



Reaper's Rage

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Category: Romance, New Adult, Mc

Description: Reaper This is supposed to be the land of the free. Not so much when you're a person of color. There are rules black people have to follow that white people don't. Getting arrested as a teenager because I was taking a walk had me join a gang for revenge. If you already condemn me as a criminal, I might as well be one. My uncle, President of the Demon Dawgs' chapter in Vegas, talked me into prospecting. Now I'm a patched member. Unfortunately, my old gang isn't happy with my choice, so they go after my girl.

Ashlyn I'm in love with my brother's best friend. There, I said it. My brother, Flame, doesn't know. I thought no one knew, not even Reaper. But Reaper's old gang figured it out. Now they want to use me to make him pay for choosing the Demon Dawgs over them. So much for growing old together...

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CHAPTER ONE: REAPER

Walking out of El Bodego was the hardest thing Dante's ever asked of me since becoming a prospect. I want to be in there, beating the answers out of that bitch Renee. Answers that will lead me to Ashlyn. I feel like I've drunk an entire barista worth of coffee. My nerves are shot. Fear about what she's going through has me ready to slam back into El Bodego and demand answers.

"How you holding up?" Ghost asks me, but I know from his expression he already knows.

"I want to be in there." I admit. "Never wanted to defy Dante before this..."

"If he knew the truth..." Ghost starts and I nod.

"I know. I also understand why he doesn't want us in there. He wants to give Izzy and Kingsley as much privacy as he can while they question that bitch." I say. I know Dante's worried about Kingsley and how she'll hold up. He doesn't want to make it harder for her than it already is. After all, Kingsley and Izzy are teaming up to torture a woman for information. And not just any woman, a woman Kingsley considered a friend. Until she showed her true self.

"If anyone can make her talk, it's those two." Ghost assures me. "I saw the look on Kingsley's face. She'll make the bitch suffer, and she won't stop until she has the information we need to find Ashlyn."

I nod. Standing outside El Bodego, we can't hear anything happening inside. The

place is a soundproof fortress, well-hidden in case the authorities search the clubhouse grounds. Ghost and I are standing guard, not because we expect anyone to come rescue the bitch, but for when Dante calls us inside. He wants us close in case we need to help the women, or to handle the body they leave behind.

“You need to tell Flame about you and Ashlyn.” Ghost says, interrupting my thoughts.

“I know. But I can’t tell him right now.” I say. “Shit! I knew we should have told him sooner, but Ashlyn wanted to wait until the end of term. I think she’s nervous about how Flame’s going to react.”

“Aren’t you worried?”

“Fuck yeah, but I also know the longer we wait, the harder he’s going to take it. Although I understand why she doesn’t want to tell him.” I say, trying to not give into the pain of rejection that creeps in whenever I consider the reasons behind her hesitancy to tell her brother about us.

“Why?”

“Because I’m black.” I say, unable to keep the bitterness from coming through at those words.

“What the fuck?” Ghost explodes. “Who do you think has a problem with you because you’re black? Flame? Ashlyn? That’s bullshit and you know it. You’re the only one who thinks it matters.”

“Yeah? Would you want your sister going out with a black man with the way things are right now?” I demand.

“If that someone was you, I’d be fine with it. Look, I get it. Racism is rampant right now. Being Asian isn’t winning me any popularity points, either. But you know damn well that no one in this club, especially Flame, gives two fucks that you’re black. You’re our brother, and that’s all that matters. And if you think Ashlyn has a problem with the color of your skin, she doesn’t. Not considering how she eye fucks you every time she sees you.”

I silently mull over his words, and while I know Ashlyn cares about me, I can’t shake the feeling that I’m not good enough for her. “She’d be better off with someone else.” I grumble. “Someone who doesn’t get pulled over once a week because his skin is dark or who can’t wear a hoodie without finding himself face down on the ground in handcuffs.” I can still feel the fear coursing through me from that night. The night I went for a walk in my own neighborhood and ended up at the wrong end of a taser before getting arrested. The cops couldn’t believe that a black kid like me lived in the upper class neighborhood and since my parents were on vacation, I couldn’t prove it. Luckily, my uncle was in town playing the Lakers. The cops bent over backwards to reunite me with the great Maklin Brooks, NBA superstar. Now Maklin is Puma, the President of the Las Vegas chapter of the Demon Dawgs and the reason I’m a Demon.

“That was all before you became a Demon.” Ghost argues. “I’ve ridden with you plenty of times and I’ve never seen you pulled over.”

I shrug. “It still happens. Maybe not once a week, but I still have to be careful. The kutte helps in some ways, but in other ways, it’s just another reason for them to fuck with me.”

“But it’s better than when you were with the Spades.” Ghost persists.

I can’t deny this, so I don’t. My life changed the night two racist cops arrested me. I rebelled against all authority, deciding to become a criminal if they were already

treating me like one. I made the biggest mistake of my life by joining a gang, the Spades. My parents and Puma tried everything to get me to quit, but I was stubborn. It took watching a kid die to rethink my choice.

The door to El Bodego opens to allow Grimm to exit. He's holding a wiped out Kingsley in his arms. Dante and Izzy follow behind them. Izzy continues to the clubhouse, but Dante stops to talk to us. "You can take out the garbage now." Dante tells us.

"Did she talk?" Ghost asks.

"Oh yeah, she gave us a name. I've got Byte and Smoke looking for him now. Once you're done, come back to the clubhouse, and hopefully we'll know where to find Ashlyn by then."

Ghost and I make quick work wrapping Renee's body in a cotton sheet and then a tarp. As a prospect, one of my tasks had been to help Babe dispose of bodies. He used to wrap them in just the tarp, but I suggested adding the cotton sheet. It added another layer of protection and since cotton is flammable, any evidence that transferred from the body to the sheet went up in smoke along with the body. We dispose of the ashes and any other remains in the desert.

When I took over transporting the bodies, I rigged the van to make the task easier and the possibility of getting caught almost non-existent. I painted the van to match the colors of the desert. The bodies we transport can either ride in the back, which is all metal and easy to clean with bleach. Or, if we're only transporting one body like we are now, it can fit in the hidden compartment under the floor. We load Renee's body into the compartment and head into the desert.

I earned the name Reaper because I specialize in disposing bodies. Knowing we needed a fool-proof solution, I built a crematorium deep in the desert and use a

refractory-lined flue to control the emissions. We burn bodies and clothes. I then grind the remaining bones and teeth into ash before scattering everything in the desert. Virtually untraceable.

We finish disposing of Renee, so we can head back to the clubhouse. Seeing the pain Izzy and Kingsley inflicted on Renee eases some of my anger, but I'm still coiled tight. I can only hope Dante and the other Demons have discovered who has Ashlyn. She needs to be found safe and soon.

When we enter the clubhouse, the first person I see is Flame and my guilt rises another notch. I transfer my attention to Kingsley and give her a head nod so she knows we've taken care of Renee's remains.

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Flame comes over to join us just as Dante enters. When he mentions the name Deion Jones, my world crashes around me. Because I know that name. He's the leader the Spades. Which is why he calls himself The King of Spades. He's the man who promised me retribution when I abandoned his gang to join the Demons. I vent my anger by kicking a stool across the room, silencing everyone. I turn to Flame to apologize. It's because of me that bastard has his sister. I don't know what I say to Flame, but I watch the face of my friend turn from concern into fury before he takes the first punch. All I can hear is his anguish as he labels me a traitor. Truer words were never spoken.

CHAPTER TWO: ASHLYN

"How much did I drink?" I wonder out loud as I pry my eyes open. "And where the hell am I?" I add when I glance around the room. Although it's more of a cell than a room. I'm lying on a dirty mattress atop a metal frame. In one corner is a plastic bucket, which I'm ignoring, for now. Standing on the bed, I try to see out the small window, but I can't. It's too high and too dirty. I'm not even sure it's the sky I'm seeing. It's chilly in the room, so I'm grateful for my hoody and jeans.

My last memory is of drinking margaritas and looking at lingerie and sex toys with Renee and the Old Ladies from the Demon Dawgs. I'm certain I'm no longer in Renee's apartment. I vaguely remember feeling sleepy, but I don't remember falling asleep. If I'm no longer in Renee's apartment, then someone moved me and not with my permission. I consider trying the door, but I have little doubt it's locked. Also, I don't want to alert whoever is on the other side that I'm awake.

I glance back at the window. I'm fit, so I might fit through it. But even if I can open

the window, I'm not positive I can escape without getting stuck. Glancing at the door and considering what nightmare may be on the other side, though, has me thinking it might be worth the risk. Glancing first at the bed, then at the wall under the window, I consider my options. I could probably prop the bed up on its end and climb up it. Stepping away from the bed and studying the window, I don't see a latch or any other way to open it. Which means I need to find something to break the glass in order to get out. As I glance around the room again, looking for anything that I could use to break the glass, I hear someone at the door.

When the door opens, I freeze. The man standing there is a stranger. I'm not weak, but he makes me feel vulnerable. His expression is hard. I know without him having to speak that he is not a nice man. His cold, dead eyes are a black abyss. I cross my arms over my chest to protect myself. I want to appear strong and unaffected by him, but I can't pull it off. Looks like I'll have to bluff my way into courage.

"Hello, Ashlyn." He says. Those two words sound like a threat. I barely suppress a shudder as he moves into my space. He reaches out to loop a strand of my hair around his index finger. "My name is Deion. I'm the King of Spades. You are a pretty little bitch. Gotta give Randall props for his taste in women." I frown at his mention of Randall, aka Reaper. "And I hear you're a virgin, to boot. Tasty."

"What am I doing here?" I ask him. "And where are the others?"

He releases my hair to circle me, pausing behind me to either check out my ass or to play with my nerves. Probably both. Once he completes his circuit, he stands in front of me again. He runs a finger up and down my arm, his touch leaves an ice cold trail. "So many answers to the first question. As for these others, you're asking about. I don't know who you're asking about. You're the only one here. Besides my men, of course."

I frown at him and wonder if I should push about the whereabouts of Caitlin and the

others. I decide to come at him from a different angle. “How do you know Renee?” I ask him.

He frowns at me. “I don’t know any person by that name. Don’t you want to know why I have you here?”

“In a minute.” I tell him and I can see by the widening of his eyes that I’ve surprised him. Hooray for me. “The last thing I remember is drinking a margarita at a woman’s house and getting sleepy. If she didn’t hand me over to you, then who did?”

He furrows his brows and stares at me. I’m resigned to thinking he won’t answer until he does. “I don’t know this woman. One of my men picked you up outside your apartment. He brought you to me because you’re dating Randall. You’re the bait.”

“Well, first, your man lied to you, but that’s your problem. As for Randall. He’s known as Reaper now. You might want to think about how he earned that name before you do anything to me.”

“You think I fear Reaper, or Randall, or whatever the hell he wants to call himself?” Deion sneers.

“If you’re smart. Yeah. Reaper is a fully patched member of the Demon Dawgs. So is my brother. Every single one of them would die for the other and those they care about. You hurt me, they’ll end you.”

Deion chuckles as he studies me. “Should have known Randall would pick a sassy one. Does he know how loyal you are to him? Is he as loyal to you?”

“Absolutely.” I say without a doubt.

“Hmmm. I guess we’ll see.” Deion says as he grabs me the back of my neck and

leans so close I can smell the beer on his breath. “Would you be so loyal if you knew your beloved Reaper shot an unarmed kid in the back?”

I glare at him, never taking my eyes off his, so he knows I’m telling the truth. “I know he would never do such a thing.”

“I have a witness.” Deion says with an evil grin.

“This witness wouldn’t be the same guy who lied to you about where he found me, would it?” I counter. “Or maybe all your guys lie to you. Because Reaper would never do what you just said. You obviously don’t know Reaper very well.”

Deion raises his arm back as if to hit me, but his phone chimes, distracting him. I scramble up on the bed so I’m standing with my back to the wall and as far away from him as I can get in the tiny room. He watches me but doesn’t make a move toward me.

“Randall, nice of you to call.” Deion says, locking eyes with me. “I was just getting to know your girl. She’s a feisty one. Surprised you like the type. Figured you preferred your women weak, like you.”

I can’t hear Reaper’s response. One thing I love about Reaper is that he rarely loses his temper. When he does, it’s terrifying. Although I know he’d never hurt me. I also know he’d have no problem releasing that rage on someone who hurt anyone he cared about. Right now, I kind of wish he was shouting so I could hear what he’s saying. Deion’s face lacks emotion, so I’m not getting information from him either.

“I haven’t touched her. Yet.” Deion says, watching me. “What I want is for you to come here alone. You come and I let her go. You know where to find me.”

He lets Reaper talk again before he shoves the phone in my direction. “Just tell him

you're alive." He orders me. I reach for the phone, but he pulls it back. "Just talk."

"Reaper. I'm here. I'm ok. He hasn't touched me. What about the others? Are they..." I yell out, but Randall pulls the phone away and holds it to his ear.

"Your woman doesn't listen to instructions very well." I watch Deion smirk at whatever Reaper says to him. "Just get here. And Reaper, if you don't come, I'll send you a video of her death along with her body."

When he closes the door, my legs give out and I fall onto the bed. How the hell did I get into this mess? I went to a party at a friend's house. I snort. Some friend. Renee has to be part of this. She drugged me. I think about the other women at the party and my heart hurts. Did Renee drug them, too? She had to have done. Or how else how did she get me out of the apartment without them stopping her? What a bitch. I can't believe I trusted that woman.

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I shake my mind free of Renee. If the Demons haven't taken care of her by now, I will when I get out. So, I need to get out of here. There is no reason I can't help myself, even though I know Reaper and the Demons will come for me. I yank the mattress off the frame and flip the frame over. I yank on piece after piece, but nothing gives. My frustration level rises until I finally find a loose screw. Using my fingers, I work it until it falls into my hand. I right the bed and tuck the screw between my fingers just as the door opens again. Deion strides back in with another man at his side.

