Oh, I know. I can’t wait to get my hands on him and prove that to him.” I tell him.

“I can’t wait to help you.” Trouble agrees.

The prospect behind the bar answers the phone before addressing Trouble. “There’s a prospect from the Demons at the gate.

“Alisa, Corinne. Showtime is outside. Trouble and I have some planning to do.” I start but stop when Alisa gives me an eye roll.

“I can tell when I’m being dismissed.” She says with a chuckle, stretching up to kiss me. I smack her on the ass as she walks away. I watch my woman sashay her way out the door, all the while ignoring the tongue action between Corinne and Trouble. If I know my woman, she’ll grill Corinne on the way back to the clubhouse about her relationship with Trouble. Good, because I don’t want to have a heart to heart with Trouble about his intentions toward the mother of my son. We have a killer to find and eliminate.

“Let me have it.” Trouble says as I follow him into his office.

I frown in response, but speak my mind. “Look, I don’t have any rights to object to you and Corinne hooking up. I love Alisa. But Corinne is the mother of my son, so if you hurt her or him, I’ll kill you.”

“Feel better?” Trouble asks as I snarl at him. He holds his hands up in capitulation. “I care about her. This isn’t purely physical, although the physical is amazing. She’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met, but that’s only part of the attraction. She’s fucking brave, intelligent, funny, and kind.”

I nod as I consider his words. He’s right. Corinne is all that. “I get it, I do. She’s also the mother of my son, so it isn’t just her you’re taking on, you know that.”

“I do. I don’t know him yet, but I hope to, soon. You’re his father, but that doesn’t mean there is no room in his life for me.” Trouble says. “Unless you don’t think I’m good enough for them.”

I bark out a laugh. “You’re so full of shit. You know I don’t think that. I’m happy for you and her. But let’s get one thing straight. Mal will be a Demon.”

Trouble laughs. “We’ll see. Now what are we going to do about this asshole who killed my man?”

“If your guys don’t find the asshole with Toga’s bike, then we’ll need another plan.” I say.

“Monty is a former cop. He can pull fingerprints off the bike. He has a buddy who can run them.” Trouble says.

I nod in appreciation. Dante has a cop in his club. Maybe I should look into finding one to join mine. “I can show Sal the traffic cam footage, see if he recognizes the guy. I feel in my gut that whoever is helping Juan is someone from Sal’s organization.”

When my phone buzzes, I’m surprised to see Alisa’s name flash on the screen. “Babe?” I answer. The fear in her voice has me bolting for my bike with Trouble right behind me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: ALISA

As soon as the door closes on the SUV, Corinne turns to me. “Go ahead. What do you want to know?” She asks.

I laugh as I watch her face color.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“You and Trouble, huh?” I ask, trying hard to keep the smile off my face. And failing miserably.

She grins back. “Me and Trouble.” She agrees, covering her face with her hands. “What am I doing?”

“What?” Showtime asks as she slides the gear into reverse. “What are you talking about?”

“The tongue lashing Trouble just gave Corinne.” I say with a laugh as Corinne's face turns a deeper shade of red.

“He did what? Why?” she asks, turning around to look at Corinne. She glances between us and then laughs, turning back around and slamming into drive. “Oh, that kind of tongue lashing. Good on you, Corinne. Trouble’s hot.”

“Are you...?” Corinne asks, but Showtime just laughs.

“Not interested.” Showtime assures her. “I can still think he’s hot.” She looks at Corinne in the mirror. “You two would make a good-looking couple. Can you imagine what your kids would look like?”

I study the ice blonde beauty next to me and think about her with the gorgeous dark-haired man we left behind. Any kid with her coloring and his deep green eyes would be stunning. Same if they had his coloring and her pale blue irises. “You would have nice looking kids. Guaranteed. I mean, look at Mal. He’s going to be a stunner when he grows up.”

Corinne smiles but shakes her head. “Too soon! We’re just getting to know each other. Although, I’ve never been this attracted to a man so quickly. I mean, I thought Puma was hot when we met, but there’s something about Trouble that makes me...” She trails off.

“Want to strip naked and climb him like a tree?” I ask.

Corinne gasps, then laughs, and finally just agrees. “Yeah. Exactly. The man is gorgeous. I didn’t think men really looked that hot in real life. Then you add in his confidence and damn, he’s irresistible.”

“That is one thing these guys have an abundance of: confidence.” I say. “Or arrogance.” I think about that for a minute, then adjust my comment. “No. Confidence. Arrogance is believing you’re better than everyone else, even when you aren’t. Confidence is being better than everyone else and able to prove it.”

“Another thing I like is how he looks at me.” Corinne continues. “No one has ever looked at me the way he does.”

“Like you’re the only one in the room?” I ask.

“Exactly.” She agrees. “When Puma was telling his story today, every time I looked at Trouble, he was watching me. As if he couldn’t stop looking at me. And when he gives me that smirk. I swear my panties disintegrate.”

“Ok, you guys need to stop. I haven’t gotten laid in months and I have no chance of finding a guy who looks at me like that.” Showtime complains.

I want to laugh, but I see the sadness in her eyes as I study them in the rearview mirror. “Why do you think you have no chance?” I ask her. “You’re one of the most beautiful women I’ve ever met!”

Showtime shrugs. “Most guys can’t handle my height. Then you add in the whole MC prospecting thing and they can’t run away fast enough. I don’t really want to hook up with someone from the club, because then it’s just a slippery slope into becoming a kutte bunny instead of a member.” She glances at us. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to butt in. Go on. You were grilling Corinne about Trouble.”

Corinne and I glance at each other, and then Corinne smiles. “I have an idea.”

Showtime groans. “You aren’t setting me up. No blind dates.” She states.

Corinne laughs. “No, I wasn’t thinking that.”

“No Internet dating either.” She persists. “I’ve tried that. Most men believe I lied about my measurements, so they’re stunned when I show up. Or they think they’re man enough to handle a woman taller than most men, but they crumble under the reality.”

“Losers.” Both Corinne and I say together.

“I wasn’t talking about Internet dating either.” Corinne says. “I actually see two potential sources of dating material for you. One is Puma.” She shakes her head when both Showtime and I gasp. “Not dating him. Jeez. But he’s a former professional basketball player. He has to know other players who would love to date you.”

Showtime frowns. “I don’t think Puma has much to do with his former life.”

“Ok then.” Corinne continues. “Why don’t you come with me to a party at the Shadow Borns? I saw several desirable men there who wouldn’t find you intimidating at all. Do the clubs ever mingle?”

Showtime frowns. “Huh. I didn’t think about hooking up with someone from another

club. They might not like that I'm prospecting for the Demon Dawgs, but it would be better than hooking up with someone from my club."

"Good. Trouble mentioned inviting me to a party sometime. You can come with me. You can scope out the guys with no one knowing that's what you're doing."

"Yeah. I like that..." Showtime starts, but then shouts. "Hold on. God damn it, son of a bitch, what the fuck is he doing?" She slams on the brakes and the SUV fishtails until we come to a stop. I hear the doors lock. "Stay in the car. Don't open the door." Showtime snaps. "Call Puma and tell him where we are and to send the calvary."

I pull out my phone as I shift to see out the front window. Blocking off the road is an older model sedan, but that isn't what captures my attention. Standing between us and the car is a man. Holding a gun. Pointed directly at Showtime's head.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Babe.” When I hear Puma’s voice, I take a deep breath and relay the information.

“Hurry.” I tell him when he confirms that he’s on the way. “He’s on his way.”

“Good. Now we’ll just sit and wait.”

“Wait?” Corinne squeaks out. “For what? For him to kill us?”

“He’d have to get to us first.” Showtime says, not taking her attention off the man as he moves to the driver's side window.

Corinne looks at me, and I can see the fear in her eyes. It’s then that I realize she doesn’t have all the information. I open my mouth to tell her when the man yells.

“Open the fucking door or I’ll kill you.” He orders.

Showtime glares at him. “Do I look stupid to you? I’m not opening the door. Get in your car and get the fuck out of here or you’ll be the one who dies.” She shouts back.

“I’m not fucking around!” He shouts. I see him tighten his finger around the trigger.

Corinne screams when he shoots off a round.

“The SUV is bulletproof.” I tell her. “He can’t get to us.”

The guy shoots off several more rounds, but the bulletproof glass absorbs the impact. With a snarl, he unloads his pistol, having a small meltdown when he realizes he

can't get to us. His yelling masks the sound of a half a dozen motorcycles converging on our location. I see his expression shift when he realizes he's no longer the hunter, but the prey. Running to his car, I can see he's limping. Showtime steps on the gas just enough for the SUV to surge forward and knock him against the car. He disappears from view as we're surrounded by eight motorcycles.

While Chill and Dice deal with our attacker, Puma stalks to the SUV and pulls open the door. He envelopes me in his arms and strokes my back. At first I think he's comforting himself, but I realize I'm the one shaking. I take several deep breaths and let his strength calm me before pulling away.

"I'm ok." I tell him, glancing over to see Corinne weeping in Trouble's arms. I want to tell her we weren't in any real danger, but I don't want to lie to her. Our attacker only had a pistol and since the SUV is armored, we're safe. But the threat was still too real. "Who is he?" I ask Puma.