Deion still wears his stony expression, but the second guy doesn't hide his feelings. His eyes are hungry as he roams every inch of my body. I feel dirty and violated just from his gaze. I shudder at the thought of him touching me. When he comes over and grabs my arm, I can't stop myself from jerking away. He raises his hand to backhand me, but Deion stops him.

"Don't. If Randall sees bruises, he'll kick your ass and I'll let him. If he doesn't hold up his end of the bargain, then I don't care what you do to her." He shifts his attention to me. "This is Trask, my second in command. Don't try anything. If you do, I won't stop him again." Deion says before turning around. "Let's go and you better hope your boyfriend follows instructions better than you."

Deion grabs my arm to keep me from moving past him. Although, I want to fight him; Deion doesn't frighten me as much as Trask does. I let him lead me through a crowded room. Half a dozen men watch us walk by. This must be their clubhouse. It isn't as comfortable or inviting as the Demon Dawg clubhouse. Each man stares at me like a starving lion watching an injured lamb. The shudder that shoots through me is impossible to stop. I hear Trask's dark chuckle behind me, and I know he notices

my fear. I really hope Reaper doesn't come alone and the other Demons take out these guys. Starting with Trask.

CHAPTER THREE: REAPER

Flame lands a few solid punches before Dante and Chaos pull him off me. I didn't fight back, I couldn't. I knew when Flame found out about Ashlyn and me, he wouldn't be happy. But finding out about us and learning that I'm the reason they kidnapped her made things that much worse. The thought of Deion getting his hands on my beautiful Ashlyn makes me wish Flame had finished me.

"Knock it off!" Dante shouts. "We don't have time for this bullshit."

I take Grimm's hand so he can pull me up off the floor.

"He's the reason my sister is in danger." Flame bellows.

"He's the one who kidnapped Ashlyn?" Dante snaps back. "Or is he the one holding her captive?"

"No, but..." Flame sputters.

"I'd be very careful with your next words." Dante says, getting in his face. When Flame says nothing, only giving Dante a nod to show he's done, Dante places his hand on Flame's shoulder. "We're getting her back. But the only way we can do that is by working together. Right?"

Flame nods again. I want to say something, but I know right now, I'm not the friend he needs. I glance at Ghost, who gives me a nod before punching Flame's arm lightly and pushing him toward the door. "We'll go outside and cool down." Ghost tells Dante.

Dante turns to me. “My office.”

Chaos and Grimm follow us. Dante takes his seat behind the desk, while Grimm sits across from him and Chaos stands against the door. I stay standing in the middle of the room.

“Deion Jones?” Dante queries.

“He’s the leader of the Spades. He goes by the title King of Spades, or King.” I explain.

“Do you know how to reach him?” Grimm asks.

I pull out my phone and nod. “I can call him.”

“In a minute.” Dante says. “Give us the background. I know you ran with the Spades until you prospected with us. How did you get mixed up with them?”

I huff out a sigh because I really hate talking about that time in my life. I was not in a good headspace back then and did not make the best decisions.

“Sit down.” Grimm orders, so I take the seat next to him.

“You know my parents live in Carmel Mountain.” Dante nods when I mention the high-end community, while both Chaos and Grimm simply raise their eyebrows. “When I was fifteen, my parents went on vacation. I took a walk one night to visit a friend. A couple of cops spotted me and decided that since I was black in a mostly white upperclass neighborhood, that I was looking for trouble. They shot me with a taser before throwing me in jail. I guess I should consider myself lucky that they didn’t kill me. My luck held because Puma was playing the Lakers so he was in Los Angeles. I called him and he came to bail me out. The entire experience pissed me

off. Angry at the injustice, I decided that if I was going to be treated like a criminal...”

“You’d become one.” Dante finishes and I nod.

“A child’s reaction.” I admit.

“So you joined the Spades?” Grimm asks.

“I did. Most gangs have an initiation, some are violent, but Deion only resorts to violence as a last resort. Their initiation is more mercurial. I was told to break into a house and steal something valuable. I cheated. Puma used to have an apartment near my parents’ house where he’d stay when he came to visit. I had a key to his place. So, I took one of his practice balls, signed it, and used one of his display cases to make it look like a signed game ball. A collectible.”

“And they bought it?” Dante asks.

“Part of the initiation is that you have to make a recording of the theft. After setting everything up, I recorded my breaking in and taking the ball.” I explain. “I handed the recording and the ball over and I was in. He told me I was in the club for good. That if I ever turned my back on the club, the recording would make its way to the cops.”

“But you left?” Dante presses. “Why?”

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“I’d been with them for about three years when they had me oversee an initiation for a new recruit. I think Deion always suspected that I cheated on my initiation, so he changed the rules. Instead of a recruit planning and executing the theft on their own, he would have a member stay outside the target location. When the recruit came out, they were to hand the item and the recording over.” I take a deep breath, because this next part guts me every time I let myself remember. “The kid made it inside without a problem, while I waited by my car across the street. Then something went wrong. I heard gunshots. The front door flew open, and the kid came stumbling out. He passed under a light and I could see blood on his shirt. He stumbled onto the road and tripped. The homeowner ran outside waving his gun just as I reached the kid. I shot at the asshole which had him running back into his house. I grabbed the kid and took him to the hospital.”

“I’m surprised they didn’t arrest you.” Chaos muses.

“I wasn’t wearing gang colors. I drove an expensive car and wore flash clothes just in case something went wrong. Plausible deniability. I convinced the security guard at the hospital that I found the kid in the street after someone attacked him. They told me to wait for the cops, but I booked it.” I explain. “Watching the kid bleed out changed me. Deion didn’t care about the kid, hell he doesn’t care about anyone but himself. I realized I was wasting my life by tying myself to them. I got back in my car and drove straight to Puma in Vegas.”

Dante nods. “That was almost two years ago. Why do you think Deion is doing this now? And what does he want?”

I shrug. “No idea.”

“Did he contact you after you left?” Grimm asks.

“He called, and I told him that I wasn’t coming back. That I was done with the gang.” I tell them. “He threatened to send the video to the cops. I told him to go ahead. He was angry, but he just hung up. I haven’t heard from him since.”

“Nothing since then?” Chaos asks.

“No.”

“Call him.” Dante orders.

I leave the phone on speaker so they can hear both ends of the conversation. He’s somewhat out of breath when he answers. “Randall, nice of you to call.” Deion says. “I was just getting to know your girl. She’s a feisty one. Surprised you like the type. Figured you preferred your women weak, like you.”

“You better not have touched her.” I growl.

“I haven’t. Yet.” Deion says. “You want her safe, you come here, alone. You come and I let her go. You know where to find me.”

“I want to talk to her.” I say, glancing at Dante, who’s typing on his phone.

I can finally breathe when I hear Ashlyn speak. Her voice is strong, but I can hear the fear. Her concern for the other women makes me proud. Too soon she’s gone and I’m back to listening to Deion tell me where to meet him, as well as the terms, including another threat against Ashlyn.

Hanging up the phone, I watch Dante finish texting. “I don’t think I should go alone. I should at least take Flame with me to collect Ashlyn.”

Dante stares at me for a long minute before shaking his head. “Do you really think we’re letting you face this asshole alone?”

I don’t want to question Dante, but this is Ashlyn’s life we were talking about. And he doesn’t know Deion like I do. He’d kill her just to spite me. “If he thinks we’re there to attack him, he’ll kill her.”

Dante snorts. “No, he won’t. We’ll make sure of it. I have a plan. I’ve called Church. Let’s go.”

CHAPTER FOUR: ASHLYN

When we step outside, I see only two bikes. My heart races. I was counting on the whole club coming. Why only the two of them? I recognize both immediately. One is Reaper and the other is my brother, Flame. Deion yanks me forward when I stop walking. I can’t believe it’s only them. What is Reaper thinking?

“I told you to come alone.” Deion yells at Reaper, letting me go only to have Trask grab my other arm to keep me close.

“Well, then that makes you a bigger idiot than I remember.” Reaper responds, moving closer with Flame next to him. “Flame’s here to get his sister.”

“Flame?” Trask scoffs, pulling me against him. He isn’t very tall, so my shoulder bumps into his chest. I can feel his piercings digging into me. Ick. “Is that because you’re into guys?”

Both Reaper and Flame shift their eyes from me to Trask and then back to me.

“He got his road name because he carried their VP out of a burning building.” I explain. “He’s a hero.” I put the emphasis on the word ‘he’. Trask catches on to my

slight, grasping my arm tighter. Reaper and Flame must both have seen the pain flash across my face, because they both take a step forward and add in a growl.

“Get your fucking hands off of her.” Flame says, pulling out his gun. “Or I’ll put one right between your eyes.”

I hear a commotion behind me and I turn just enough to see that the guys we passed earlier file out for the show.

“You think you can take all of us?” Deion smirks. “Put those away, or my guys will end both of you and they’ll get the girl as a reward.”

I hear Flame growl again as I use their distraction to shift the screw in my hand so it’s pointing out from between my fingers. When the guys pulled their guns, Trask shifted his hold. He has his hand against my neck so my body fully covers his. Coward. But I’m not complaining because this position gives me the angle I need to make sure my attack does the most damage when the time is right. I’m hoping the guys planned something more than just showing up.

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“Funny enough, I don’t take orders from you any longer, Deion.” Reaper says with a sneer. “You always were a cocky asshole. You took on more than you can handle by going after my girl. Take a good look at Trask.”

Deion glances back at us before doing a double take. The look on his face would be comical if I wasn’t so angry and scared.

“What the fuck is that?” Deion explodes.

“Some of my brothers were in the service. One is a former Marine sniper. He can take out 14 men in twenty-three seconds. Release Ashlyn, or you’re all dead before the first body hits the pavement.” Reaper explains.

Hearing Reaper’s words has Trask loosening his grip on me. Seeing my opportunity, I reach up to drag the screw tip down his face. He lets out a loud bellow as he releases me completely slapping his hand over the gash. I scramble forward and don’t stop until I feel Reaper’s hands yank me behind him. “I got you baby.” He whispers as everyone yanks out their guns in a terrifying standoff. It’s silent for about two seconds before the roar of a dozen or more motorcycles breaks it. The Demon Dawgs come flying into the parking lot, their guns drawn. Each of the gang members is in the sights of at least two Demons.

“You’re outnumbered, outgunned and outmaneuvered.” Dante says over the idling engines. “Put away your weapons or we’ll end you.”

I move so I can see what’s happening. Deion is glaring at Reaper and me. He shifts his eyes over to Dante before returning his glare back to Reaper. Without a word, he

lowers his gun, setting the safety before it disappears behind his back. The rest of his men do the same. Trask uses his shirt to wipe the blood off his face. His eyes never leaving my face and I can almost feel the heat of his anger pulsing off of him.

“This isn’t over.” Deion calls out to Reaper.

“You want to talk to me, call me.” Reaper snaps back. “Don’t fuck with my woman or my club.”

“You owe me.” Deion persists. “There’s no walking away from the Spades.”

“I walked away eighteen months ago.” Reaper argues. “I’m not coming back. The Demons are my family, now.”

“You forget. I can send you to jail. I still have the video.”

I’m not sure what Deion is talking about, but instead of tensing up, Reaper laughs.

“The video of me borrowing a basketball from my uncle?” Reaper replies. “He won’t press charges. You really should do your homework, Deion. You’ve got nothing on me and I’ve got no more to say to you.”

“Why did you shoot Wylan?” Deion shouts back.

“What the fuck are you talking about? I didn’t shoot Wylan. I’m the one who drove him to the fucking hospital.”

“I have a witness who saw you shoot him.”

“Well, you’re witness is a fucking liar. I didn’t shoot him. The homeowner did. Hell, his getting shot was the reason I left the Spades. You got him killed.”

I watch the emotions flit across Deion's face. First confusion and then fury. He glances at me and I raise my eyebrow at him. I told him someone lied to him. I wonder if he's starting to believe it.

"Who shot him?" Deion asks, shifting his attention back to Reaper.

"I told you. The owner of the house he went to rob." Reaper says, pushing back toward his bike.

"I want the address." Deion demands, but Dante has had enough.

"Let's ride." Dante calls out.

Reaper helps me onto the back of his bike, offering me the helmet he keeps for me. I see Flame watching us and the look he shoots Reaper is one of anger and betrayal. I feel a twinge of guilt because I know Flame is angry at Reaper, and it's my fault. When Reaper and I finally admitted to ourselves and each other that we shared feelings, I was the one who wanted to wait to tell Flame. I was in the middle of finals and not ready to deal with Flame's temper. However, it looks like the secret is out. Time for damage control. In the meantime, I wrap my body around Reaper's back and breathe in his scent. My man came for me, just like I knew he would. I lay my chin on his shoulder and enjoy the view of the club riding in formation back to their clubhouse.

When Flame first prospected for the club, Mom and I worried about his decision. Neither of us had any knowledge or experience with motorcycle clubs. We knew Babe because he rented an apartment from us. On the surface, he seemed like a nice guy, but more than once I'd seen him return from an outing covered in blood. And his knuckles always looked like he'd been fighting. But he was always polite to us and on time with his rent payments.

Flame couldn't tell us what he did for the club, but it was hard not to notice the changes in him over the course of the year as he proved his worth to the club. He'd grown from a lost man into one with a purpose.

I'm proud of my brothers. I know Axel will follow Flame's example and advice. He'll serve his time as a prospect and eventually have a kutte like Flame and Reaper. He'll be a member of this family. I don't know if it was when Babe moved in or when Flame became a prospect, but one of those was the start of something. It's when our family grew to include the Demons. Or maybe the Demons grew to include us. I feel nothing but gratitude to the club for coming to rescue me. I never doubted for a minute that Reaper would come. Seeing him and Flame standing alone gave me pause. I thought they had come alone. I should have known better. Dante would never allow any member of his family to face danger alone.

When we pull in front of the clubhouse, I barely have time to release Reaper before I'm yanked off the bike and engulfed in Flame's arms.

"Are you alright?" He asks. "Did that bastard hurt you?"

I pat his back to calm him. "I'm fine. They mostly left me alone. Deion isn't much of a host, but he made sure Trask didn't touch me. I think if Deion wasn't there, Trask might have hurt me."