He shrugs as he leads me over to where Chill has the man bound and laying face down on the road. It's then that I can see the kutte. "I think it might be the guy who shot at us earlier." Puma says.

"He was limping." I tell him. "I saw it when he tried to escape."

Puma circles the man until he's on the other side before kicking him hard in the leg. The man comes to with a scream. "It looks like him." Puma looks over at Trouble and waits until Corinne calms before calling them over. When Trouble sees the kutte, his face turns thunderous.

"Is that him?" He asks Puma.

Puma nods. "I think so. What do you want to do with him?"

“I’m in the mood to play.” Trouble says.

Puma grins. “My house or yours?”

“We’re closer to yours.” Trouble says, pulling Corinne closer. “Besides, I think our women need their kids.”

Puma looks at me, and I nod.

Within minutes, I’m driving Corinne and myself back to the clubhouse while Showtime drives our attacker’s car with our captive riding in the trunk.

I wait until I pull in behind Puma and Trouble to speak to Corinne.

“How are you doing?” I ask her.

“How do you think I’m doing?” She mutters. “I want to get to the clubhouse, grab Mal, and leave. I want my normal, boring life back.”

I grimace because I can imagine the pain this would cause Puma. “Can you please not do that today?” I beg her. “I know it seems like this life is chaotic, so I can understand your wanting to leave. But if you leave and take Mal, you’ll destroy Puma.”

“He didn’t even know about Mal three days ago.”

“I know. But he knows about him now.” I say. “Please. You and Mal are safer at the clubhouse than you could be anywhere else.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“You call this safe?” Corinne shrieks.

“Yes. You’re still alive. You aren’t hurt. This was scary, I won’t deny it. You aren’t the only one shaken up.” She scoffs, so I give her the brutal truth. “If you were on your own in your car today, how would that have ended?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: PUMA

As we ride to the clubhouse, I glance back at the cage behind us and see Alisa and Corinne in a heated discussion. My heart sinks as I consider the potential ramifications of this latest attack. I know it shook Corinne. It shook me. When Alisa called for help, the guilt swamped me. I should never have let them out of my sight. I hope Alisa can talk her down. I glance over at Trouble and see his eyes flit back to the SUV as well. At least I won’t be in this fight alone. Trouble will do all he can to keep Corinne in our lives.

At the clubhouse, I disembark and head for the SUV, Trouble next to me. I lock eyes with Alisa and I can read everything I need to know in her deep chocolate orbs. She’s worried. About me. I pull her in and kiss her head before speaking. “She’s upset. I can tell. We’ll figure it out.”

“Why don’t you go check on the kids? We’ll be with you soon. We can have a movie night.” I smile at Corinne, and I feel some of the tension flow out when she gives me a small smile and a nod. At least she’s not demanding that they leave immediately.

The San Diego clubhouse has El Bodego, we have The Pit. Both of which are where we entertain enemies of our club. We rarely allow outsiders in, but I’m making an

exception for Trouble. After all, this piece of shit likely killed one of his.

“Corinne is upset.” I say as we make our way to the entrance.

He nods. “Understandable. She’s talking about leaving and how she never should have come to Vegas.”

My heart drops as I consider the ramifications of her leaving not only the clubhouse but the city as well. I thought she’d only want to go back to her condo. I could still keep her safe there, although it would be harder and take more men. The thought of her moving away has me rubbing my chest to relieve the pain.

“I think Alisa and I calmed some of her fears. Alisa told her how much more dangerous it could have been if she had been alone in her own car.”

“Good.” I say. “Are you going to keep working on her?” I ask him.

He grins. “I plan on using every trick I know to convince her to stay.”

“Good.” I say as we descend the steps into The Pit.

The only good thing I can say about my predecessor is he did an exceptional job planning out our clubhouse. The Pit being his crowning achievement. It sits under a barn on the adjacent property. No one would think of looking there because on paper a metalworks company owns the land. Several buildings dot the landscape, including an old barn at the backend of the property. The barn is nothing special, except it holds a secret along with rusty farm equipment. Hell on earth sits under the wood and dirt floor. A pit where those who sin against the Demon Dawgs earn their passage to hell. We help them out by giving them a preview.

“Impressive.” Trouble says when we enter the open room we lovingly call The Pit.

Chill and Dice already have our guest hanging from a hook in the center of the room. Against the back wall are two tables covered with various items. Tools Chill uses for interrogation. Against the wall are two locked cabinets. Next to them, in a corner, sits an ice machine, like the ones you'd find at motels. A large tub sits in front of it. I can see Trouble's mind working as he takes in the room. This is Chill's domain, but not all the equipment is hers. Dice and some of the other guys like to help her out. Even though she has her choice of helpers today, I doubt she'll need them. My SOA will have the bastard crying for his mommy before she even draws blood. A search of the car and our captive left us with no information. We're working blind here, but I have full confidence in my SOA's ability.

I lean against the far wall and watch Chill hold up each tool on the table. She studies it and tries it out before discarding it and moving on. I keep my expression neutral even though inside I'm chuckling. Because I'm not the only one watching her. Our guest has a clear view of her and every move she makes has him flinching. What a wuss.

When she finally selects a serrated military knife, I see his body tremble. She turns to face the man, and the torture begins.

"Have you heard of Sumer?" She asks the man. He shakes his head as he watches her glide the knife through the buttons on his shirt. "It's one of the earliest civilizations. Its location is in the southern part of Iraq. They introduced the concept of using eunuchs to protect their harems. Do you know what a eunuch is?" She asks with a wintry smile. Our prisoner stares at her, his mouth open, his eyes wide. His response is a whimper accompanied by a strong smell of ammonia.

"They created eunuchs to protect the harems." Chill continues with her history lesson, ignoring the piss trailing down the drain. "I always thought it would make a fitting punishment for rapists." She's talking as if to herself, but I know he's hearing every word as she removes his last stitch of clothing. As he hangs there naked, Chill steps

back and studies him. “I have a theory. Men who don’t get enough sex develop a build-up of testosterone which fucks up their brains. These guys get plenty of sex, so they don’t do stupid things. Like attack women who belong to the Presidents of two different motorcycle clubs.” She gives him another once over and frowns.

“Looking at you, I bet you haven’t had sex in a really long time. Which might explain how you made such a stupid move.” She steps forward and places her knife under his flaccid penis. I can barely hear his whimper over the sound of every other man in the room sucking in his breath. This just makes Chill smile wider. “As SOA, it’s my job to get assholes like you to talk. For some in my position, they mostly use their fists or other means to beat the shit out of someone. Me, I figured out long ago how best to get a man to talk. Threaten his pride and joy. Most SOAs don’t go there, because they’re men and men have a hard time whacking off another man’s penis. I don’t have that problem.” She shifts the knife just enough to prick the man’s tiny pride and joy. His scream makes her laugh.

“What do you want to know? Please, I’ll tell you everything. Just get this bitch away from me.” The man blubbers. Chill chuckles as she moves away, gesturing for Trouble and me to take over. I see Trouble shaking his head as his color returns.

“Who the fuck are you?” I ask.

“Greg Spada.” He says.

“Greg Spada is dead.” I reply.

He shakes his head. “I faked my death.”

“Why?”

“Because I found out Sal and Junior killed my brother.” Greg spits out. “Those

bastards used him and then killed him. I want revenge.”

“Who the fuck told you that?” I demand.

“Juan. He was friends with my brother. He contacted me and told me what happened.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“You’re a fucking idiot.” I say in disgust. “Sal didn’t kill your brother, neither did Junior. But you are right, one of his sons did. Juan.”

Greg shakes his head in denial. “No, Juan told me what happened. Sal wants Junior to marry some bitch, the niece of one of the other cartel leaders. She was already married to a Marine, so Sal paid my brother to off him while making it look like he died in battle. Then, instead of paying him, Sal killed him.”

“And Juan told you all this?” I ask.

Greg nods.

“First.” I slam my fist into his face so hard his neck snaps back. Blood pours out of his nose while he gags and blubbers. “No one calls my woman a bitch, got it? Especially not a fucking moron. Juan killed your brother, you idiot. He talked him into killing my woman’s husband and then once he did, Juan killed him.” Greg’s shaking his head, so I press on. “Juan not only killed him, but he stole your brother’s identity. He worked for my woman’s father as part of his security, using your brother’s id to get the job.”

Greg stops shaking his head and looks at me. Now that I have his complete attention, I continue. “He played you. Junior has no interest in my woman, no matter who her family is, and Sal would never force an arranged marriage. Josef must have told you about his family. You were his best friend. Josef came after me because he thought I had something to do with your death, Juan lied to him, too. You attacked Sal’s driver, didn’t you?”

Greg nods.

I pause and glance at Trouble. “Who the fuck’s body was in the car when the bomb went off?”

“Some biker. I killed him and put him in the car.” He admits. I feel Trouble push past me and I don’t stop him. He pounds Greg into oblivion.

CHAPTER THIRTY: ALISA

I follow Corinne into the clubhouse and argue with myself about restarting the conversation from the car. The thought of her taking Mal and leaving breaks my heart. Not just for Puma, but I know how crushed Elina will be if she loses her new friend. Before we reach the hallway leading to the bedrooms, Desdemona steps out.