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“What the fuck?” Shouts Reaper, who I realize is right behind me. “I’ll fucking kill him!”

Shifting so I can see both of them. “I hurt him more than he hurt me.” I remind them.

They both stare at me, but before they can say anything, the clubhouse doors open and all the Old Ladies come pouring out. They push past Reaper and Flame to hug me.

“I am so sorry.” Kingsley says as she takes my hand to lead me back inside. “I can’t believe that bitch gave you to them.”

“What happened to you guys?” I ask. “Did you get drugged, too?”

“Church!” I hear Dante yell, and I watch the guys follow him down the hall where they meet. As Reaper files past, I lock eyes with him. I offer him a smile that he doesn’t return. I know that look. It’s his guilty look. I promise to make sure he knows that I don’t blame him for any of this.

“Let’s go to the infirmary so I can examine you.” Tally suggests.

I keep my eyes on Reaper until he disappears, before following Tally in the other direction.

CHAPTER FIVE: REAPER

Having Ashlyn’s breasts pressing against my back, her thighs on mine, and her core

heating my ass calms me. They are what's keeping me from turning around and killing Deion and his minions. I finally gain control of the chaos swirling around inside me as we get closer to the clubhouse. My girl is safe, and that's all that matters. I know Flame is still pissed at me. It may take time and some groveling to get him to forgive me. I'll do whatever I have to keep Ashlyn in my life.

I glance over at Flame and see him slide a look at Ashlyn before glaring at me. It may take a very long time to earn his forgiveness.

When we park, I feel Ashlyn pulled from my bike so I dismount to see Flame holding her tight. He asks her the questions I want to ask. She's my girl and I need to know she's ok. Hearing that the fucker Trask threatened her has me reeling. Even knowing she hurt him doesn't help. I want to pull her into my arms and kiss her until she can't remember the past several hours. But I watch the other Old Ladies take over.

I know Dante's going to call Church, but I wish he'd wait until tomorrow. All I want right now is to take Ashlyn to my room and pleasure her until she falls into a deep sleep. Then hold her all night to keep any nightmares at bay. But that's not to be. At least not yet. I see her turn back, searching for me. Her smile has my heart constricting. She's so fucking beautiful. And she could do so much better than me.

I take my seat between Flame and Ghost. I feel the anger coming off Flame in waves. All directed at me. I know we need to talk, but now isn't the time. Dante starts the meeting and we all turn our attention to him.

"This will be a short meeting. We have all the girls back Renee tried to sell. Maestro is calling his father to let him know we have Ashlyn. Renee's been handled and won't be a problem again."

"Were Kingsley and Izzy really the ones to question and kill Renee?" Carver asks.

“I killed her.” Grimm says. “But Kingsley and Izzy worked her until she gave us Deion’s name as Ashlyn’s buyer.”

“Are we going to have them question others in the future?” Smoke asks.

Dante nods. “Maybe. They did a good job.” He glances at Grimm. “Not sure about Kingsley, though. This was personal for her.”

Grimm shrugs. “I’ll talk to her. They handled it and frankly, I think women instinctively know how to break other women. None of us enjoys hurting women, even if they deserve it.”

“Puma’s SOA is a woman, and he says she’s terrifying when she has someone in The Pit. Not only can she break them down physically, but she wrecks havoc with their minds.” I tell them. “I watched her once, and they’re right. She gave me nightmares.”

“We’ll get a feel for how dealing with Renee affected both women before we decide.” Dante says.

“Do we know why this Deion Jones wanted Ashlyn?” Byte asks with a glance toward me. “We know Reaper knew him, but that’s about it.”

I give my brothers a condensed version of how I ended up with the Spades and why I eventually left. I also cover the incident that forced my hand.

“Why did he wait this long to come at you?” Byte asks.

I shrug. “I don’t know. Maybe he thought I’d come back to them if it didn’t work out with the Demons. He might have heard I patched in and wanted revenge because he knew I wasn’t coming back.”

Byte nods. “Good a reason as any. So what do we do now?” He addresses his question to Dante.

“Nothing.” Dante says. “We have enough on our plates with Gerard and his shit. We’re heading out to Chicago soon. Can’t afford to split our attention in multiple directions.”

“We could get some eyes on them.” Smoke chimes in. “I noticed they have some cameras around their hangout. I can take a run over there, see if I can hack into their network.”

Dante nods. “Ok, do that. I’m not saying we don’t watch them if they come into our territory, but I don’t want to start a war with them right now. Unless we have no choice. Once we handle Gerard’s human trafficking business, we can revisit the Spades.”

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“What are they into?” Grimm asks.

“Mostly drugs and weapons.” I tell them. “They used to deal in just prescription drugs, but I heard they’ve added harder stuff to the mix. Hooked up with some source out of Mexico. The weapons are a small part of their operation. Mostly handguns and they only move a couple hundred a month. But Deion had an idea that he started before I left.”

“What is it?” Dante asks.

“Deion got his start working in his uncle’s pawn shop. It’s why he had us stealing shit for our initiation. We’d steal something, and he’d have his uncle sell it.” I explain. “He got the idea of expanding into smash and grab. They’d pick an area and hit a couple of stores hard. Then they go to the other stores in the same area and ask for protection money. The store owners pay because they don’t want to be victims, especially since the cops haven’t been able to stop the attacks. Once they have the other stores paying protection, he’d move the operation to a new area.”

“And the store owners haven’t figured out that it’s the same people they’re paying protection to?” Babe asks in surprise.

I shrug. “I don’t know.”

“We’ll revisit this after we deal with Standish.” Dante promises. “We can’t let thugs like them hurt our people. See what kind of surveillance you can get on them.”

“We could have the prospects take turns watching them.” Grimm suggests. “Don’t

want them getting too close, but maybe they can gather info.”

“I’ll check into the smash and grabs.” Shield offers. “See if the cops have any leads. I’ll also check with the organized crime guys, see what they have on Deion and his gang.”

“I can reach out to Deion.” I offer. “Find out why he contacted me after all this time.”

“Hold off on that.” Dante says. “Let them think we’re done with them. It might make them sloppy. Anything else?” When no one speaks up, Dante slams down the gavel. “Dismissed.”

Everyone files out, leaving me and Flame alone. He wants to either talk or deck me. I face him with my hands at my side, ready for either. I’ll let him get one shot in if that’s what he needs, but that’s it.

“How long has this been going on? Why didn’t you tell me?” He asks.

I sigh as I lean against the table. “Ashlyn and I have been friends since you introduced us, but we’ve only been dating for a few weeks. I wanted to tell you right away, but Ashlyn knew you’d be unhappy, so she asked to wait until after finals. After she got her grades. She said she could handle your objections after that.”

“She thinks I’d object? Why?” Flame asks and I snort.

“Why do you think? You almost took my head off when you found out about us.” I remind him.

He shakes his head and turns his back to me. I wait while he runs his hands through his hair twice before turning back around. He’s struggling with what he wants to say, and I realize I know exactly what his concerns are.

“You have a problem with my dating your sister because I’m black.” I state for him.
“I get it.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Flame yells at me. “Do you honestly think I give a fuck that you’re black? I’m mad because you didn’t tell me. I’m mad because she’s my fucking sister and you never even asked me if you could date her?”

“What the fuck?” Comes a different voice. We both turn to see Ashlyn standing inside the door. She stomps forward to poke Flame in the chest with her finger. “I do not need your permission to date anyone. You are my brother, not my father. And even if our father was still around, it wouldn’t be any of his business either. I decide who I date, not you, got it?”

“Ashlyn...” I start, but then she whirls on me and lands a few pokes before continuing her tirade.

“As for you. Get over yourself. You’re black. So what? You think that matters to me or to my family? After all the time we’ve had you over for dinner and barbecues? Oh wait, maybe you think we just wanted a token black guy so that we could show our friends and neighbors that we aren’t racist assholes?” Ashlyn yells at me. “I’m attracted to you, Reaper. I don’t give a shit about the color of your skin and the sooner you get that through your thick head, the better. Now you two, kiss and makeup, or whatever the fuck brothers do when they realize how stupid they’re being. I’ll be in the common room.” She swirls around and glides out of the room like a queen, leaving Flame and I to stare after her.

Flame turns to me, socks my arm and laughs. “No backsies.” He says, laughing as I follow him out of the room.

I’m grinning because not only do I have my friend back, but my woman is fierce.

CHAPTER SIX: ASHLYN

Tally gives me a quick once over as Kingsley describes their adventure. My admiration for her increases with her retelling. She's more than a survivor, she's a hero. I can't imagine how terrifying it must have been for her to be the only one aware of their situation. To feel responsible for watching over her friends and protecting them against the unknown.

"What happened to Renee?" I ask. "Did she get away?"

The women all share a look before Axel chimes in. "Club business, Ashlyn. You can't ask questions like that."

I frown at my brother, but turn back to Kingsley, who speaks up for me. "She's part of the club."

"Reaper hasn't claimed her, yet." He protests.

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“Well, we have.” Tally proclaims. “She’s one of us and she needs to know.”

“The guys caught up to her and brought her back here. Izzy and I questioned her. It’s how we discovered Deion had you. Renee won’t be a problem for anyone again.” Kingsley states.

I nod with approval as Tally examines the bruising on my arm left by Trask. She gives me a cold pack to put on it. Axel, who followed us into the infirmary, is standing nearby as he clenches and unclenches his fists. I know he’s thinking about strangling Trask. I’m not against the idea, but I don’t want him going off without backup.

“He’ll get his soon enough.” I remind Axel. I wait until our eyes meet. He gives me a nod, and I know I’ve kept him from taking matters into his own hands. For now.

“Why did Deion take you?” Evie asks. She and Kingsley are sitting in two of the recliners while Caitlin sits cross-legged on a bed.

“Bait for Reaper.” I reply. “He was angry that Reaper left the gang.”

“Boys and their clubs. They hate when they lose members. But why wait this long?” Evie asks.

“I think it was more than just about Reaper leaving. He wanted information on some kid who got shot while trying to rob a house. Reaper told Deion that the homeowner shot him.”

“I wonder if anyone has ever wanted to leave the Demon Dawgs.” Caitlin muses. “I know they’ve kicked people out, like that bastard Nerd, but have you heard of anyone asking to leave?”

Tally shakes her head. “Just the Nomads and they didn’t ask to leave the club, only to stay Demons without a fixed home.”

“The Nomads?” I ask as Tally leads the way back out to the common room. The men are still missing, so I assume they’re still in Church.

“There are three of them, Eagle, Padre and Stone.” Tally explains. “They belonged to this chapter when Dante’s dad, Dale, was President. When Dale died and Dante took over, the three of them asked for Nomad status.”

“Why?” I ask as I take a seat next to Tally. “Didn’t they like Dante?” I see the girls share a look. “You don’t have to tell me if it’s a secret.”

“She’s going to find out.” Caitlin says. “She’s associated with Crossroads. She’s bound to meet Desdemona and hear her story.” Crossroads is the name Caitlin decided on for the non-profit she’s creating to help victims. A Crossroads Demon is a demon someone calls when they’re desperate. So the name implies a connection to the club. But a crossroads is also a place where someone can take a different path in life. I know Caitlin wants to give this chance to all who need an alternative path.

With a nod of agreement, Tally relays a story that has my mouth opening wider and wider with each plot twist. I know the name Desdemona Konstantin. Her reputation extends past the art world. She has immense talent, but I never knew about her painful history. The amount of betrayal and fear she must have endured to overcome years as a man’s sex slave. To discover that Dante’s father was the one who trapped her in that world is almost unbelievable.

“After Dante learned what his father was part of, he asked Chaos to help him clean house. I don’t have the details, but I imagine those members who took part in the skin trade reunited with Dale sooner than they planned. Grimm and the Nomads passed all the tests, but while Grimm stayed on as VP, the Nomads asked to leave but still remain part of the club. Too many memories in the clubhouse.” Evie chimes in.

“Is Desdemona the reason you’re starting Crossroads?” I ask Caitlin.

“She’s a big part of it. The man who bought her died leaving her trapped in his home, although he left instructions for his sons. Luckily, one of them found her and he helped her to establish herself as Desdemona.” Caitlin explains. “When I inherited the money from my grandmother, I realized I could use the money to help others. My plan is to have plenty of people around to help those who come to us. Desdemona has offered to speak to those who come from a situation similar to hers, as well as teach an art class or two. I’m hoping to find other people to help. Not only therapists, but people who can teach skills and offer their life stories. Like you and your mom.”

“Me?” I ask in surprise. “I don’t think my life offers much of a lesson.”

“Look at all you and your family have accomplished with a single mom?” Caitlin protests. “I’m expecting some who come to us will need help to end an abusive relationship. Some may have stayed because they have kids and they don’t want to leave their kids without a father. Also, aren’t you studying to be an accountant? It’s possible some may need help learning to manage their finances.”

I nod slowly as I consider her words. She’s right. I’ve always been proud of my mom and how she took care of us after our dad ditched us. She’s an excellent role model. The only memories I have of my father are fuzzy and loud. He was a shouter. Not having him around didn’t stop me from achieving my goals. “I have one more year to finish my degree.”

“That’s fine. I’m hoping to hire you to handle our finances while you’re still in school.” Caitlin continues.

“I’ll do whatever I can to help, but you might want someone with more experience.” I offer. “Although, I could see if one of my teachers will mentor me. She has her own bookkeeping business, and I think she’d be willing to help.”

“That’s perfect!” Caitlin says.

We spend time discussing the plans for the shelter. I find out that Carver and some of his men start work on the apartment complex in the morning. I know Caitlin has enough money to get things done fast, but in this case, I’m certain it is for Caitlin herself that these guys are busting their asses to help her achieve her goal.

I watch all the men file out of the room they call their Chapel. The room where they meet for Church. Like a choreographed move, Dante, Grimm, Chaos and Scar all head straight for their women. They pull them up out of their chairs so they can claim their seats before pulling their women onto their laps. The thought of Reaper doing the same to me has me ready to sign up as an Old Lady. I know Reaper has his doubts about us. Doubts about him being good enough for me, but Reaper is the best man I know. I’ll do whatever I have to make him see that he’s the only one for me.

I expect him to appear as my thoughts focus on him, but he doesn’t come out. Neither does Flame. As I imagine the worst, I feel my stomach tighten. Excusing myself, I make my way to the room. Rather than hearing flesh hitting flesh, I hear voices. Which is a good sign. Knowing they’re discussing my relationship with Reaper, I eavesdrop.

I wince when I hear Reaper defend my decision for wanting to wait until I was done with finals before telling Flame. He did as I asked, even though he didn’t agree with me. I feel proud that he took my side, but a little guilty because I know it’s now

causing a rift between them. But when Reaper spouts off nonsense about me finding someone better than him, aka someone without his perceived baggage, and Flame bitches about not being consulted, I've had it with both of them.

“What the fuck?” I barge into the room and give both of them a piece of my mind. This isn't the 1800s. I can't remember everything I say to them, but I can tell by the stunned looks on their faces that I got my point across. “Now you two, kiss and makeup, or whatever the fuck brothers do when they realize how stupid they're being. I'll be in the common room.” I turn my back on them and leave them to their petty bickering.

I barely make it down the hall when I feel two muscular arms wrap around me, pulling me flush to an extremely hard body. I can't stop the grin when Reaper's scent envelopes me. Damn, he smells good. A heady mixture of leather, soap and, for some odd reason, vanilla and sugar. I fit perfectly in his arms and I know that this right here is the only time I ever feel perfectly safe. He kisses my neck and I sigh. I go from relaxed to high alert when he whispers in my ear.

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“I think you need to get some sleep. Why don’t we go to my room so I can take care of you?” He whispers and I melt. He could have told me we were going out to rob a bank and I would have been fine with it, as long as I have him near me. So I nod. Then I’m flying until he has me settled in his arms. Without a word to anyone, he whisks me down the hall.

I’ve never been in Reaper’s room at the club, so I don’t know what to expect. It’s good I have low expectations, because there isn’t much to it. He has a bed, matching nightstands and a dresser. It isn’t much bigger than the place Deion held me, but I’d prefer being locked up here than there. But then that has more to do with the man holding me.

“You can put me down.” I tell him. He glances down at me, shifting so he can kiss me while still holding me.

“I kind of like holding you, baby.” Reaper says with a grin. “How about a shower? Would you like that?”

“That would be heaven.” I admit. I want to erase the memory of Trask and Deion’s hands on me.

He leads me into his bathroom and starts the shower. “I’ll go grab something for you to wear for when you get out.” He says before leaving me alone. I’m a little sad that he doesn’t offer to join me in the shower, but at the same time, I’m grateful. I’ve never showered with a man before. Hell, I’ve never done anything naked with a man before. I want Reaper to be my first and my only, but I know I’m not ready. I want to remember our first time together and I don’t want it tied to the awful memories of

today.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REAPER

I grab one of my t-shirts for her to sleep in. Taking it into the bathroom, I allow myself a quick glance at the goddess in my shower. I've never seen Ashlyn naked. The most we've ever done is kiss, but I'm not complaining. Her kisses are like a fine liquor. I savor every one. But tonight I want to give her more. Hell, I want to take more. But I won't take everything, not tonight.

She wants to give me her virginity. I can't deny that I want that, too. I want to be her first, her last, her only, her forever. But today was too much of a shit day, so I'm not going there tonight. I want her first time to be special. Memorable. I don't want it tainted with terror. So tonight, I'll give her pleasure, show her what I will always give her.

I lay on the bed waiting for her. I imagine the water cascading over her skin and I wish I was in there following the trails with my tongue. But for now, just the thought of her is enough to have my cock grow hard. No matter how much I remind him, he won't be seeing any action tonight. I think he's in denial. Not that I blame him. The thought of burying myself in Ashlyn is a fantasy I've jacked off to often enough. It's going to be hard on both of us having her so close without taking advantage of her hot little body.

I hear the shower shut off, and it takes all my self-control to keep myself on the bed. I have to let her dress and maybe build up the courage to come out here. She may be nervous, so I need to let her move at her own pace. Even though I want nothing more than to charge in there, snatch the shirt out of her hand and carry her naked body to my bed.

When the door opens, I take in the sight of her. She's braided her damp hair, which

makes me want to pull it out and run my fingers through her damp locks. My shirt hangs on her tiny frame. I hold back a grin because really, she's swimming in it.

"What?" she asks and I realize I didn't hide my grin well enough.

"You're going to get lost in that shirt." I tell her.

She laughs as she pulls the material away from her body. "It is a little big." She wraps her arms around herself as she looks at me. "But I like it. It smells like you."

I frown. "What do I smell like?"

"You smell like vanilla and sugar. Like chocolate chip cookies." She says with a giggle. "My favorite."

I open my arms as she runs and jumps on the bed. Pulling her close, she puts her head on my shoulder as she wraps her arms around me.

"Thanks for coming to save me today." She says, placing a kiss against my neck.

"Was there any doubt?" I ask.

She shakes her head hard. "None. I knew you'd come. It was the only thing keeping me from falling apart."

I kiss the top of her head. "I'm sorry you got dragged into it..." I start, but she shifts up so she can look down on me, placing her finger over my lips.

"Not. Your. Fault." She says. "You made the right decision leaving them and joining the Demons."

I nod, because she's right. I'm not sorry about leaving the gang and joining Dante's club. It was the best decision for me. I'm still sorry that they tried to turn her into a weapon against me. I kiss her finger as I give her a quick nod, so she knows I won't argue about it any longer.

I flip us so her back is on the mattress and I'm leaning over her. I lower my mouth to her neck and breathe in her scent. She says I smell like chocolate chip cookies. She smells like summer. Like raspberries warmed by the sun. I kiss the spot behind the ear that she loves before moving across her cheek to find her mouth. When I do, I plunder it. I sweep my tongue around her mouth before letting our tongues dual. I could spend hours kissing Ashlyn, but tonight I have other plans.

Sliding my hands under her shirt, I lift it until I reveal her luscious breasts. I kiss her sternum before shifting my attention to her right breast. Nibbling her skin before zeroing in on her pretty dusty rose nipple. She gasps when I suck it into my mouth and follows this with a moan when I use my teeth to give her a snap of pain.

"Reaper. Randall. Baby." She moans out and the sound of my name on her lips is intoxicating.

"Right here, baby doll. Just relax. I'm going to make you feel good." I tell her as I move to lavish her other breast. As I kiss down her belly, Ashlyn's body shudders with each touch. I can smell her sex and nothing has ever smelled so delicious. I slide down until my shoulders rest between her legs. When I slip my hands under her ass, she stiffens.

"Randall, I don't think I'm ready..." she starts, but I shush her.

"I only want to taste you. Want to give you pleasure. Besides, it will help you sleep."

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She relaxes and gives me a giggle, which has me grinning in return. I love how much she trusts me. “You’re giving me a sleeping pill?” She asks.

“Better than any pill.” I promise her before diving in.

“Damn...” she moans. I glance up to see her pinching her nipples and now it’s my turn to moan. Fuck, there is nothing sexier than a woman responding to her body’s needs.

I lick her clean, but she keeps creaming. My baby is responsive, which will help when I’m ready to give her my cock. I’m not small, so I know when I take her, I’ll have to make sure she’s drenched. It doesn’t look like that’ll be an issue. Which is good, because I never want to do anything to hurt her.

“Randall, baby, I need... I need...” Ashlyn moans as she grinds her pussy into my face.

“What do you need, baby? A little of this?” I ask as I suck her clit into my mouth. “Or maybe this?” I continue as I plunge my tongue past her pussy lips. When I replace my tongue with two of my fingers, her hips jerk hard as she lets out a scream.

“That, yes, baby, I need that.” She growls out as I add another finger and use my thumb to press on her clit. I stare up at her face, which is pink with exertion and glowing with sweat. My god, she’s beautiful. I pump my fingers in and out of her passage, scissoring them to stretch her. She rewards me with moans and whimpers that I want to hear for the rest of my life. I feel the walls of her pussy flutter, so I know she’s close. I crook my finger to brush against that spongy spot which

detonates her orgasm like an explosion.

“Randall!” she screams as she chases her orgasm with another.

I’m surprised she manages back-to-back releases, but my girl dealt with too much stress today. Her body needs the release.

As I clean her up, she is almost asleep. She’s mumbling something that I can’t quite hear, but it makes me grin. She’s so fucking adorable. I can’t believe she’s mine. I gently pull her shirt back down to cover her nakedness, even though I’d prefer her naked in my bed. One day, soon. She’ll be mine in every way and we’ll sleep skin against skin.

I lift her so I can pull the covers down and tuck her in. Gathering her in my arms, I take another deep breath. I smell her raspberry scent, but it’s mixed with the scent of her arousal. Fuck me, her scent calls to the beast in me. I want to devour her until there’s nothing left.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ASHLYN

My day starts in the best way possible, waking up in Reaper’s arms. I want a lifetime of this. Cocooned in his heat and his scent. I feel his dick pressing against my ass, so I wiggle said ass against him. The moan that comes out of him makes me giggle.

“You’re playing with fire, baby girl.” He growls into my ear as he pulls me close.

I wiggle my body until he loosens his hold so I can shift around and face him.

“How did you sleep?” He asks as he tucks a strand of hair behind my ear. “Any nightmares?”

I shake my head. “I slept fine. No nightmares. I think I should take that sleeping pill every night.”

He barks out a laugh before attacking my neck. He has me giggling as he hits every ticklish spot. “Stop.” I squeal breathlessly, pushing at him until he relents.

“We’ll get there.” Reaper promises. “I want you in my bed every night. But Flame needs some time to get his head around us.”

I nod because I know we need to give my brother some time. Even though I want to smack him upside the head. “He’s cock blocking me.” I sniff, causing Reaper to laugh again.

“That’s not exactly what that saying means.” He corrects me. “But don’t worry. I promise we’ll be together soon.”

My stomach growls, which has him moving. “Let’s get you fed and back home. Have you talked to your mom?”

“Axel called her and told her I was alright. He didn’t give her all the details, so that’s something I need to do today. She’s going to be angry about not realizing what Renee was up to.”

“The bitch hid her actions well. She’s gone now, so you won’t have to worry about her.”

I nod as I pull on my clothes. They’re the ones I wore yesterday and as soon as I get home, they’re going in the garbage.

In the common room, Reaper takes me to an empty table and leaves me with a promise of breakfast. He passes Scar, who is coming out of the kitchen with two

plates full of food. He puts them down on the table in front of Caitlin before picking her up and settling her on his lap. The two eat while talking to Dante, Tally, Evie, Chaos, Grimm and Kingsley. All the men have their women on their laps as they eat. I feel a pang of jealousy. I want that with Reaper. We may be there soon as long as Flame doesn't cause trouble and Reaper doesn't convince himself that he's not good enough for me. There is no one better than Reaper.

Speaking of Flame, he comes out of the kitchen with Reaper. Reaper's carrying two plates while Flame carries just one. They both sit down with me. Reaper puts my plate in front of me. Eggs, bacon, pancakes and hash browns fill both plates. Yum.

"Thanks, honey." I say to Reaper. Flame winces, so I send him a scowl. "Who cooks for you guys?"

"It used to be Kingsley, but now Jenna and Tamara take turns cooking, manning the bar and keeping the clubhouse running." Flame explains.

"Kingsley did all that by herself?" I ask, glancing at the woman.

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“She’s a force.” Reaper says. “Which is why Caitlin wants her to help to establish and manage Crossroads.”

“Caitlin asked me to help, too.” I tell them. “She wants me to handle the bookkeeping and maybe teach the residents how to make a budget and manage their money.”

“That’s great, honey.” Reaper says, reaching over to squeeze my hand, causing Flame to growl.

“Knock it off.” I snap at Flame. “You need to grow up and accept that I’m with Reaper.”

“Yeah, man. What are you thinking?” Axel says as he joins us. “Would you rather she hook up with some asshole we don’t know or with someone you know would give his life for her?”

Flame frowns at our brother before looking at me and then at Reaper. “It’s just weird. In my mind, she’s six with pigtails and ice cream all over her face.”

I roll my eyes as Reaper and Axel laugh.

“I’m twenty.” I remind him, and he nods.

“I know. Look, I’m trying, alright?” Flame says, moving his food around with his fork. “But Axel’s right. I would rather know you’re with someone who would never hurt you. I think if you hooked up with anyone else, I’d always be worried that he isn’t treating you right. That he isn’t good enough for you.”

“You think I’m good enough for her?” Reaper asks. His eyes are on his plate, and I can sense his vulnerability. I want so much to wrap my arms around him and assure him he is more than good enough for me, but I know he’d take it more to heart if he heard it from Flame. Glancing at Flame, I want to plead with him to answer in the affirmative. I don’t have to. He does it all on his own.

“Of course you are. You’re my best friend. If I have to let go of her being my kid sister and watch her move on with a guy, you’re the only one I want for her.”

I nod with approval and dig into my breakfast, happy to see one problem solved. I hated knowing I was causing problems between Flame and Reaper, but I’ll be damned if I let my brother ruin what Reaper and I are building.

“What are you up to today?” Reaper asks me.

“I need to go home and check in with my mom.” I tell him. “But I’ll need a ride there.”

“I’m taking you.” Axel says. “The guys are starting on the demo today and I’m helping.”

“Ok. What are you two up to today?” I ask Flame and Reaper.

“Working at Styx.” Flame says. Styx is the towing and storage business they bought a few months ago. Flame, Ghost and Reaper manage the place and have been since they were prospects. I know Reaper wants to do something else. But, he just hasn’t figured out what that is yet.

I study Flame and realize that he’s never expressed an interest in doing anything other than work ing at Styx. Which surprises me. Before he patched in, the club called him Jack because he was a Jack of All Trades. When mom got the job as the manager for

the apartment complex, Flame was the one who kept everything working. He learned how to do plumbing, electricity and construction. You name it, he could do it. He loved learning new things and facing new challenges. But since he patched in, he hasn't shown an interest in learning or doing anything new.