“There you are. I tried to keep them from falling asleep, so you could see them before their nap, but they both just conked out.”

I see Corinne stare down the hall, and I know she’s considering grabbing Mal and running.

“It might be a good idea to take a few minutes and settle before we see them. They might pick up on our anxiety.” I tell her, hoping she’ll listen.

Corinne’s shoulders droop and she nods. “That’s probably a good idea. I’m not sure what would come out of my mouth right now.”

“What’s going on?” Desdemona asks, her look of concern bouncing between the two of us.

“A man waylaid us on our way back. He shot at the SUV.” I tell her.

Desdemona frowns. “Oh, well, at least you were in the SUV.”

Corinne’s head whips around, and she glares at Desdemona. “Are you serious? Someone shot at us.”

Desdemona looks at me and then back at Corinne. “You’re frightened.” When Corinne’s eyes flash with temper, Desdemona holds her hands up. “I understand. I do. But, the SUVs are bullet proof. He couldn’t have gotten in, so he couldn’t have hurt you.”

Corinne is still angry. “That doesn’t change the fact that he waylaid us. What am I doing bringing my son into a place that has to have bullet proof vehicles?” She throws her hands up in the air in disgust.

“Why don’t you go into the playroom and sit down? It’s quieter in there and more private.” Desdemona says. “I’ll go grab a bottle of wine and some snacks.” She glances at me and we share a look before she heads for the kitchen. I walk with Corinne into the playroom and take a seat across from her.

“I know you think I’m overreacting...” Corinne starts, but I shake my head.

“I don’t.” I tell her honestly. “You’re a wonderful mother who is worried about her son.”

“How do you do it?” Corinne asks, her eyes pleading with me to help her understand. “How do you handle being here with Elina and constantly exposed to danger?”

“My situation differs from yours.” I tell her. “My father worked for Sal and his cartel since before I was born. I grew up knowing I was a potential target. We were always under threat from Sal’s enemies, including the authorities. I’ve had bodyguards since before I was Elina’s age.”

Corinne frowns. “I didn’t know that. You must have had an interesting childhood.”

I laugh as Desdemona comes in carrying a tray laden with wine, glasses, food and plates.

“It was a very boring childhood with smatterings of terror.” I tell her, taking a glass from Desdemona and piling my plate with grapes, strawberries, cheese and crackers. “I didn’t have any friends. Well, that’s not true. I had friends at school. Most parents wouldn’t let their children come to my house because of our known connection with the cartel, and I couldn’t spend time at anyone’s house without bringing at least one bodyguard.”

Corinne grimaces. “Is that how it’s going to be from now on?” She asks. “Will Mal need a bodyguard at all times?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

I shake my head. “No, of course not. This whole situation is not the club’s problem. It’s mine.” I tell her.

“It’s not.” Desdemona says, reaching over and squeezing my hand. “I know you feel it is, but this is all on Juan. Not you.”

“So they don’t have any other enemies?” Corinne asks.

I want to say no, but if she’s going to be around the club, she needs to know what to expect. “I’d be lying if I said that there would never be a situation similar to this again. One that requires us to be on lockdown. But since I’ve been here, this is the worst it’s been. And I know it seems bad to you, it isn’t. We’re safe here. If we leave the compound, they do all they can to ensure our safety.”

I watch as Corinne stares at a spot on the wall. I know she’s not seeing the wall, but playing out the possibilities in her head. “I feel like I should take Mal and leave.” Corinne says. Desdemona’s wine glass bumps her plate, which startles me, but I return my focus back to Corinne.

“I told you when I was growing up that I had guards. After Elina was born, I still had them. What I didn’t say was that there were days I was more afraid of the guards than of any looming threat. I’d catch them looking at me, especially as I got older. I knew that some of them, if not all, would happily hand me over to the highest bidder or destroy me themselves. That the only reason I was safe was because they were afraid of Sal.”

Corinne’s eyes widen, and I nod.

“The first time I really felt safe was when I visited the San Diego chapter. Dante and his men let me see how not all men have ulterior motives. Some only want to keep women and children safe. Here, with Puma, is the same. I trust every person here. Every single one of them. They would die rather than let anything happen to Elina or me. They would never betray Puma. Not because they fear him, but because they love him. They admire him. They don’t follow Puma just for the money. Although, he makes sure everyone earns a good income. But they’re here because this is their family. They’re loyal to each other.”

I see Corinne nod, and the tightness around my chest loosens.

“I understand what you’re saying. But I still don’t know if staying here is the right thing for us. However, I promise, I’ll think about what you’ve said. I’ll talk with Puma, and I’ll likely be talking to Trouble.” I see Desdemona’s eyes widen and I stifle a giggle.

“Thank you. I hope you stay. I enjoy having you around, and I know losing Mal would devastate Elina.”

“I need a shower before the kids wake up.” Corinne says and I nod in agreement.

“Me, too.”

“You two go get cleaned up. By the time you’re done, the kids should be awake. I’ll take care of all this.” She says, gesturing toward the food and wine.

I part ways with Corinne as she ducks into her bedroom while I make my way to Puma’s. I let my mind drift to what the guys are doing, but I don’t linger. So far, Corinne hasn’t asked about what the guys plan on doing with our attacker. I’m pretty sure if she knew, she’d grab Mal and run without a backwards glance.

The hot water runs over my body as I grab the soap, only to find it missing as I feel a presence behind me. My heart races until I take in the scent of my mate and relax back into him.

“Mmm. Max. We have to be quick. Puma will be back any minute.” I whisper, keeping the humor out of my tone. But I can’t stop the bark of laughter when he growls.

“Max? Really?” Puma says and I chuckle as I turn to wrap my arms around his neck and press my body against his.

“He is cute.” I tell him, but before he can bitch, I glide up and kiss him with all the passion and need flowing through my body.

Puma hoists me into his arms and pins my body between his and the tile. The cold tile does very little too cool off my skin. The feeling of his cock rubbing against my pussy lips sends a flood of heat through my veins and straight into my skin.

“I should spank you for thinking he’s cute.” Puma threatens. Fuck, the heat escalates at the thought of a spanking. Imagining the feel of his calloused hand smacking my ass has my pussy gushing, and a shudder runs through me. He must feel it, because the grin spreads across his face. “You like that idea, don’t you? The thought of me taking you over my knee and smacking your ass until it’s red?”

“Oh, fuck.” I moan as my body takes over so I’m rubbing against him with need, like a cat in heat. He gives me some relief by sliding his finger along my folds and flicking my clit. I groan when that finger slides into me. He uses his finger to fuck my channel while his thumb works my clit. The pleasure builds as my body overheats. When I detonate, I scream his name just before he captures my cries with his mouth.

I’m still reeling from the orgasm as I feel his soapy hands roam over my body. As he

lifts me and carries me out of the shower, I feel myself finally returning to my body and I stare into his eyes as he carries me to the bed.

“I love you, Alisa. My angel.” He says as he lowers us both down.

“I love you, too.” I whisper as he attacks my neck with his tongue and teeth.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: PUMA

Fuck, my woman tastes good. I use my teeth and my tongue to nibble and lick her neck before making my way to her glorious breasts. I didn't have time to worship them when we made love earlier. Sex on the bike was hot and fast, so now I'm taking it slow to draw out her pleasure.

I suck her nipple into my mouth and use my tongue to work it into a hard nub before moving to the other one. Losing myself, I chuckle when I feel her thrashing under me as tries to impale herself on my cock. “Need something, baby girl?” I ask her as I rub my nose down past her belly until he's buried in her wet core. Damn, she smells sweet.

“You, inside me. Please. I need you. Puma. Please.” She's moaning and I feel her body shaking with need. I realize the orgasm in the shower didn't sate her in the least. It simply lit the fuse. But instead of giving her what she's begging for, I take what I need first. Lapping her juices, I get my fill as her essence floods my mouth and coats my tongue. I don't stop until I feel her walls tremble and her legs tighten as she lifts her ass off the bed to shove her pussy into my face.

Fucking heaven.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

With no effort, I flip her over and shift her until she's kneeling on the bed. Wrapping my hand around her damp hair, I tug her head back as I let my eyes roam over the sight before me. Her round ass is slightly pink from the shower. I want to see that ass glow red, so I swing my arm back and slam my palm against her right cheek and then the left. Her body bucks and arches as groans slide through her lips. I admire my palm print, but it's not enough. I rear back and slap her ass again and again until it turns a lovely shade of red. Her essence sparkles as it drips down her legs. Her body shudders with each smack and I know she's close to exploding. Without warning her, I line my dick up and slam home.

"Fuck. Jesus. Fucking Christ." Alisa screams out as I use my hand in her hair and the other on her hip to keep her in place as I pound into her. The feel of her around me is heaven. The heat coming from her ass burns my skin, just like the heat of her channel scorches my dick. When her body clamps down on my cock, I bellow out her name as she screams out mine. We crash onto the bed in a heap of sweaty limbs and fuck me, I'll never be the same.