I open my mouth to ask him about this change in him, but Reaper leans over to kiss me. "I'll see you later, ok?" He asks me and I nod. "Be good and don't get into any trouble. No lingerie parties." He smirks at me as I roll my eyes.

"I doubt I'll be going to any of those for awhile." I remind him. "Have a good day, both of you."

I watch my man walk out of the clubhouse with my brother and sigh. Reaper has an amazing ass. I just want to bite it.

"Ok, look, I'm fine with you and Reaper dating, but please don't undress him while I'm sitting right here." Axel whines, causing me to laugh.

"Sorry. I can't help it if I'm happy." I tell him.

"I'm glad you're happy, but I don't need to know the details." Axel says, getting up and grabbing the plates from the table. "I'll take these to the kitchen and then take you home."

Axel drives me back to the apartment complex in one of the club's SUVs.

"How do you like being a prospect?" I ask him after we drive through the gates of the clubhouse.

"It's a challenge, but it's worth it." He tells me. "I don't think I've had a decent night's sleep since I joined. The guys are demanding."

“They don’t let you sleep?” I ask.

“It’s not like that. We get sleep, but one of us has to be available at all times. Last night, I slept in the common room in case anyone needed anything. It was Simon’s idea. Have someone out there and then the rest of us are more likely to get some sleep. Izzy’s up tonight, so I should get caught up.”

As Axel pulls into the parking lot, I nod. I glance around but don’t see any other vehicles except mom’s car. “I thought the guys were starting work today.”

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“They are. Carver said they’d be here around eight-thirty.” He parks next to mom’s car and we both get out.

When I step on the path that leads to our apartment, I notice a pile of clothes on another path. “What’s that?” I ask Axel, who’s frowning as he looks past me.

“Stay here.” He says and although I want to argue, there is something in his tone that makes me stay put.

I watch him slowly approach and when he stills with his hand reaching out. He looks at me. “Fuck, I think he’s dead.”

CHAPTER NINE: REAPER

As I ride to Styx with Flame next to me, I’m grateful that he admitted he was happy Ashlyn chose me. While I still think she could do better than a former gang member, I know I’ll do everything I can to make her happy. Being part of the Demons is the best way I know of to make that happen.

I unlock the gate to let us in. When the original owner, Jeff Regis, found himself in debt to the Demon Dawgs with no way to pay, he signed over the business so he could move to Northern California and go into business with his son. Feral ran the place with a plan of having Ghost and me co-run it once we patched in. Flame, Ghost and I take turns so that there are at least two of us on site at all times. Ghost is manning one of the tow trucks because we’re down a man. We currently have only six employees. Four men drive the tow trucks while the other two work security.

While Flame hands out the assignments to the drivers, I take a tour of the various storage units. I'm sure the original owner had some sort of plan in mind when he built this place, but it's like a maze. He brought in dozens of shipping containers that he converted into single or multiple storage units. But he also built a structure that offers temperature controlled units. I walk through the maze, checking locks and making sure everything is secure. We have security cameras that the club's security firm monitors, but I like seeing for myself that all is well.

When we took over the facility from the original owner, we discovered one container had been used to hold human trafficking victims. Kingsley had been one of those victims. Every time I pass by the unit, I feel sick.

With my mind on the past, I don't notice the dead body until I'm almost on top of it. He's dressed in black cargo pants and a black henley. I see white skin under the black paint on his face. He looks like a guy dressed up to play military maneuvers or play paint ball. Well, except for the blood pooling under his torso. I glance around at the cameras, wondering if anyone is watching. Pulling out my phone, I call Smoke.

"Reaper." Smoke answers.

"You got eyes on Styx?" I ask him.

"Let me check." I hear him typing on his keyboard before he lets out a curse. "Who the fuck is that? Is he dead?"

"Yeah, he's dead and I don't know who is or how he got here." I reply. "What do we do?" Hearing someone pounding on metal and muffled shouting, I move toward the sound. "Hang on." I'm pretty sure the sounds are coming from inside. When I open the door, I find our night security, Mark. He's pale, with dried blood on his cheek and chin. "What the hell happened to you?"

“Is that Mark?” I hear Smoke ask over the phone.

Holding the phone in my left hand, I help Mark step outside. “Yeah, it’s Mark. Looks like someone clobbered him.”

“Yeah. Some asshole got me from behind. Heard a commotion and came to check it out. Someone got the drop on me and knocked me out.” Mark says. “Holy shit, is that a body?” He asks, gawking at the corpse.

“I’ve called 911.” Smoke says. “I called Flame and Dante. Both should be on their way to you.”

“Thanks.” I tell Smoke before ending the call. I lead Mark away from the dead body and help him sit down with his back to the scene. “You doing alright?”

“Just have a splitting headache. I’m sorry, man, I don’t know how they got in or how they got the drop on me.”

“You saw who hit you?” I ask him, wondering how he knew there was more than one person here if they caught him off-guard.

“There were at least two, but I think there must have been three. I heard sounds, like someone fiddling with a padlock, which drew my attention. I thought maybe a customer was trying to get into their unit. As I got closer, I heard voices. It sounded like they were arguing. Someone hit me before I could turn the corner. I woke up when I heard you talking.”

I nod as I consider his story. It’s plausible, but I want to see what the cameras caught before I take his word for it. Mark has been guarding Styx ever since we took it over, and I trust him. But what’s the saying? Trust but verify.

Flame joins me when the cops and the ambulance show up. He makes sure Mark gets taken care of while the cops drill me about the dead body.

“What time did you get here?” Officer Jones asks me as his partner puts up the crime scene tape.

“We got here at eight.” I tell him. “That’s when we normally open.”

“Why were you back here?” He continues.

“I always make a tour of the facility after we open. Just to make sure everything is in order.” I explain.

“And you found the security guard locked inside a container?”

I point at the container in question. “That one, yeah.” I then point at the cameras mounted around the space. “We have cameras. I contacted our security firm and they’re getting the feed for you guys.”

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He looks me up and down before glancing at the cameras. “Who runs your security?”

“Diablo Security.”

“Doesn’t your club own them?”

I give him a quick nod as an answer.

“So who’s to say you didn’t call your buddies to have them alter the feed?” Officer Jones demands.

“Because he isn’t stupid, and he has nothing to hide.” Says Dante, as he joins us. He gives Officer Jones a disgusted look before locking eyes with me. “None of my men had anything to do with this guy’s death. Just like we have nothing to do with the body found on our other property across town.”

I frown at him because I hadn’t heard of another dead body.

“Where is that?” Jones asks.

“Apartment complex, one of our Old Ladies recently bought, used to be Oak Park Apartments.” Dante says, maintaining eye contact with me. “Ashlyn and Axel found the body.”

“Fuck.” I grit out. “Are we done?” I ask Officer Jones. I need to go find my woman and make sure she’s ok.

“We need the feed...” He starts, but Dante waves him off.

“I talked to Smoke. He’s already sending over a copy, but if you want to see the original, just head over to Diablo Security. Smoke said he’d meet you there.” Dante tells him as he walks with me to my bike. I search around for Flame, but I don’t see him. Dante must know who I’m looking for, because he answers my unspoken question. “Flame’s locking up so you can drive over together.”

“Do we know who’s dead?” I ask Dante, and he nods slowly.

“Ashlyn recognized him from when the Spades held her. She’s not positive, but she’s pretty certain about it.” Dante pulls out his phone and shows me an image of a man dressed all in black lying in a heap. His face is pale, except for the bruising. I recognize him. “Yeah. I recognize him. He’s one of Deion’s guys. I saw him there last night.”

“Go take care of Ashlyn. Smoke is looking through the footage from here. We don’t have cameras around Crossroads yet, which we’ll resolve today. Byte and Maestro are checking traffic cams and other footage to see if they can find anything we can use. Shield is reaching out to whoever is in charge of each investigation.” Dante tells me.

“You think they’re linked?” Flame asks as he joins us.

Dante nods. “I think the odds of two guys dressed in black winding up dead on two of our properties are too high to consider anything else. But we need more information, specifically about who this guy was. You didn’t recognize him?”

I shake my head. “I’ve never seen him before.”

“Think he might be a customer?” Flame asks.

“Maybe. I know we haven’t met everyone who rents from us. Maybe he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. But he was wearing face black so whatever he was doing wasn’t on the up and up.”

“Ok, go take care of Ashlyn. Carver and his guys are there, as is Axel, so she’s not alone. We’re having Church later to discuss the trip to Chicago. Maybe we’ll have more info by then.” Dante says as he waves us off. He walks over to join Chaos, who is watching the action from a distance.

Flame and I race over to Crossroads to find a scene similar to the one we just left. I see a sea of leather and make my way over with Flame at my heels. I can’t breathe until I see the familiar golden brown hair of my girl. When she sees me, her eyes fill with tears as she races over. I catch her when she jumps into my arms and wraps her legs around me. I place one arm under her ass to hold her in place while I pet her hair with my other hand to soothe her.

CHAPTER TEN: ASHLYN

Carver and his crew arrive a few minutes after we discover the body. When he calls Smoke, he learns that this isn’t the only dead body the Demons have found today. Reaper found one at Styx. Per Smoke’s instructions, Carver calls the cops to let them deal with this one, too.

“What the hell is going on?” Carver asks Smoke after he relays what he learned to the rest of us.

I split my attention between Carver and the body at my feet. Something compels me to move until I can see his face and when I do, I suck in a breath.

“What is it?” Axel asks me as he joins me in studying the man.

He's wearing baggy black jeans and an LA Kings Jersey. His black baseball cap fell off. This lets me see his face clearly, and it is one I recognize.

"I think he was with Deion yesterday." I tell Axel. "Before Deion brought me outside their hangout to meet with Reaper, he led me through a common room where a bunch of his guys were hanging out. I think this guy was near the door."

"Are you certain?" Carver asks, who is still on the phone but has his attention fixed on me.

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“No, but I’m pretty sure.” I tell him.

Carver nods and relays the information. I assume he’s still talking with Smoke. He looks back at me. “When the cops get here, don’t let on that you recognize him. We don’t want them knowing about our interaction with the Spades. Ok?”

I nod before shifting my attention to movement near our apartment. I see my mom, who has come out to see what we’re all doing. “Mom.” I whisper to Axel, who immediately goes to her side. I follow him. Soon, all three of us are standing together in a group hug. That is how Carver finds us a few minutes later.

“Hey, Mrs. B.” Carver greets her. “Sorry about this. The cops are on their way over.”

“You said there was another body?” I ask him and he nods.

“Reaper found it when he and Flame opened up. Reaper typically does a quick walkthrough of the storage areas just to make sure there have been no break-ins. We have security cameras and they’re monitored, but it’s not a foolproof system. Obviously.” Carver explains.

“Do they know who it is?” Axel asks.

“Not a clue.” Carver admits.

“It can’t be a coincidence.” Mom says, rubbing her hand on my back. “Can it?”

Carver shrugs. “We don’t know. This guy here is young, black, and possibly part of a

gang. The guy they found at Styx is white, older, and according to Smoke, looks more like an accountant than a gang member.”

“Maybe he’s just part of a different gang.” I suggest.

We glance over to the parking lot as two marked police cars pull into the lot. Four cops pile out and head in our direction.

“Here we go.” Says Carver. “Remember, keep it simple. Don’t volunteer information and don’t let on that you recognize him.”

We answer questions for what feels like hours. I keep my answers simple, as Carver suggested.

“You sure you don’t know the victim?” Officer Wagstaff asks again.

“No, I’ve never met him.” I respond. It isn’t a lie. I may have seen him in the room, but Deion didn’t introduce anyone but Trask. For which I’m immensely grateful. “Do you know who he is?” I ask because I can’t seem to help myself.

“We recognize him. He’s a member of a local gang.”

I shudder at the memory of the gang, but I think he believes I’m just scared of gangs. He wouldn’t be wrong in that assumption. “Why would he be here?” I ask.

“You’ve had no trouble with gangs before?” He asks. My mom comes to join us and puts her arm around my waist.

“No, never.” She responds for me. She knows some of what happened to me the previous evening, enough that she understands I was more scared than hurt.

He glances at Carver's member kutte and the prospect kutte Axel is wearing.

"The Demon Dawgs are not a gang." I tell him with some heat. "They're a motorcycle club and they own this property."

Officer Wagstaff glances at me and shakes his head. "I didn't say they were a gang. I was just wondering if they're the reason someone dumped a body here."

"Oh. Sorry." I mumble, and he gives me a grin.

"Nothing to be sorry about. Some guys on the force would insist they were just as bad as any gang. I don't. I think they're the good guys. But I have inside information. My daughter is a nurse who works in the ER with Dr. Chambers."

His words make me feel better, but I still don't trust him enough to tell him I recognize the victim.

By the time Officer Wagstaff leaves me, several of the Demon Dawgs have arrived. Scar is standing near Carver. Grimm and Babe next to them. Scar looks worried and I wonder if he thinks someone meant this as a warning for Caitlin.

"I don't think this has anything to do with Crossroads." I assure him. "Maybe whoever dumped the body here simply knew the place was empty. Less likely to get caught."

Scar studies me and then slowly nods. "Maybe."

The sound of motorcycles draws my attention back to the parking lot. I let out a whimper when I see Reaper dismount from his bike and remove his helmet. When his eyes latch on to mine, I can't control myself. I take a running start before jumping into his arms. He wraps his arms around me and pets my hair to soothe me. Right

here is the only place I feel safe. I can never understand why Reaper ever doubts whether he's good enough for me. Because he is my everything and the only person I can never live without. I open my eyes to see Flame behind us, shaking his head. This causes me to smile.

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“You ok, baby?” Reaper asks as he carries me back to the others.

“Better now that you’re here.” I tell him honestly. Hearing that he found a body and was talking to the cops was more nerve-wracking than finding a body of my own. I know not all cops are racist assholes, but there are enough of them that the odds are too good he’d run into one who was. Someone who would immediately see him as the likely suspect. “Carver said you found a body, too.”

Reaper slides me down his body until I’m standing in front of him. I see him cast Carver a dirty look, so I draw his attention back to me. “We’re in this together, hotshot.”

He grins at me. “Hotshot?” I shrug, happy that I distracted him. He gives me a soft kiss before turning me around so my back is against his front, with his muscular arms encircling my waist.

“Any idea who he is?” Flame asks. We’re far enough away from the crime scene that neither of them can see the body and the cops can’t hear our conversation.

“Ashlyn thinks it might be one of Deion’s guys.” Carver says, glancing around to make sure no stray cops linger nearby.

Reaper stiffens behind me, so I look up at him. “I don’t know for certain, but he reminds me of a guy I saw last night. I didn’t meet him or talk to him, so I could be wrong.”

Reaper kisses my neck, then whispers he’ll be right back before releasing me. I see

him walk over to Officer Wagstaff with Flame. They're standing only a few feet away from the body. The coroner is next to the body doing his examination.

"Do you think this has to do with Renee?" Mom asks me when she joins me. I hadn't considered that. But I should have. She's the one who delivered me to them.

"Huh, maybe. I wonder how she knew them." Scar turns to look at me when I tap his arm. "Do you think they were in the skin trade with Renee?"

Scar shrugs. "I don't know. Reaper said they weren't when he was running with them, but he's been away from them for almost eighteen months. Things change."

I hear another vehicle arrive and turn to see a delivery van enter the parking lot. The sign on the van is for a local florist. I frown as a young guy gets out of the van and makes his way to the back. A few minutes later, he's walking toward our apartment carrying a vase, his eyes bouncing around the surrounding activity. Just as he turns down the path to our apartment door, my mom waylays him. She talks to him for a few minutes before he hands the bouquet to her. I can tell from here that they're all red roses. At least a dozen of them.

Mom searches in the flowers until she pulls out the card. She glances over at me with a frown. I feel a trickle of fear wash over me, even though I don't know why. I make my way over to her just as she goes inside with the flowers. By the time I reach the door to our apartment, it opens, and she comes outside. She hands me the card and I take it with shaking fingers. I can see my name written on the front. I turn to glance at Reaper, who is still talking to Officer Wagstaff and Flame.

Somehow, I know the flowers aren't from him. Not that he can't afford them, but predictable dating rules aren't ones he follows. I open the card and brace myself. I think I'm expecting them to be from Deion. But the reality is much worse.

“To my sweet, Ashlyn. You were supposed to come to me. I took care of one who thought he could touch you. Consider it a gift. Soon you’ll be mine.”

I glance up to lock eyes with Reaper. He must see the fear on my face because he’s in front of me before I realize he moved.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: REAPER

I see the fear on Ashlyn’s face and it guts me. I’ve already taken the opportunity to study the body and although I recognize him from the previous night, I’ve never met him. He must have joined the Spades after I left.

I rush over to Ashlyn to pull her close to me. I feel her body trembling as I glance at her mother for some sign of what’s frightened her. She takes the small card out of Ashlyn’s hand and gives it to me. When I read it I feel my blood run cold at the implication. Some asshole thinks he’s getting his hands on my woman? Not fucking likely.

“It came with a bouquet of red roses.” Cecilia explains, gesturing toward their apartment. “I’ll get rid of them.” She says, leaving me with Ashlyn.

I pocket the card and make a note to contact Byte. Whoever sent the flowers had to leave some sort of trail and if anyone can find it, it’s Byte. In the meantime, I need to make sure my girl feels safe. But I also need to make sure the police don’t figure out we know more than we’re saying. I wait for Cecilia to give me the all-clear before guiding Ashlyn inside. She takes a seat at the table while Cecilia makes her a cup of tea.

“I need to call Byte and have him find whoever sent this.” I tell them both. “He won’t touch you, baby, I promise. He won’t get past me or the guys.”

“I know.” She tells me and I feel proud of her confidence. “I’m not worried about that. Do you think he’s responsible for that man’s death?”

I shrug. “Maybe, but we may never know for certain. Let me get Byte checking into the delivery. Ok?” She nods as I pull out my cell phone.

“Reaper.” Byte answers after the first ring.

I explain about the note and ask him to check the florist’s records to see if he can identify who placed the order.

I hear Byte typing away and expect him to end the call, but he doesn’t.

“Fuck.”

“What?”

“Whoever runs this florist shop doesn’t keep accurate records. They have the order but no name. Doesn’t even show the type of payment. The only thing listed is Ashlyn’s name and address.”

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I frown. “That’s odd, isn’t it? Are the other orders that vague on the details?”

“Hmm. Good question. Let me check.” I hear more clicking before he speaks again. “No, I’ve checked half a dozen orders and they all have the information you would expect. Buyer’s name, payment method, etc. I wonder why this one is different?”

“Because whoever purchased the flowers didn’t want us to find out their identity. Maybe they bribed the person who took the order.”

“Maybe. I’ll keep digging. See if I can access their security cameras.” Byte says before ending the call.

I sit at the table with Ashlyn and Cecilia. “Byte’s checking on who sent the flowers.” I tell them, taking Ashlyn’s hand in mine. It’s warm from the mug. “Where’s Alexie?”

“She’s staying with a friend.” Cecilia tells me. “Their family went to Lake Tahoe for a few days, and they offered to take her with them.”

I frown at the thought of Ashlyn’s fourteen-year-old sister running wild in Tahoe, but Cecilia just shakes her head at me.

“She’s fine. The family has a home on the south side of the lake and the girls are planning on spending their days sunbathing and swimming. They aren’t dressing up and hitting the casinos.” Cecilia assures me.

“You guys should come stay at the club.” I tell them. “I don’t like the idea of you two

here alone.” Expecting an argument, I brace myself. But I should know better. Ashlyn and her mom are very smart women.

“I think that’s a good idea.” Cecilia agrees while Ashlyn nods. “Are you sure there is enough room?”

“Plenty of room. Let me go talk with Grimm and clear it with him. But I don’t see a problem. Why don’t you both go pack?”

Taking Ashlyn’s mug, I clean it in the sink while they head back to their rooms to pack. Finding Grimm still standing with Carver and the others, I make my way over to them.

Running my idea of having Ashlyn and her mom stay at the clubhouse, I’m not surprised when he nods in agreement.

“What about Alexie?” Flame asks and I tell him what his mom had told me.

“That’s right. I forgot she was out of town. Do you think whoever did this will come back?”

I glance around to make sure none of the cops are nearby before pulling out the card to show it to them. “I called Byte. He’s trying to discover who sent the flowers.”

“Do you think the gang had dealings with Renee?” Grimm asks.

“That’s what Cecilia and Ashlyn asked.” Scar says. “Renee must have known at least one member since she delivered Ashlyn to them.”

I nod because Maestro’s father, Alex, last saw Ashlyn in Renee’s car before Deion got his hands on her. “The Spades didn’t deal in skin when I was with them. But,

Deion is all about turning a profit. He could see the skin trade as less risky than dealing in drugs or guns. Especially if they were working with someone like Renee who did the legwork and found the women.”

“We won’t get much done today.” Carver says. “I sent my men to other jobs. After what happened here, I’m changing my plan. I considered building the wall last, but it might be better to build it first. If we had the wall up and security in place, this wouldn’t have happened.”

“I agree.” Grimm says. “We can discuss it in Church today, but I’m certain Dante will agree. Anything to keep this place as safe as possible.”

When Ashlyn and her mother come out of their apartment each carrying a suitcase, Axel rushes over to help them. He grabs their bags and loads them into the SUV. Flame and I follow him over.

“Can we take our cars, or should we ride in the SUV?” Ashlyn asks me.

“Axel can drive you, but I think it might be a good idea to drive over to the club. No sense leaving them here. They will be safer at the clubhouse.” I tell her. “But neither of you should leave the compound without a guard.” I warn them.

“Ok, we’ll head over to the clubhouse now.” Cecilia says, walking to her car. Flame follows her to open her door and get her settled behind the wheel.

“I have soccer practice later.” Ashlyn reminds me. “I thought about cancelling, but I could really use the exercise to get my mind off things. I’ll return to the clubhouse after.”

“Axel can drive you over.” I tell her and she nods.

“Agreed. I promise I won’t fight you. I’d feel better having someone watching my back. Even if it is Axel.” She says with a wink at her brother and a grin for me. I open her car door. She blasts me with one of her brilliant smiles, so I pull her into my arms and devour her mouth. Losing myself in the taste of her, I pull back only when I hear two distinct sounds of gagging. I glare at her brothers while she giggles. She snuggles into my arms, so I give her a tight hug before releasing her. Once she’s behind the wheel, I close her door.

“Reaper?” I hear Ashlyn’s mom call me over.

“Hey, Mrs. B.” I greet her. “You all set? Need me to take care of anything here before we follow you to the clubhouse?”

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“Adam, I mean, Flame, has that covered, but thank you. I just want to tell you how happy I am that you’re with Ashlyn.”

I’m grateful for my dark skin because it hides my blush. “You are?” I ask her. “You don’t think she could do better?” I ask, but immediately want to pull back the question.

She studies me for a long minute before responding. “How could she do better than a strong, handsome man who loves her beyond reason and only wants her to be happy?”

I don’t answer her right away, but I glance over at Ashlyn and then away. I open my mouth to respond, but Cecilia beats me to it.

“Do you think I’d object because you’re a member of the Demons?” She asks me with some heat in her tone. “What kind of hypocrite do you take me for?”

“It’s not that.” I protest. “I just worry that she’d be better off with someone who isn’t...”

“Black? Seriously?” She asks. “Flame said you were thinking those thoughts. Do I wear the Confederate Flag or dress in white robes? I’m not a bigot or a racist. Flame told me what happened to you when you were a teenager and let me tell you something. Bigots and racists are bottom-dwellers. They know it, which is why they feed the hate inside. They let fear and their own sense of worthlessness take over. Do not allow them to make you feel less than you are. They are inadequate. Something you will never be. Do you know how many men hassled me because I was raising

four children on my own? At first, it made me self-conscious. Then I got smart and really looked at each one of them. You know what I saw?"

I shake my head, silenced by the venom in her tone.

"I saw men threatened by me. They saw a woman doing it all on her own without the help of a man. They saw me for what I am. A hell of a lot better and more capable than them." She says, causing me to grin. "My guess is those assholes were jealous of your youth and if they saw you today, they'd be even more jealous."

I smile at Cecilia before glancing over to see Ashlyn watching us. She, too, has a smile on her face. I've never felt so happy. And accepted.

CHAPTER TWELVE: ASHLYN

Watching Reaper talking with my mom, the expressions flitting across his handsome face has me smiling. She's embarrassing him. Which means she's telling him what he needs to hear. I know what happened to him as a teenager has stayed with him. I don't know if it's because it was his first real brush against racism, or if there was more to the confrontation than he's said. Watching him, I know he's expecting my mom to have issues with us dating, but I know something he doesn't. My mom adores Reaper, and she's well aware of my feelings for him. There is no one better than him. He's as gorgeous on the inside as he is on the outside.

I lead the way to the clubhouse with mom behind me and Axel taking up the rear. Mom has never been to the clubhouse, and I cringe when I think about her seeing the kutte bunnies. Mostly, I ignore them. Well, as much as you can ignore half-naked women draping themselves all over the guys and begging to be fucked. Maybe I should give mom a head's up.

We drive through the gate and I pull over to where those with cars, or cages as the

guys call them, park. Mom pulls in next to me while Axel drives around to the back where they park the club's SUVs.

I wait for her to get out and join me. "I probably should have told you sooner, but there are other women living here that are, um..."

"Whores?" Mom asks with a grin. "Honey, I've read MC books. I expect to find half-naked women and couples having sex out in the open. I promise not to embarrass you and your brothers by clutching at my pearls and stuttering, 'oh my'."

I laugh. "Good to know. I just didn't want you surprised." I tell her.

As we step up to the clubhouse door, Axel opens it to let us in. "Everything ok?" He asks.

"Yeah. Everything is fine. I just realized I didn't warn mom about the bunnies."

He blushes and I realize he forgot about them, too.

When we get inside, Axel tries to rush mom through the common room and down the hall to the guest rooms. She waves him off as she glances around the place, taking in all the visuals it offers. Simon and Tamara are behind the bar, chatting with a couple of members I haven't met yet. One has reddish hair, the color of burnt copper, and the other is blonde and drop dead gorgeous. They both turn to look at us and yep, the blonde looks like he should be a model. He turns far enough that I can read his name patch, Shield. So this is the cop that is also a brother.

In the corner, Laser and Ghost are playing pool. Two of the bunnies are chatting with the guys. Lily is wearing a bikini bra and cutoff jeans. I imagine her ass is hanging out the back because the front barely covers her pussy. Joanna is flirting with Ghost, who is ignoring her as he lines up a shot. She's wearing a tube top that's more like a

bandage wrapped around her impressive breasts and bikini bottoms that I think are the match to Lily's top. Interesting and a little gross.

Mom leans in close to me and says, "they should pay these girls more so they don't have to share a bikini." I bark out a laugh that draws the attention of everyone in the room, including the Old Ladies. Taking my mom's hand, I lead her over to the coolest women I've ever met. I introduce everyone and take a seat with them after Axel brings over two more chairs.

"I want to show mom her room before we leave." Axel says to me and I nod.

"I have to leave in twenty minutes." I tell him. "You're going with me?"

"I'll drive us in the SUV." Axel says. "It's bulletproof." After he leaves us, I see him pick up our suitcases, which he left against the wall and head down the hall. I hope he puts my bag in Reaper's room, but I figure I can move it later.

"We can show you to your room later." Kingsley tells my mom. "I'm glad you're staying with us. Did something happen?"

I tell them about the two dead bodies, then about the flowers and the card.

"Damn, so Renee had a buyer for you but gave you to the Spades. What she lacked in intelligence she made up for in gumption." Kingsley muses.

Mom shakes her head. "I just can't believe that was going on right under my nose. I feel like an idiot."