"I'm sorry." Alisa says, and I frown. Glancing into her face, I can't see her eyes because she has them closed, but I see a smile tug at her lips.

"For what?" I ask, playing along.

"For mentioning Max. I don't think I'd live through another punishment like that one." She says, and I bark out a laugh.

"Fuck, woman. You're something else." I tell her, brushing my hand along her arm, down her waist, over hip hip and onto her thigh. She's so soft, I just want to pet her

forever.

“I didn’t expect you back so soon. I figured you’d be busy for the rest of the evening.”

I wait for her to ask about what we learned, but she doesn’t. I want to grin, because I know it’s killing her. “You’ve never seen Chill in action. And honestly, I never want you to.” I admit.

“That bloody?” She asks.

I chuckle. “She rarely draws blood. She doesn’t have to. Instead, she terrorizes them into talking.”

“Really?” she asks in surprise and I nod.

“She’s fucking terrifying. She’s scarier than Stephen King.”

“Damn. I can’t imagine...” She trails off and I know she’s trying to picture it.

“And I don’t want you to.” I tell her. “I like all my parts, but one set in particular.”

I watch as she realizes my meaning and we both chuckle.

“That would do it.”

I open my mouth to tell her what we learned when someone pounds on the door. Corinne’s frantic voice has me up and moving. Pulling on my jeans, I rip open the door. I hear Alisa scrambling behind me and wince. I should have waited, but the abject fear coming through the door was palpable.

I step into the hall to join Corinne and Trouble, giving Alisa privacy.

“What’s wrong?” I ask her.

“Mal, he’s missing. So is Elina. I went to check on him after my shower and he wasn’t in his room. Elina’s not in hers either. I checked everywhere, but I can’t find them.” I hear Alisa gasp as she joins us.

Trouble has his arms wrapped around Corinne, and I pull Alisa to me. I can see the panic building in their eyes.

“They’re in the clubhouse. Somewhere. We will find them.” I grab my kutte and put it on over my bare chest. Striding out into the common room, I shout to get everyone’s attention. Movement stops as everyone in the room looks at me.

“Has anyone seen Elina or Mal in the past hour?” I ask.

“They went down for their nap about ninety minutes ago.” Desdemona says. “I’m guessing you checked their rooms?”

“Corinne did.” I supply. “Has anyone else seen them?”

“I saw them go into the playroom a little over an hour ago.” Max offers. “Did you try there? I know they love the new tent. Or they could be in the castle.”

“I’ll check.” Showtime offers as she races down the hallway. I turn to watch her go in time to spot the look of horror on Corinne’s face. Alisa has the same expression. “What?”

They look at each other, and I see the tears drip down Corinne’s face. “Oh God, they must have heard us.”

“Heard what?” I ask, stifling my impatience.

“I was talking to Alisa and Desdemona about wanting to leave. About taking Mal and just disappearing. I felt guilty for exposing Mal to danger after the attack today.” Corinne says. She looks at me and then focuses on Trouble. “I’m sorry. I was just upset after what happened.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

He puts his arms around her shoulder. I can't read his expression, but I know what he's feeling. But now is not the time to get into that discussion.

"Spark." I shout.

"I'm looking." I hear him call out from his office. With Spark checking the camera feed, I open my mouth to shout out other orders when Showtime slides back into the room.

"They're not there. But I found this." Showtime says, opening her hand to reveal the small bracelet that Elina wears. The one that holds a small GPS tracker.

"Fuck." I swear. "Ok, Spark is checking the feeds. Everyone else, we have to search outside and in. I want every inch covered until we find them. Got it?"

"On it." Everyone shouts as they disperse. A few stay inside with the prospects, but most of the club heads outside. The property is vast, with too many places to hide.

"They ran away." Alisa cries. "They must have heard us talking. But where would they go?"

"They're here." I assure her. "They can't get over the fence and there's no fucking way Smooth let them out through the gate."

"He didn't." Showtime says as she completes her search of the bar area. "I checked."

I nod in thanks. I feel Alisa lean into me, so I wrap my arms around her. Closing my

eyes, I visualize the clubhouse and the property. I consider every hiding place, dismissing them almost as quickly as I consider each one. I know they can't get into my office or Church, but the men will check even though they're locked. We only have a few rooms on the first floor that don't have locks. Shifting my thoughts to the second floor, where most of the bedrooms are. I know they'll check each one. I picture each door until my mind lands on one door that doesn't lead to a room.

"Fuck." I say as I race toward the stairs.

I hear Alisa and the other shouting my name, but I ignore them. I have a feeling I know where they are and if they're there, well; I have no one to blame but myself.

I pass behind Mad Max as he enters Wildcard's room. At the end of the hallway is another door, one you can't find unless you know it's there. I push open the door and climb the stairs to the roof. As soon as I open the door, I see them. Relief floods through me when I spot them sitting against the wall. Each bundled in sweatshirts and jeans wearing matching expressions of guilt.

I gesture toward the door without speaking, because I can't form words.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: ALISA

"Where did he go?" I demand of Max, but he shakes his head.

"I haven't seen him. Are you sure he came up here?" He asks.

"Yes, he ran up the stairs and now he's disappeared, too." I swallow a scream of frustration, but then let out a yelp of surprise when the far wall opens and three figures emerge.

Corinne and I fall onto our offspring and hug them so tight that we get a stereo of

complaints about needing to breathe.

“Where were you?” I ask, but glance up to Puma for an answer.

“On the roof.” He says.

“What?” Corinne snaps. “They could have fallen off.”

Puma shakes his head. “No, they couldn’t. We have a wall around the edge and barbed wire.”

“I didn’t even know you could get to the roof.” I say. “How did you know how to get up there?” I ask Elina because I know she was the one who led them there.

“That would be my fault.” Puma admits. “One night we had a lightning storm in the desert. I took her up there to see it. It offered the best view. I have it on my list to lock up the entry. I just haven’t gotten to it yet.” He turns to Max. “Let everyone know, ok?”

“Sure, boss. And I’ll add that lock tonight.” He says, taking off without waiting for a response.

“I’m hungry.” Elina says and Mal chimes in with a nod.

“Let’s go eat.” Puma says as he lifts each kid up into his arms and leads the way downstairs.

“I should take off.” Trouble says when we reach the first floor.

“You should stay for dinner.” I offer, but then glance quickly at Corinne. I’m happy to see her nod in approval.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“You should stay. Unless you’re tired of the drama.” Corinne says.

“Never.” Trouble responds and follows us through to the kitchen.

Desdemona and my dad are filling plates with tacos when we walk in. “I heard we found the runaways and figured everyone would be hungry.” She says before kneeling down in front of the kids. “You know you scared us, right?” They nod. “Please don’t do that again. I’m not ready for my hair to turn as gray as your grandfather’s.”

“Hey!” my dad protests with a laugh. “But I second that, because I think my hair went all the way gray.”

The kids each take their plates as we head into the small dining room.

“Why would our being on the roof turn your hair gray?” Elina asks.

“You were on the roof?” Desdemona asks. “How do you get on the roof?”

“There’s a hidden door at the end of the hall upstairs.” Puma explains.

“How did you know it was there?” Diego asks.

“Puma showed it to me after we moved in.” Elina explains, and I watch Puma shrink like a child caught doing something naughty.

“No movie and popcorn for you.” Diego tells Puma with a laugh. “Straight to bed

after supper.”

Puma sends me a sexy grin and I laugh.

“You can’t punish, Puma.” My daughter says and I hear the plea in her voice. “It’s my fault. I’m the one who hid up there.”

“Why did you need to hide?” I ask her.

“Because we heard you and Aunt Corinne talking about taking Mal away. He’s my Old Man, I’d die without him.” Elina says, as Mal nods.

“I don’t want to leave. I just found my dad and I can’t leave Elina alone.” Mal tells his mother.

“I’m sorry you heard that.” Corinne says to Mal. “It was a grown up discussion. We didn’t know you were in the room. But now that it’s out there. Something happened today that frightened me and my immediate reaction was to leave here to keep you safe.” She locks eyes with Puma. “But seeing how everyone rallied together to find you, I realize how wrong I was.” I see Puma relax as Corinne shifts her attention back to her son. “I can’t promise that we’ll live here, but I can promise that you will not lose your dad or Elina. Ok?”

Mal nods and grins at Elina.

“You know you can always come talk to your President.” Puma tells them. “It’s my job to listen to my crew when they have problems. So if you have concerns in the future?”

“We’ll come to you.” Elina and Mal say together.

Puma nods, and we return to eating. Once we're done, we head outside so the kids can play on the jungle gym. The sun is still up, so we take advantage. While the kids run around, I quiz Puma.

"Did you identify the man who waylaid us?" I ask him.

He nods. "Greg Spada. His brother was..."

"John Spada." I finish and Puma nods. "What did he want?"

"Juan told him that Sal used John to kill your husband. To make way for Sal Junior to marry you." Puma says, before telling me the rest.

"So basically, Juan's been lying to him in order to get Greg to do his dirty work?"

Puma nods.

"What now?" When Puma just looks at me, I raise my hands. "Ok, fine. I get it. Sorry, I asked. I just don't understand Juan's plan. He knows the SUVs are bullet proof, what's the point of sending Greg into a no-win situation?" I think about it and already know the answer. "Because he wanted you and the club to dispose of Greg. He's worn out his usefulness."

Puma shrugs. "Maybe."

We let the kids play as I empty my mind of the day and just enjoy the moment. Puma must feel the same way, because he steps behind me and pulls me against him. I love the warmth seeping from his body into mine. But most of all, I love how safe I feel. As if nothing can touch me as long as I'm here with him. When the light dims, Puma whistles. It's the only sound loud enough to cut through their squeals. The kids run up to Puma and he takes each of their hands to lead us back inside.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

Corinne and I head to the kitchen to make popcorn while the men work the electronics so we can watch Lightyear.

“Are you really feeling better?” I ask her as we wait for the air popper to finish.

“I am. When I first realized Mal was gone, I lost it. But watching Puma take charge and the way everyone responded, I finally saw what you were trying to tell me.”

“Even though they ran and hid on the roof?” I ask with a grimace. “Something that wouldn’t have happened if you weren’t here?”

She chuckles. “You would think. But no. I kept thinking about what would have happened if I’d been on my own. Mal is an easy-going kid, but we still have our disagreements. I realized that if he ever ran away, that I’d have someone to call. I know Puma and his club would never stop looking.”

“You’re right.” I tell her as we pour the popcorn into four bowls. Desdemona walks in.

“The little kids have water, the big kids have beers. I figure us adults should have some wine.”

“That sounds perfect.” I tell her as she heads to the wine fridge and pulls out a bottle of Chardonnay. After she uncorks the bottle, she grabs three glasses and follows us back to the game room.

I hand one bowl of popcorn to Diego before taking a glass from Desdemona and

settling on Puma's lap with our bowl. Corinne hands a bowl to the kids who have created a nest of blankets and pillows on the floor. She sits next to Trouble, who drapes his arm around her shoulders. Desdemona hands Corinne her glass before she takes her seat with Diego. I glance around the room and let out a soft chuckle.

"What?" Puma whispers as we watch Buzz Lightyear explore a new planet.

"We're all paired up." I whisper back, and he grins.

Soon we're lost in the movie, and in watching the kids enjoy the antics of Sox. I feel a sense of peace and I hate to admit it to myself. Because as soon as you appreciate the calm, you know the storm is close.

Elina yawns hugely as the credits play out.

"I think it's time for bed." I say, standing up.

"I should take off." Trouble says, running his hand down Corinne's arm. She responds by giving him a soft kiss. He grins at her before he and Puma leave the room.

"Poor Mal." Diego chuckles. We all turn to him and frown.

"What do you mean?" I ask him.

"He's going to have two Presidents vying for him to join their clubs." He says. I see Corinne grimace and I chuckle.

"I hope you weren't thinking he could avoid the MC life." I tell her.

She shrugs. "He could do worse." Which turns out to be famous last words as

Showtime comes running into the room.

“Cops are coming. They have a warrant and they’re searching the place.” She says.

“Puma wants everyone to stay in this room. I’m staying with you.”

“Panic room?” I ask her.

She shakes her head. “Puma doesn’t think that’ll be necessary, but it is why he wants you in here, just in case.” The door to the panic room is next to Elina’s castle.

“What are they looking for, do you know?” I ask her.

“Someone called in a tip. Said the Demon Dawgs kidnapped a man and are holding him hostage on the property.” I try to keep my face impassive. But fuck. The Demon Dawgs are holding a man captive. I have to trust that Puma has him well hidden.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: PUMA

“I’m glad you got Corinne to stay.” Trouble says once we step outside. “She seems skittish. Not that I blame her. This has been a terrifying introduction to our world.”

I nod. “She had two scares today. She faltered a bit, but I have to say she bounced back strong. I thought for sure she’d start packing once we found the kids. You willing to take a chance with her, even though she’s skittish?”

“Yeah. I never saw myself with someone like her. I always thought I’d find someone already used to our ways. But the minute she showed up at our clubhouse looking for you. Fuck, she had me hooked.”

“I get that. Same way I felt when I met Alisa. Add in Elina and I was a goner.” I chuckle.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Mal’s a great kid.” Trouble says. Climbing on the back of his bike. He holds his helmet in his lap and grins. “He’ll look good in a Shadow Born kutte.”

“Fuck you. He’s a Demon.” I laugh. Flashing lights on the other side of the gate draw my attention. I glance at Trouble, who has shifted in his seat to look.

Showtime comes running up. “Cops. They have a warrant.” She says. “They think we’re holding a man prisoner.”

Well, fuck. “Go to the game room, keep the kids and the others there. Move them into the panic room the minute you sense trouble.”

She nods and bolts inside. Trouble and I walk casually to the gate and hear the cop ordering Max to open up.

“What can I help you with?” I ask Detective Sterling. He and I have had some interaction in the past, but nothing official. Until now, it seems.

“You can open this gate.” He demands. “I have a warrant to search the property.”

“And I have a right to read the warrant before you come in.” I tell him, reaching through and accepting the document. I read through it and understand most of it. Even though I’ve never studied law, I’ve signed my fair share of contracts. You get to know some of the lingo. It looks like someone knows we grabbed Spada and brought him here. Well, fuck.

“You can call your lawyer.” Sterling informs me, and I nod. I know my rights, but I

don't need the lawyer, not yet. After all, they won't find a damn thing with this search. Spada is long gone and even if they found the opening to The Pit, they won't find anything incriminating.

I nod at Max. "Open the gate."

Wildcard joins us as I watch the cops swarm over the property.

"Want me to call Baskins?" Wildcard asks. Baskins is our criminal defense lawyer.

I shake my head. "Only if they arrest someone. But they won't find anything, so I don't think that will happen, although..." I trail off as I consider the situation. We're standing away from the cops, but I glance around to see if anyone is nearby.

"What?" Trouble asks.

"Juan's behind this." I state. "He set Spada up. Alisa called it earlier. She mentioned how Juan knew our SUVs were bulletproof. It was a suicide mission."

"Juan knew we'd bring him here." Wildcard suggests, and I nod.

"He probably planned it so that the cops would get here while we were still interrogating him."

"But he doesn't know how fast Chill works." Wildcard states and Trouble chuckles.

"Fuck, she's terrifying." Trouble adds.

"She is." I agree. My mind still working through the plan of a madman. "Fuck."

"What?"

“Juan was here on the grounds. He could have planted something.” I admit. “We searched the grounds for him, but not for anything that could get us busted. Fuck. We may need to call Baskins after all.”

We silently watch the action. Although I’m eager to get inside and check on Alisa, I know they are safe with Showtime. My mind flips through the various items Juan could have planted when he was running around the compound. My best guess is drugs. With his contacts, he could get his hands on enough cocaine to cause us some serious trouble.

I knew from our discussion with Greg Spada that Juan not only wanted Alisa to gain more power, but he has his sights set on inheriting his father’s empire, too. Which means he plans on killing off his brothers and possibly his father, as well. I hadn’t had the chance to call Sal yet and fill him in on what we learned. I thought I had more time. But if Juan is setting me up to get arrested, then I won’t have that time. I turn to Trouble and Wildcard and fill them in on my fear. “If they arrest me, then you need to make sure you update Sal on what we learned from Greg. He has to prepare for Juan coming after him and his other sons. Call Dante for backup.”

“If they arrest you, they’ll likely arrest all of us, especially your executives.” Wildcard said and I nod, turning to Trouble.

“I’ll see to it.” He assures me. “I’ll be your backup outside if the worst happens. They can’t tie me to anything. This isn’t my club. I’ll make sure the women and kids are safe, Diego as well, if it comes to it.”

“Thanks.” I tell him. My head snaps up when I hear a shout from one officer. Fuck, this is it. I shut down my anger and force my expression into neutral, even though I’m ready to pull out my gun and start shooting.

I watch Sterling step toward a cop coming into the gate. What the hell could they

have found outside the gate? Confused, I study their transaction but can't figure out what the younger cop is saying. I notice Sterling go rigid, his attention on the gate before he looks around the compound. Once he spies me, he strides over with purpose. As he gets closer, I see rage and a hint of fear. What the fuck is going on? An angry and scared cop is not someone to fuck with.

“Do you have cameras covering the road?” He asks me.

I frown at him, but nod. “Of course.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“I need to see the footage from the time we arrived.” He informs me. When I hesitate, his impatience intensifies. “Please. It’s important.”

I debate being an asshole, but something about his demeanor tells me I’m no longer his focus. Nodding, I move toward the clubhouse. I spot Spark and call him over.

“Yeah boss.” He says.

“Are the cameras still operating?” I ask him, and he glances at Sterling before refocusing on me. “Especially the ones covering the road?”

“Yeah. Of course.” He says.

I nod. “Good, I need you to pull up the recording for outside the gate. Before or after your arrival?” I ask Sterling.

“Start with our arrival. It would have happened after we gained access, but I need to double check.” Sterling says, following us into Spark’s domain.

“What are we looking for?” Spark asks.

When Sterling doesn’t answer, I glare at him. “You going to tell us what you’re looking for or not?”

“One of my men is missing.” Sterling finally says. “I don’t suspect you or your guys. You’re all accounted for and nowhere near the gate.”