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“You couldn’t have known.” Tally assures her. “We didn’t realize we were in danger until it was much too late. She never gave off any vibes or showed a single misstep. And it isn’t like we haven’t been around people as nasty as her.”

“You have? Like who?” Mom asks as Axel comes back in the room, swinging the car keys around his finger.

I leave mom with the other ladies as they each bring her up to speed on the crazy adventures they’ve experienced since falling into the club. Reaper has already told me some of what each woman has dealt with, making me feel a little sorry for the men. It seems like their lives were much easier before the women burst onto the scene.

Axel drives me to the college, walking with me to the locker room. He remains outside while I go in to change. I find two of my closest friends and teammates already getting dressed. Jessica has the locker on my right while Briony’s is on my left. Briony and I are so much alike that many think we’re sisters, while Jessica is as different from us as a peacock is to a chicken. She’s just as colorful as one, too. Her short hair is a kaleidoscope of color. She grew up with super religious parents. She’s rebels against their strict upbringing every chance she gets. Her horror stories make me grateful for my mother. We may have had a challenging life, but she’s one of my best friends.

“Hey there girl, I was wondering if you were coming.” Jessica says when she spots me.

“My brother gave me a ride, and he drives slower than I do.” I explain as I strip out of

my clothes and pull on my sports bra.

“Which one? Adam or Axel?” Briony asks with interest. I know she has a crush on Axel, so I grin at her.

“Axel.”

“Is he going to watch us practice?” Briony asks jumping up and down with excitement.

“Yes, he is.”

“He’s a little young for you, isn’t he?” Jessica asks with a smirk.

“Only a few months, and who cares? He’s cute.” Briony retorts.

We walk outside to find the man in question waiting for us. He gives both my girls a chin lift as he falls in behind us as we head to the field.

“What’s with the vest thing?” Jessica asks him.

“It’s a kutte.” Axel responds. “I’m prospecting for the Demon Dawgs.”

“Really?” Briony asks, giving him the once over. “Very sexy.”

He smirks at her as Jessica turns to me. “So, both your brothers are part of the gang?”

“Club.” Axel and I both correct her. “And yes, Flame and Axel both belong, along with my guy, Reaper.”

“You’re dating someone named Reaper?” Jessica asks me.

I shrug.

“My parents would have heart attacks if I started dating a guy named Reaper, who belonged to a motorcycle club.”

“Your parents freak out if you talk to a guy.” I remind her.

“Yeah.” She sighs.

“They still call you every night to make sure you’re home and not out on a date?” Briony asks.

Jessica smirks. “Yeah, but they’re so far in the dark ages, they don’t realize I’m using a cell phone. They think I have a landline in the dorm.”

Axel snorts while we laugh. Our coach whistles for us to hurry over and soon we’re running and sweating through our workout.

I love playing soccer. The exhilaration of running up and down the field, competing for the control of the ball, is all I need to release my tension. Thinking of the arrogant asshole who sent me that note has me wanting to kick him in the nuts. I end up kicking the ball so hard into the net that it shoots through the bottom gap.

“Nice one!” Briony says, giving me a high five as Jessica, who’s playing goalie, runs to recover the ball.

The coach blows his whistle and calls me over. “Great offense today, Ash, but you slipped a few times on defense.”

I nod because I know exactly what he’s saying. “Sorry, coach. My mind wasn’t on it today. It won’t happen again.”

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He frowns at me as I study his handsome face. Most of the girls on the team have a crush on Coach Matthews, especially Briony. He's the epitome of a nice guy. Good manners, kind and never creepy. "If you need to talk..." He starts, but I grin at him and shake my head.

"No. Really. I'm fine. I found a dead body this morning. Looks like the victim of a gang fight." I tell him. "Somebody dumped his body at the apartment complex my mom manages."

He glances over at Axel and narrows his eyes. "Was it his gang?"

I glance at my brother and frown. "Axel isn't part of a gang. He's a prospect for the Demon Dawgs MC. They aren't a gang, they're a motorcycle club."

He doesn't look convinced, but nods his head. "As long as you're ok. If you need anything, you only need to ask."

I thank him and run back to my friends, just as he blows the whistle to end practice. Together, we walk back to the locker room to shower and change back into street clothes.

"You all run like girls." Axel teases us.

I glance back at him. "Thank you. And if you could run a little faster, you could, too!" Causing him to scowl and the girls to laugh.

Briony and Jessica both finish before I do, calling out their goodbyes as I open my

locker. When I pull out my clothes, a piece of paper comes floating out. It's folded in half. I open it to find a type-written message.

"Keep yourself pure for me. I'll be coming for you soon."

I crumple the paper and rush through getting dressed. Talking to Professor Addington has to wait. I need Reaper.

I find Axel outside and show him the note.

"Shit." Axel says, reading it and looking at me. "You found this in your locker? Can you show me?"

"Let me make sure the no one is inside." I tell him as I go back in, keeping the outside door open just in case. I thought I was the last person to leave, but I find Coach Matthews in his office. He's on the phone, so I return to Axel and let him come in.

We leave once Axel finishes examining my locker.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: REAPER

I help Flame lock up the apartment complex before we head back to the clubhouse. We arrive just as Dante calls for Church. I spy Cecilia sitting with the Old Ladies and glance at Flame.

"She looks like she belongs." I tell him and he nods.

"That's my mom. She fits in no matter what the group." He says with pride.

Cecilia is a strong and confident woman. I don't know why their father left her, but I

know he's an idiot who made a terrible choice. My woman takes after her mom. I once heard that you should look to the mother to see how the daughter turns out. I'll be a lucky bastard if Ashlyn turns out like her mom.

I follow Flame and take my seat as Dante slams down the gavel. He starts by explaining about the two dead bodies and what we know of each. Which isn't much.

"They've id'd the body found at Styx." Shield speaks up. "His name was Alan Webber. He's a lawyer. Works at the DA's office. I left a message for Clayton Turner to see if he can give us any background on this guy. The detective in charge has found no reason why anyone wanted him dead or why he was at Styx dressed like he was ready for a heist."

"Are they looking at us?" Dante asks and Shield shakes his head.

"The detective in charge checked the footage. They think a street gang targeted the victim. He's prosecuted several cases involving various gang members."

"Including the Spades?" I ask, and Shield nods.

"I have the video." Byte says as he types on his keyboard. We all turn to watch. "It confirms Mark's story." He says, glancing at me, I nod in understanding.

We watch the video which was taken using a night vision camera. Three men dressed in dark clothes with hoodies hiding their features make their way through the storage units to the place where I found the body. Two start messing with the lock on one unit, which draws the attention of our security guard, Mark. Once Mark arrives on the scene, a third guy steps up behind Mark and slams something into the back of his head, causing him to crumble. The other two rush over to help move Mark into the container where I found him.

“That matches what Mark said.” I confirm, causing Byte to pause the replay. “He said he heard two people arguing and then someone knocked him out when he went over to investigate. I think they lured him there. We don’t have many unused containers. That’s the closest one to the front. While we were waiting for the police, I examined the locked storage areas and didn’t see any signs of tampering.”

“They likely lured Mark to get him out of the way.” Grimm says. “What about the dead guy?”

“Watch.” Says Byte as he restarts the video.

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As the other two move off into the shadows, the last guy locks up Mark. After he shuts the container, he stands next to it. Waiting. I study him because there is something familiar about him, but I can't place what it is. The video splits into two views.

"I've cued up the video from the street so we can watch it play out." Byte tells us.

We watch as a car drives into the lot and parks. A man gets out. I can't see his face, but from the way he's dressed, I can tell he's the man whose body I found. He's carrying a duffle bag as he walks out of one frame and into the other. The guy waiting for him greets the newcomer, taking the duffle bag and opening it. We can't see the contents on the screen, but we all know a payoff when we see one. When he confirms the contents, he nods toward the container holding Mark. When the man moves past him, the first guy slams his fist into the second guy's back. As the man falls into the position where I found him, the other guy races to the car and takes off in it.

"The coroner hasn't completed their autopsy, but the detective told me they found a single stab wound in the back." Shield explains.

"Do we know where the killer went?" Dante asks.

"Maestro is checking traffic cams, but so far we only know he took off toward downtown." Byte responds. "We're hoping he can find a better view of the killer's face."

"Any more details about the murder at Crossroads?" I ask and both Byte and Shield shake their heads.

“We don’t have cameras covering Crossroads, something I want to rectify as soon as possible.” Byte says.

“The detective on the case said someone shot him. Probably used a silencer, since Cecilia didn’t hear anything.” Shield adds. “Time of death is about an hour after Webber.”

“If we get any more information, let us know.” Dante says.

“Cecilia and Ashlyn are staying here and I told them that we’d provide protection if they needed to leave the compound.” I say.

Dante nods before speaking. “Changing topics. I heard from Feral today and they’re on schedule to reach Chicago the day after tomorrow. I’ve been talking with Puma and we put together a plan that gets us in Chicago and ready to take on Standish.”

My mind has been replaying the video of the killer because I know I recognize him from somewhere, but the mention of my uncle draws my attention back to my President. Where it should have been.

“Puma has a contact at Nellis Air Force Base who will fly several of us to Chicago on a cargo plane. The plane is large enough to carry us along with our bikes. Scar, Chaos, Babe, Byte, Ghost, Laser, and myself are all riding to Vegas. We’ll take the cargo plane to Chicago and meet up with Chrome, his club, and a few other allies from other clubs and gangs in the area. Some of us are meeting Feral, so we can enter the trailer and confront Standish when he opens it, expecting to find our women.”

“We’re certain that they don’t suspect the women escaped?” Penny asks.

“Chrome is continuing to monitor Gareth and Gerard Standish, along with Colin and his parents. They’re still making plans for the women’s arrival, including

confirmation from their contact here that they successfully locked the women in the trailer. They've also confirmed the driver has no knowledge of what he's transporting. The driver, Pete, has reported daily that he's on track with no problems. Chrome has continued to identify locations holding other women for auction and the brothels. He also identified the building where they planned on taking our women after delivery. Chrome has a member who is an expert in demolition. He's wired the place up to blow."

"Why?" Flame asks. "Isn't that a risk? What if other women are in there?"

"Chrome's making sure. He has eyes and ears on the location. Everything he's heard since Standish first mentioned the plan is that the place is opening the night our women are supposed to arrive. That they are the chief attraction. And the only attraction for the first night. The men invited for the opening are VIPs who Standish wants to go into business with. We're talking heads of the mafia, the mob, and two different cartels." Dante explains. "Chrome has an inside source who Standish hired to secure the place."

"Handy." Ranch says.

"He's good." Byte adds. "I've spoken with him and he has access to some really advanced equipment. Plus, he modified the detection devices they're using so they don't alert the user to any of the items he's placed."

"What are we doing with Standish and the others once we have them?" I ask.

Dante gives a smile that would terrify Lucifer himself. "Simple. They'll be riding back here in the cell meant for our women. And once they're here, they'll be yours to dispose of after we bleed them dry of information."

"What about Tally and Caitlin's mom and dad? Are they involved in this?" Ranch

asks.

Dante shrugs. “We don’t know.”

“Their mom may have been working with them only to get her hands on Caitlin’s inheritance. She may not know what they’re doing to those women. Same goes for their father. He wasn’t part of Caitlin’s kidnapping so he may not know about any of this.” Scar adds.

“It’s pretty simple.” Dante says. “If they’re at the meet, then we’ll grab them, too. If not, then Chrome will continue to monitor their activity after the takedown. I don’t trust anyone from that family except Tally and Caitlin.”

A knock on the door has Dante growling. I jump up to open it, finding Axel on the other side. My heart races because he’s supposed to be guarding Ashlyn.

“Where’s Ashlyn?” I ask.

“She’s in the common room.” Axel hands me a sheet of paper as he responds. “Sorry to interrupt, Prez. Ashlyn found this note in her locker after soccer practice. It’s from that asshole who claims to own her. I thought you’d want to see it right away.”

Dante nods before glancing at me. “What does it say?”

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I read the note out loud, my hands shaking.

“Fuck.” Says Flame. “How the hell did he get it in her locker?”

Axel comes in when Dante beacons him forward and I close the door behind him. He stands as he should while I take my seat.

“She says it wasn’t there when she changed before practice. I watched the practice but didn’t see anyone acting suspicious. No one was at practice except for her teammates and their coach. I stayed outside while she changed. Didn’t see anyone else enter. Although I guess someone could have gotten in after we left for the field. As far as I can tell, they leave the doors unlocked.”

“Does she think someone opened her locker to place the note, or did they simply slip it in?” I ask.

Axel looks at me with some surprise before shrugging. “I’m not sure, although she said she found it as she was dressing, not before she started dressing. Want me to go ask her?”

“No.” Dante says. “Church dismissed. Let’s all go out and make sure she knows we have her back.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: ASHLYN

I’m sitting with my Mom and the Old Ladies when the guys come pouring out of Church. Reaper comes right to me and lifts me out of my chair so he can pull me

back onto his lap. I watch in amusement as the other men do the same with their women.

“Axel told us about the note.” Reaper says. “You found it in your locker. Do you think someone pushed it in, or did they open the locker to place it inside?”

I glance around at the men sitting at our table and standing around it. All the Demon Dawgs are waiting for my answer. It’s at this moment I realize I’m really part of this family of bikers. Glancing back at Reaper, I consider his question. “I don’t know for certain. But the note didn’t fall out when I opened the locker. It wasn’t on top of my clothes either. So if I had to guess, I think someone opened my locker and placed it between my clothes.”

“What kind of lock?” Dante asks.

“Simple combination lock.” I say.

“Not too hard to break into, then.” Smoke says. “But could someone have the combination? Maybe one of your friends or someone with a locker near yours?”

I frown at the insinuation. “None of my friends would have put that note in there.” I defend them.

“I’m not saying they did. Maybe they thought it fell out of your locker, so they replaced it. Or someone asked them to put it inside, not know they would hurt you.”