“Who is missing?” Trouble asks.

“I had a cop outside, directing traffic and keeping away the looky-loos. One of my guys couldn’t reach him on the radio, so he went looking for him. He can’t find him.”

“Maybe he went off to take a leak.” Wildcard offers, but Sterling is already shaking his head.

“Not this guy. He’s anal about procedure. Fresh out of the academy and doesn’t know how to disobey an order.” Sterling says. Something about his tone has me studying the man.

“Who is he to you?” I ask.

Sterling glances at me and grimaces. “My nephew.”

“Got it.” I tell him, and I do. “I’ve got one of those myself. We’ll find him.”

While we’re talking, Spark is studying the feed. “Got him.” He says and starts the playback.

We watch as a dark Mercedes pulls up to the barricade. A man gets out of the car and approaches the divider. He speaks to the officer for a few minutes before returning to his car. Just as he reaches the door, the man collapses to the ground. The officer rushes over to assist. The man quickly subdues the cop, dragging him to the back of the car and dumping him in the trunk.

“Son of a bitch!” Sterling shouts, moving to the door.

“Hold on, he’s leaving.” I call out. Sterling comes back and we watch the car disappear.

“I’ll get traffic to pull the cameras.” Sterling says, pulling out his phone. He grabs the sheet of paper Spark hands him. The one with the license plate number of the vehicle. I know he’s already set up the search via traffic cams, but we aren’t sharing that with Sterling. He walks away from us as we continue to watch the feed. A few minutes later, I spot him.

“Stop the feed.” I tell Spark before calling Sterling back. “Who the fuck is that? Is he one of yours?” I ask. Spark starts up the recording. We see a man in a police uniform jogging down the road. He crosses the street before stepping onto the compound. Outside the gates, the darkness hid his features, but once he’s past the gates, I can see his face clearly.

“I don’t recognize him.” Sterling says.

“I do.” I growl. “That’s Juan Fucking Gutierrez. That son of a bitch is in my house!”

I rush out of Spark’s office and head straight for the game room. If Juan is here, he’s here for Alisa. I hear Sterling telling me to stop, but I ignore him. Cops in the hallway get out of my way as I tear through the common room. I reach the hall leading to the game room when I hear Elina’s terrified scream by a shot.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: ALISA

After the cops search the game room, they leave us alone. Every once in a while, one will walk by or check in on us. To keep the kids distracted, Showtime has them at the table building a Lego set. I’m not sure which one it is, because I’m too busy pacing and praying that the cops find nothing that could lock Puma or any of the guys up. I’m likely paranoid, but I can’t shake the feeling that this is Juan’s doing. Fear courses through me as I imagine them arresting Puma. What if the cops find Greg? I don’t know if he’s alive or dead, but they couldn’t have disposed of the body that quickly. Could they? The thought has me ready to scream in frustration.

“You look guilty.” Desdemona tells me as she pulls me to the couch. “You need to get it together.”

Nodding, I slump back, rubbing my hands over my face. “I feel like all I do is bring trouble to Puma’s doorstep.” I think of the other President by the same name and let out a mad chuckle. “Figuratively and literally.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

I hear Corinne's softer chuckle as she sits next to me. "I'm pretty grateful that you brought the literal Trouble into my life. But you shouldn't worry. I'm sure the guys have everything under control."

I glance at Corinne and narrow my eyes. "Just a few hours ago, you were ready to run. But now you're not worried? Because they're cops? You think cops will treat Puma and his men fairly?"

Corinne frowns, considers my question and then shakes her head slowly. "Honestly, I wasn't thinking about the cops at all. I was thinking about Puma and Trouble. I've met men and women who crumble when their plans don't come together the way they expect. They hit a snag and they fall apart. Those two men hit every obstacle with a plan to overcome it. As if nothing and nobody can stop them from achieving victory."

I study her and know that the picture she's painting has some major flaws, but she is right about one thing. Our men know how to roll with the punches and come back swinging harder than before. They don't give up and they're always thinking.

"You're right. I think I'm just worked up because I feel like this is all my fault. If I wasn't here..."

"Stop right there." Corinne orders. "I like you and Elina too much to imagine what would become of either of you if you weren't under Puma's protection." She shudders and I have to laugh.

"Are you the same person I was talking to just a few hours ago?" I ask her.

She chuckles. “Yeah, yeah. I listened to you. Sue me.”

We sit in silence for a few minutes until Desdemona breaks it.

“Why do you think the cops are here?” She asks me. “You seem to think you’re the cause.”

“This is Juan’s doing.” I say. “I was telling Puma earlier that Greg’s attack made little sense. Juan knows the cars are bulletproof. He would know that Puma would likely catch Greg in the act.”

“You think Juan called the police?” Corinne asks and I nod.

“I do. The timing is right.”

I hear a commotion behind us and I turn in time to see Juan, wearing a police uniform, grab Elina up from her chair. He slams the door shut and holds her against his chest. “Alisa, you and Elina are coming with me.” He says, his gun pointing at my baby’s head.

I stifle my scream just as Elina lets out hers. Only she screams right into the bastard’s ear. He shifts his attention to her, snapping for her to shut up. Mal runs up and punches Juan hard in the crotch. Juan buckles and the gun goes off. I scream again as Elina drops to the ground. Showtime grabs Juan around the neck and has him in a chokehold when the door bursts open. Puma runs into the room and takes in the chaos.

I ignore everyone as I run to Elina, dropping next to her. Puma moves up behind me. I can barely see through the tears, but what I can make out has me crying even harder. Mal is holding Elina close, shielding her with his little body. It looks like he inherited his father’s hero DNA.

Corinne drops next to me and gives me a tearful smile. “I think I just aged thirty years.” She says and I laugh.

“Me, too.”

I get Elina ready for bed and hold her close until her breathing evens out and I know she’s asleep. I want to stay like this and hold her all night, but her bed is too small. She flails in her sleep. I know she’ll not only wake me up, but likely herself as well if I’m in the way. Reluctantly, I rise and tuck her in, spending several minutes just taking her in. With a sigh, I leave the room to find Max sitting outside her door.

“Just in case she or Mal have nightmares.” He says when I raise an eyebrow in question. “Have to protect our future warriors.”

I smile and pat his shoulder before moving past him. I stop when I see Mal’s door open and Corinne step out.

“How is he?” I ask her.

She smiles. “Asleep. Finally. He was pretty proud of himself.”

“He should be. He’s a hero. Just like his daddy.” I remind her.

“How’s Elina?”

“Sleeping. Finally.” I laugh. “I don’t think I’ll be able to fall asleep that quickly.”

“Kids are more resilient.” She says. “Then again, I don’t think either of them understands what could have happened tonight.”

“Are you having second thoughts?” I ask her as we head to the common room.

She doesn't answer, but responds with her own question. "Do you think it's over now? With Juan's arrest?"

I consider the question and slowly nod. "I think so. Puma will need to talk to Sal, and there might be some fallout. But I don't think Sal can hold his son's arrest against Puma or the club. Not after everything Juan's done." I let my mind play over everything I know. "I think we're fine. You and Mal should stay here for at least a few more days until we know for certain. Either way, Puma will want to beef up the security at your condo before you two go back. If you want to go back."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“I’m ok staying here for now, but yeah, I will want to move back into my condo.” She says. We’re in the common room and I can see Trouble and Puma sitting at the bar. “But whatever we do, I won’t keep Mal away from Puma.”

I smile as we make our way over to the men.

“How are they?” Puma asks, shifting over to make room for us.

“Sleeping.” I say. “Thanks for putting Max outside their rooms.”

“He volunteered. I thought it was a good idea.” Puma says. “You want something?”

“Whiskey, neat.” I tell Smooth who’s working the bar.

“Same.” Corinne says.

I glance around the room and spot Detective Sterling sitting at a table with Showtime. I turn back to Puma. “Why is he still here?” I ask him. “I thought they called off the search.”

Puma smirks as he glances over. “I think he’s hoping to frisk somebody, or have her frisk him.”

Trouble snorts as Corinne and I whip our heads around to study the couple. I grin when I spot the look on the detective’s face. He looks like Showtime shot him with a taser.

“How’s that going to work?” Corinne asks.

Puma shrugs. “No idea.” The crease between his eyebrows tells me he’s considering the ramifications. I don’t know if he’s afraid of losing Showtime or gaining a cop.

“I need to head out.” Trouble says, getting up after polishing off his beer. He leans down and lays a kiss on Corinne, that has her panting when he breaks off. “I’ll see you tomorrow at the art show.” He says, and I see Corinne perk up.

“You’re going?”

“Of course. My club is helping with security.” He says. He waves goodbye to Puma and me before heading out the door.

“I’m off to bed. I just hope I can sleep.” Corinne says as she steps down from the stool. Puma and I follow her lead. She looks at me. “Would I cause a problem if I gave Puma a hug?” She asks me.

I smile. “Of course not.”

“I don’t get a say?” Puma asks with a grin, letting Corinne know he’s teasing.

“No.” We both say together and laugh. Corinne leans into Puma as he puts his arms around her and squeezes her tight.

“Thank you.” She says as she breaks off.

“For what?” Puma asks.

“For protecting Mal and me. For opening your home to us. You welcomed both of us. I knew you’d accept Mal, but I always worried if you’d forgive me once you found

out about him.”

“I can’t say that I’m not sad that I missed out on so much of his life, but I don’t blame you. I’m just happy we’re all together now.” Puma says. “Don’t look so worried. I know you’ll want to go back to your condo. But this is your home, too.”

She thanks him and moves to her room.

I let Puma sweep me up into his arms to carry me to our room. I need to feel him and being in his arms is the one place I know I’m safe.

Once inside, he sits me on the edge of the bed and carefully removes my clothes before he strips. “Think you’ll be able to sleep?” He asks, and I shrug.

“I think so. I’m tired, but I can’t seem to settle.” I admit.

“I know an excellent muscle relaxer.” He says with a sexy grin.

“Oh yeah? Prescription or over the counter?” I ask with a smirk.

“Definitely prescription only. Can’t be handing these out to just anybody.” He pushes me up further onto the bed so he can crawl between my legs.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Wait.” I tell him as he lowers his mouth to my pussy. He looks up at me with a question in his eyes and I return it with a look of lust. “On your knees.” I order him. Although Puma usually takes charge in the bedroom, he does as I ask. Once he’s in position, I slide under him so I’m under his cock while offering him my pussy. I curl up and take the tip into my mouth. He wastes no time before he buries his face in my folds and gets to work.

I get lost in the taste of him, in the feel of his silky skin over his thick rod. In this position, the jerks of his hips cause his dick to slide deep down my throat. He shows his pleasure by sucking and biting on my clit. I run my fingernails over his ass as I take him as deep as I can before swallowing. I know the action has him close to blowing his load because he moans and his hips piston. The vibration of his moan over my clit has my own hips jerking in response. I work his cock until I feel his legs tense and I know he’s close.

“Fuck, baby, I’m close.” He says.

“Give it to me, Puma, every single drop. I want it all.” I say, which has him roaring as he unloads streams of cum down my throat. As I float on his pleasure, he continues to suck and lick my pussy as he slides one of his thick fingers into my passage. When he crooks his finger, I explode.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: PUMA

When I wake, I see my future. Alisa, naked and curled into me, is how I want to start every day for the rest of my life. The sheet covers her waist and one leg, leaving her breasts and the other leg exposed. The sight of all her gorgeous skin gives me ideas.

My cock twitches in complete agreement with my plan. I lean forward to capture a milk chocolate nipple in my mouth and roll my tongue around it until I feel it harden. I shift to the other nipple and repeat the action. Alisa shifts as my administrations awaken her body.

Pulling the sheet away from her pussy, I shift my attention to her sex. Her arousal glistens in welcome, and I grin. I glance at her face to see if she's awake, but her soft moans and even breathing tells me she's still sleeping. Hoping she stays asleep, I swipe my tongue through her folds and lose myself in the taste, smell, and feel of her. My mate.

I get so lost in my need for her I don't realize she's awake until her hand caresses my scalp. I shift so my tongue is still inside her, but I can look up into her beautiful face.

She's giving me a sleepy smile, but I see the lust fully awake in her eyes. "I was having this amazing dream." She says as her smile turns into a sexy smirk. "Turns out it wasn't a dream."

Sliding a finger into her, I give her clit a nip with my teeth before grinning up at her. "I'm doing something wrong then."

She stretches her arms over her head while her hips rock against the movement of my finger. "I wouldn't say that." She moans when I crick my finger. "The reality is so much better."

I kiss her inner thigh before shifting so I can align my aching cock with her wet passage. With a slow steady glide, I plant myself inside her and feel a shudder of pleasure pass through me. "I see what you mean." I growl as I slowly slide out and then back in. Falling forward on my hands, I stare into her beautiful face. "You're so fucking beautiful." I tell her, leaning down far enough to capture her mouth with mine. Her groan as she tastes herself on my lips has my hips jerking faster.

When we come together, we're always explosive, but this morning, I feel my pleasure build slowly as I glide in and out while feasting on her lips. Making love to Alisa is an all-consuming adrenaline rush. This is my life. She is my life. The passion grows as I imagine her round with my child, then caring for our children. It peaks as I imagine her with gray streaks as we watch our grandchildren. This woman is my life. The thought of that sends me right to the precipice. I'm close to going over, but she isn't there yet. Reaching down, I rub her clit with my thumb and a jolt of pleasure shoots through me when I brush against our joining.

"Puma!" Alisa groans as she breaks the kiss. The look of pure ecstasy on her face is the last straw.

"I'm coming baby, come with me." I order, and she detonates when I explode inside her. I hold her until her body stops trembling. Brushing her hair out of her face, I plant a soft kiss on her lips. "That was..." I started, but I honestly have no words.

"A preview to the rest of our life together?" Alisa asks and I nod.

"Exactly." I say.

"I wish we could stay in bed all day." She says, shifting to throw her leg over my hip. "But Desdemona and I have to get over to 1% and I want to check on Elina."

"Well, then." I say, rolling out of bed and pulling her up with me. "Let's get you clean."

After another round of sex in the shower, this one hard and fast, we head to Elina's room. Unsurprisingly, we find her gone. We simply follow the sound of her giggles until we reach the common room. She and Mal are sitting at the table eating breakfast. Pancakes today with what looks like chocolate chips and whipped cream.

“They’re going to be bouncing off the walls.” Alisa says.

“Breakfast of warriors.” I tell her and she snickers.

Lilly sees us coming and motions for us to sit. I take the seat next to Corinne so Alisa can sit next to her daughter.

“How did everyone sleep?” I ask, looking at Corinne.

“Better than I expected.” She admits. “I thought Mal would have nightmares, but Smooth says he slept through the night. As did Elina.”

“What about you?” I ask her.

She shrugs. “I woke up twice, but I slept.”

Lilly returns with plates for us. After thanking her, I turn back to Corinne.

“Are you still going to the charity even today?” I ask her and she nods.

“Showtime and Max are planning on staying with the kids. They said something about a Lego video game challenge.” She says. “I’m looking forward to getting out of the clubhouse and not worrying about what’s out there.” She pauses, looking at me. “We don’t have to worry any longer, do we?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“No. You don’t.” I tell her. Although, I still have work to do to ensure Juan is well and truly out of our lives. He’s in jail as of this morning. I checked. He tried to kidnap two people in front of a clubhouse full of cops, but his dad is the head of a cartel. He has money and power, both of which can get the wrong people out of jail. Sal is supposed to be at the charity event today and I plan on making sure I get his word that Juan will never be an issue again.

One advantage of being seven feet tall is that I can easily see over a crowd. I’m using my height advantage to keep tabs on my gorgeous woman, who looks like an exotic goddess in her bright red dress that cascades over her body like water. Her dark hair and tan skin turn the color into a sinful pleasure. I take a deep breath as I watch her and consider various scenarios to get her away from the crowd just long enough to lift that skirt and...

“Puma.” A voice interrupts my sexy thoughts, and I turn to see Sal standing next to me. I’d seen him arrive and had plans to approach him, but I’m not surprised that he found me first.

“Sal.” I say. “I’d say I’m sorry about your son, but seeing as he tried to kidnap my woman and her child. I’d be lying.”

Sal nods slowly before looking out over the crowd. It gives me a chance to study him and I realize how much of a toll his son’s arrest took on him.

“I don’t blame you for being upset. I’m not happy about it, either.” Sal says. “Doesn’t mean that I won’t do everything I can to help him.”

I nod, because I'd expect nothing less. "And if he gets out and I think he's coming after Alisa again, I'll end him." I tell Sal, keeping eye contact so he knows how serious I am. "I told you I wouldn't kill him and I didn't, but if he gets out of jail..."

"I'm hoping to have him committed." Sal admits. "I don't know if I'll succeed. The cops are holding him on several charges, including attempted kidnapping and attacking a cop. My best hope is that I can take him back to Yuma under house arrest. Either way, Alisa and Elina will be safe. I can guarantee it. I owe it to them and to her mother."

I nod. "Ok, then." I turn away, but Sal stops me. "We have another problem to discuss." He says.

I narrow my eyes at him. "What?"

"Greg Spada." Sal says.

"What about him?" I ask.

"We know." He says simply, glancing around to make sure no one is eavesdropping. "All of it. About him faking his death and working with Juan. Juan said he convinced Greg that Junior had caused his brother's death."

"Ok." I say, waiting for him to get to the point.

"Juan told us what happened to Greg." Sal says.

"Did he?" I ask, keeping my tone neutral.

"Josef wants restitution." Sal replies. "Greg was his best friend."

I study Sal, searching for some sign to show me his thoughts. But all I see is resolution, and it gives me a bad feeling. “What kind of restitution?”

“Old Testament. Eye for an eye. He wants blood. Either yours or Trouble’s.” Sal says, and it takes every ounce of my strength to not go off on him.

“Funny. That was the debt Greg paid. Or maybe you forgot about the body in the car?” I ask him. Sal blinks, but other than that, his expression doesn’t change. “That was one of Trouble’s men. Greg killed him and stole his kutte and bike. He used both to try starting a war between my club and Trouble’s. He didn’t succeed. But Trouble lost a man. Don’t forget that.”

Sal lets out a loud sigh. “I understand, Puma, I do. But Josef is hurting. He wants revenge. With Juan in the mess he’s in, I turned over the business to Junior and Josef. They’re calling the shots now.”

“I would suggest you explain to your sons what a war against the Demons and the Shadow Borns would mean to their business.” I tell Sal. “And I don’t just mean our chapters.”

“Fuck.” Sal says and nods. “I’ll talk to them again.”

I walk away and go to my office in the casino. Pulling out my phone, I make the call.

“Puma, how’s the charity event?” Dante asks.

“Fine.” I tell him. “But I just had a conversation with Sal and I see trouble on the horizon.”

“What kind of trouble?” Dante asks.

“War between us and the cartel.” I explain as I tell him about my conversation with Sal. “He’s going to talk to his sons again, but if that fails...”

“Let me know, and we’ll be there to have your back. If you want to set up a meeting with Junior and Josef, I’ll come to Vegas.”

“Might take you up on that. But I was also wondering if you’ve found out anything about Adella Cortez? If we could reach her, she might put a stop to this.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“I talked to my mom, and she said she recognizes the name. She’s doing some digging. If she finds out anything, I’ll let you know.” Dante says. “You’re still coming out here to preside over the wedding, right?”

“Wouldn’t miss it.” I tell him, smiling. “I’ll get there early. I might save Tally from wasting her life with the likes of you.”

“Shut up, fucker. I don’t want her to know.” He says, laughing before ending the call.

EPILOGUE: ALISA

One advantage of having a man who stands seven feet tall is its easy to find him in a crowd. Of course, Puma being Puma means he’s usually surrounded. He’s not only a former hot shot basketball star, but he’s now a bad ass biker. The only thing that could have made him hotter would be the trifecta of being a Navy Seal or some other military hero. I smile when I see him wade through the crowd. His eyes focused only on me. How the hell did I get so lucky?

“Hey, gorgeous.” He says, leaning down to kiss me. “How was the auction?”

“Extremely successful.” I tell him. “We hit our mark and then some. Sal was very generous.” When Puma frowns, I place my hand on his arm. “What is it?”

“Nothing to worry about. I talked to him earlier. He promises Juan will no longer be a threat.” He tells me, pulling two glasses of champagne off the tray of a passing server. “Which I think deserves a toast. So does your hitting the goal.” He hands a glass to me and we toast before taking sips. Unlike most guys in the club, Puma has

experience with champagne, so he doesn't make a face like most of them do. Although, I'm fairly certain Puma's sprayed more champagne during his career than he actually drank.

We chat for a while as the rest of the guests finish the free food and drinks and head for the exit. I see Trouble and Corinne making their way toward us, and I grin. They aren't as striking a couple as she and Puma, but they're attractive tougher. His dark hair and deep green eyes contrast prettily with her white blonde hair and ice blue orbs.

"This was so much fun." Corinne says when she reaches us. "I needed this evening." I see Puma send Trouble a look and watch them walk a few feet away, so I return my attention to Corinne.

"So, you think you might want to help us out again?" I ask as Desdemona and Diego join us.

"Absolutely." Corinne says.

I glance around the emptying room and spot Chill standing off to the side. I smile at how gorgeous she is in a royal blue cocktail dress. It shows off her stunning figure. Although, I have to admit she looks out of place without her kutte and jeans. She's in deep conversation with a man who also looks out of place. He isn't wearing a tux or a suit, but he is in all black. Black boots, black jeans and a black t-shirt under a black jacket. Even his baseball cap is black. The bill of the cap casts his face in shadow so I can't see his features or his expression. However, from their combined postures, I can tell they're not making small talk. I consider going over to check with her, but I feel Puma move in behind me. When he tenses up, I assume he's seen Chill, but when I glance up, I see his attention is elsewhere. I follow his line of sight, and my heart freezes in place. Detective Sterling is walking our way.

“What’s wrong?” I ask without waiting for either men to speak. “Is he out?”

Detective Sterling shakes his head and gives me a light touch on my arm. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you. No, Juan is still in custody. I promise I’ll let you know if that changes.” He says, before sending a smirk in Puma’s direction. “Although, I know you’ll hear it almost the same time I do.”

“If it isn’t about Juan, what do you need?” Puma asks him.

“I need to speak with Gillian Forrester. I understand she’s a member of your club.” Sterling says.

Puma nods. “She is. What do you need her for?” Puma asks.

“Her former commander called the station, said he’s been trying to reach her but doesn’t know her exact location, only that she’s living in Vegas. I recognized the name when I heard it. Knew she was yours, so I said I’d reach out.”

I see Puma gesture to someone and I turn to see Chill making her way over to us. The guy she was talking with is gone. “Detective Sterling said he has a message from your former commanding officer.” He says to her.

I see Chill still, but she turns to the Detective. “What does he want?”

“He said one of your former teammates has gone AWOL. A Lieutenant Bryson. The general thought you might know where he is or how to reach him.” Sterling says. “He also suggested that you might be in danger.”

“Why would he think that?” Chill asks.

“Before Bryson took off, he mentioned you. Said you owed him and he was planning

on collecting. No one thought anything about it until he disappeared. General Clark said you two have some history.”

Chill scoffs. “If you call finding out you’re a dirty little secret to be a history, then yeah, I guess you’re right. As for unfinished business. I have no business with Lieutenant Bryson. He and I concluded our business several years ago.”

Detective Sterling nods. “Ok, I just wanted to deliver the message. If you need help...” Sterling trails off and laughs. “You won’t be calling me. Got it.” Sterling shakes his head and walks away.

“Are you alright?” Puma asks her and she nods.

“I’m fine. A little surprised that he went AWOL. He was a career soldier.”

I open my mouth to ask about the man she was talking with, because he looks like a former soldier, but before I can speak, Puma does.

“Let’s head back to the clubhouse. I’m ready to get out of this monkey suit.” Puma announces. “Trouble, you coming back with us?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:27 pm

“Can’t. I need to head back to my clubhouse and update my crew.” Trouble says. He kisses Corinne. “Maybe we can hang out together tomorrow. You, me and mini Puma.”

Corinne laughs and agrees. “I’d like that.”

We walk out of the casino and get into the limo that Puma hired for our group. In the car, I snuggle up against Puma. I plan on peeling off his tux like wrapping paper later, but right now, I’m just happy. Juan’s out of the picture, and the charity event is over. We need to disburse the funds, but I’m not thinking about that tonight. It can all wait until tomorrow.

I glance over at Chill and see her worrying her lip as she stares out the window. Something is going on with her. I glance at Puma and see him studying his SOA. He knows something is wrong, so I let it go, knowing he’ll handle it. Just like he’s handled everything else.

When we step into the clubhouse, I see the man from earlier, the one who was speaking with Chill. When she sees him, she freezes before striding over to get into his face.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” She demands. “I told you I needed to talk to my President first and then I’d meet with you. You know what you’ve done? You’ve made me an accomplice, and you’ve put my club at risk.” She pulls out her phone.

“Who the fuck are you calling?” He demands, reaching for the phone.

She keeps it out of his reach as she answers him. "I'm calling Detective Sterling."

"You're turning me in?" The man roars. "What the fuck, Chill? You're a fucking cold-hearted bitch!" He seems to realize his mistake when the sound of every chair in the room scraping against the floor echoes around the space. He glances around him as every member moves forward until he's boxed in. The growls and angry noises remind me of a zoo and I have to tamp down a giggle. Now is not the time for giggling.

"Chill. Your choice. We can take him to The Pit or dump him somewhere. Maybe Nellis. I take it you're the deserter? Lieutenant Bryson?"

Bryson glances at Puma and then does a double take. "You're Maklin Brooks."

Puma growls. "Not anymore. I'm Puma, President of this club and I don't take kindly to deserters threatening my crew. Dice, Wildcard, show this man his new accommodations in The Pit."

Bryson doesn't flinch or show any fear, but he does glance at Chill. "Please. I need your help. Find him. I don't care what you do to me, but please, he's only seven, and he's all alone."

Puma holds his hand to stop Dice and Wildcard. "What's going on Chill?"

"It's my son..." Bryson starts and Puma gives him a hard look to make him shut up.

"Chill?"

"I only know what Bryson told me earlier. The cops found his wife murdered and their son missing. He thought we could help find him."

"How long has he been missing?" Puma asks.

“Six days.” Bryson says, his voice cracking. “I didn’t hear about my ex-wife’s death until four days ago when I returned stateside. I asked for leave, but they were dragging their feet. During that time, I tried to find out what happened to Slade, but no one seems to know anything. He’s only seven. The thought of him alone, out there...” Bryson’s voice trails off.

I glance up at Puma and know he’s softening toward the man. I imagine he’s picturing Mal wandering the streets of Vegas.

“Chill, Wildcard, my office. Bryson. You too.” Puma orders. He looks at me and I rise to kiss him.

“I’ll stay awake, but if I’m asleep. You wake me. I plan on taking that tux off you.” I whisper to him. He grins.

“It’s a date.”