I consider his words and realize he could be right. Now that I’m thinking of it, I can imagine a few scenarios where my friends might have gone into my locker. We know each others combinations. “I guess that’s true.” I admit. “Maybe whoever left the note shoved it in and one of them opened my locker to borrow something and they moved the note around.”

“I don’t suppose there are any cameras in the locker room?” Smoke asks.

I shake my head no.

“Any headway on finding who Renee might have sold me to before she handed me over to Deion?” I ask.

“We’re still searching through her accounts and backtracking those who wired money into hers. Most are shell companies with the owners of the accounts buried deep. Some accounts were setup just for the single transaction before being taken down again. There is one that is odd, though.” Smoke admits. “It’s an account for a church. God’s Chosen. I checked them out. They’re a legitimate organization. Their leader is popular with many followers.”

“I don’t see a church buying virgins.” Flame says, and I have to agree.

“Renee said she sold other collectibles. That she acquired items for her customers. She might have found something for the church or its leader.” Kingsley adds.

“Maybe. Their payments are smaller than the others, but there are more of them. That would make sense if Renee was finding artifacts or other items for the church. But I still think someone needs to talk to them.” Smoke says.

“I can do that.” Shield offers. “I can tell them we’re looking into Renee’s disappearance and need to talk to her customers to see if they know anything.”

The men wander off to the bar while a few head over to the pool tables and waiting kutte bunnies. I lean my head against Reaper and relax into him. I’m safe here. Safe with him.

“Your twenty-first is just a few days away.” My mom reminds me. “What are we

going to do to celebrate?”

I open my eyes and crinkle my nose at her, causing her to laugh. She knows what I really want to do to celebrate my birthday. Reaper. My mom and I talk about everything. She’s my best friend, and she knows how much I want to lose my virginity to him. He’s the man I want to spend the rest of my life with, so he’s the only one I ever want to have sex with. I’m not a virgin because I’m a prude. I’m still a virgin because I’ve never felt the desire for sex with anyone until I met Reaper.

“We could have a party here.” Kingsley offers. I glance at her and I must grimace because she changes tactics. “Although no one here will card you, so that’s a waste.”

“You should go out to an expensive restaurant and order a drink.” Evie suggests. “That’s what I did. A group of us went out, and I ordered a Long Island Iced Tea.” Evie laughs. “Boy, that was a mistake. They were so easy to drink that I had three of them. Then spent the night hurling.”

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I laugh as everyone at the table shares their own stories.

“What do you want to do for your twenty-first?” Reaper asks me with a whisper in my ear.

I lean back against his shoulder so I can reply in kind. “You.”

I feel him tense before he hugs me closer to him. His cock is rock hard under my ass and I shift so I can better feel him. He groans before clamping his hand on my legs to keep me from moving. “Behave.” He warns me, but I flick my tongue out to trace his ear, causing him to shudder. Nothing is hotter than seeing your guy’s reaction to things you do to him. I’m about to push him further when suddenly several cell phones go off, one right after the other. I glance around the room as everyone, including Reaper, pulls out their phones.

I focus only on Reaper, who glances over at Flame. “Ok, fuck, anybody hurt?” Reaper says, getting up and setting me back on the seat. “Sorry, babe, but someone vandalized Styx.” He glances over at Dante, who is standing as his eyes bounce around the room. Carver, Torch, Grimm and Byte are all on their phones, cussing and asking similar questions about damages and injuries. Something bad has happened and I can’t shake the feeling that I’m the reason.

“Report.” Dante demands as each man ends his call.

“Someone shot up Lucifer’s Den.” Grimm says. “Two of the bouncers are in the hospital. I don’t know how much damage. Yet.”

“Someone hit Demon Custom Art.” Torch says. “Two mechanics got hit, no casualties, but they riddled the place with bullets.”

“They hit one of our construction sites.” Carver says. “An office building near downtown. Material torched and shot to shit. No one was there, so that’s something.”

“They shot up Styx.” Reaper says. “The tow trucks got most of the damage. Tires and windows. They torched the office building.”

“They hit Diablo Security, but they didn’t make it into the building. Shot at the window and door, but they’re bulletproof.” Byte says. “I’m having the guys pull the video for Diablo and for all of our businesses that were hit. Someone’s started a war.”

“And that’s exactly what they’re getting.” Dante fumes. “Head to your business, but not alone. I want the prospects to stay here with Chaos and Babe, protect the women and the clubhouse.”

Reaper gives me a kiss before he, Ghost and Flame head out together.

I turn back to the women and see all of them showing the same amount of shock and disbelief as I’m feeling.

“Is it self-centered of me to think this is my fault?” I ask, causing everyone at our table to stop watching the door and turn their attention on me.

“Why do you think this is your fault?” Tally asks.

I shrug. “I just feel like this has to do with the whoever sent those flowers and left me that note.”

Evie frowns at me. “You could be right.”

“Evie!” Caitlin exclaims, grasping my hand between hers. “You can’t blame Ashlyn.”

Evie rolls her eyes. “I wasn’t blaming her. I was just thinking that she might be right in thinking the guy behind the flowers and the murder of a gang member might try to get the Demons to leave her vulnerable. If that’s the case...”

“Then these attacks could be a way to draw most of us away from the club to leave her unprotected.” Chaos finishes her thought. “Simon. Go out and join Izzy at the guardhouse. Laser, up on the roof and take your sniper shit. Ladies, maybe you should get into the panic room.”

As quickly as Simon runs outside, he comes running back in. “Chaos, cops at the gate.”

“Everyone stay inside.” Chaos orders as he walks out. Evie ignores his order and follows him out. Tally, Caitlin and Kingsley also get up to follow leaving my mom and I at the table alone. So we do what comes naturally.

Chaos turns and scowls as we all follow him outside.

“What did I say?” He demands.

“One for all, and all for one?” Tally asks with a grin. Chaos just shakes his head and glares at Evie.

“Little girl...” He growls.

“No. Big bad lawyer.” Evie corrects him as she leads the way to the gate. “Gentlemen, what can we do for you?”

“You can open the gates.” One cop informs her. “We have a report that the Demon

Dawgs kidnapped a young woman and are holding her against her will.”

“Who?” Evie asks.

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“An Ashlyn Barnes.” The cop replies, glancing around at all the women who surround Evie. When I hear my name, I gasp, which draws his attention to me.

“Officer, I’m Ashlyn Barnes and I can assure you I’m not here against my will. The Demon Dawgs have not kidnapped me. I’m here visiting my boyfriend and my brothers.”

“I’m sorry, but I need you to come outside so we can question you alone.” The officer insists. “You could be under duress.”

“As her mother, I assure you, my daughter is not under duress.” My mom chimes in. “I don’t know who told you she was in danger, but they are mistaken or they lied.”

The cop studies my mom and then each of the surrounding women before landing on me. “We received calls from several upstanding citizens who claim to have seen you kidnapped by a black man wearing a Demon Dawgs kutte. If you aren’t being held against your will, can you come to the station so we can sort this out?”

I glance at my mom and then at Chaos. I don’t really want to go with them, but I can understand their desire to question me outside the club’s influence.

“I can drive her.” My brother offers and I see that he’s no longer wearing his prospect kutte. I glance at Chaos, who is frowning at him, but he says nothing.

“And you are?” The officer asks.

“Ashlyn’s brother. I can drive her and my mom to the station, where you can make

sure they're both fine."

The cop nods. "We need you at the station within the hour." He says before returning to his vehicle.

"Where's your kutte, prospect?" Chaos growls.

Axel shrugs. "I figure he'd only agree to let me drive them if he didn't know I was a prospect."

Chaos clasps him on the back. "Good call."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: REAPER

The place is a fucking mess. Glass is everywhere, so it's impossible to walk without hearing it crunch underfoot. Considering the semi-straight line of bullets across the side of the truck, my guess is someone took his assault rifle out for a day of fun. But why?

"This place is a disaster." Ghost says as he leans in to examine the office. Flame is walking down the row of tow trucks, his fists clenched at his sides.

"It'll take time and money to get everything fixed." I say. "I wonder how bad the other business are. If they're as bad as this, we're screwed."

"The shooter stood here." Flame says studying the damaged tow truck in front of him. He glances at the spots where we have cameras mounted. They shot all the visible cameras into obscurity. But Byte and Smoke never install one layer of security when they can up it to five layers or more. They have several cameras in places most people wouldn't consider. Like inside the rearview mirror pointing directly at where Flame stands. They put the cameras there for the safety of our drivers, but they're on

constant record. Smoke and Byte live for data and collect video feed like squirrels hoarding nuts.

We clean up most of the mess before we agree to head back to the clubhouse. Dante will want updates from everyone. A part of me thinks this is the handy work of the Spades, but how they could organize a coordinate strike against five separate businesses at the same time is beyond me.

The three of us mount our bikes. After I put on my helmet, I get notification that I have several missed calls. I glance over at Flame, who is also pulling out his cell phone. My chest tightens as I read a series of messages from Axel, Chaos, and Ashlyn.

“What’s up?” Ghost asks as Flame and I share a look.

“They took Ashlyn and my mom to the police station.” Flame says. “Cops arrived at the clubhouse a few minutes after we all left. Someone reported Ashlyn as a kidnap victim. They went to clear it up. They’re on their way back to the clubhouse. We should get back there.”

“Dante’s likely to call Church again.” I tell them. “I wonder if all this was a distraction for someone to get their hands on Ashlyn.”

We all ride back to the clubhouse to find that everyone has returned, except for Ashlyn and her mother. Axel is missing, too, so I’m hoping he’s with them. I see Evie and Tally talking, so I head to them to see if they can fill us in on what happened. Dante squelches that plan by calling Church. I open my mouth to protest, but Dante shuts me down. “I’ve told Tally to come get us once Ashlyn and Cecilia return.”

I nod in acceptance and follow the rest of my brothers into Church once again. I’m feeling like we’re spending more time in Church than out of it lately. Our club has

too many enemies right now. We're spread thin.

We all summarize what we each found in our businesses. Each attack is so similar that we know the same group orchestrated the attack. But that doesn't tell us who did it.

"Do you think it's the Spades?" Chaos asks me. "In retaliation for their dead member?"

"I don't see how. They carry handguns, not assault rifles. At least they didn't have access to them before. Those aren't cheap or easy to get."

"Not sure they have enough members, either." Byte adds. "We're still going through the video, but first glance tells us that no less than three attackers hit each place. In the case of the construction site and Diablo, there were four at each site. That's seventeen. I only counted twelve Spades when we rescued Ashlyn and they lost one."

"I have someone I can call and get information." I offer. "We're still on good terms. He's Deion's cousin and their money guy. He's smart, and Deion trusts him completely. Killian thinks Deion talks out of his ass most of the time, so he doesn't have a problem doing his own thing. Which includes staying friends with a traitor like me."

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“I don’t think it’s them.” Smoke adds. “Unless they’re letting white guys join.” He hits a few keys and we see the outside of Diablo Security. Two black SUVs pull up and four men jump out, two out of each. They move in military formation as they line up. In perfect synch, they raise their assault rifles and let loose. The men are wearing black cargo pants, black knitted long-sleeve shirts, and heavy boots. Each is also wearing a ski mask that covers their heads, face and neck. I don’t see how Smoke knows they’re white until I get a look at their hands. They’re wearing gloves, but you can still see their wrists. Their pale wrists.

“They’re trained. Could be military or para-military.” Scar suggests.

“Not gang members.” I add.

“So who the hell sent these guys to shoot up our businesses?” Dante asks. “You said the cops arrived shortly after we all left?” He asks Chaos.

“Within minutes. Hell, I just sent Simon out to stand guard with Izzy in case they coordinated the attacks to leave the clubhouse unprotected.” Chaos says.

“Any info on who called in the kidnapping?” Dante asks Shield.

“Five separate men called it in. Reported seeing, and I quote, a pretty young white girl getting kidnapped by a black man wearing a Demon Dawgs kutte. They each gave the same time and the same description of Ashlyn and Reaper. I have a buddy at the station pulling the id’s of these witnesses.” Shield says.

“This has to be related to the guy who tried to buy Ashlyn from Renee.” I say and

Dante nods.

“No doubt. Whoever he is, he has money and connections. Fuck. We need to leave tomorrow, but I don’t want to leave the clubhouse short-handed.”

“Acid’s still in town.” Chaos says. “He’s spending time with his daughter, Sophie. He could stay here.”

“You trust him?” Dante asks.

“Not as far as I can throw him. But I know he hates human traffickers as much as we do, so if we need him to help protect against this asshole, Acid will come through.”

“I can get the Nomads to come here.” Grimm suggests. “They’re in Yuma cleaning up the mess the Devil’s Disciples left when we obliterated them. They could be here before you leave in the morning.”

“Good. Yeah. Get them here and let them know what’s going on.” Dante says. “They can help find out who’s behind this attack. They still have connections in San Diego, and they can travel incognito if they need to.”

“Dante.” I say, drawing his attention. “Maybe Ashlyn and I should go with you to Vegas. Getting Ashlyn out of town would keep her safe and it might make these guys leave the club alone. She’d be safer at the clubhouse in Vegas. We’d be away from this asshole and his resources.”

“That’s not a bad idea.” Chaos says. “Odds are this guy has eyes on the clubhouse. At least enough to see us coming and going. We can take him by surprise. Leaving in a large group and taking Ashlyn with us.”

“What if he follows you?” Flame asks and I’m not surprised he’s against the idea.

“It’s a five and half hour drive. We can outrun one of their SUVs and we’ll have our own SUV with us.” Chaos replies. “I think it’s a good plan. Plus, it will be interesting to see how far he can reach. Might give us a better idea of who the fuck he is. Is Puma ok with you bringing trouble to his doorstep?”

I shrug. “Wouldn’t be the first time. I went to him when I left the Spades. He knew it was a possibility that the gang would come for me. If he knows Ashlyn is in danger and we need his help, he’ll give it.”

A knock on the door draws our attention. Tally pokes her head in and speaks to Dante. “Ashlyn and her mom are back. You want her to come in here?”

“We’ll come out there.” Dante says. “I think everyone needs to know what’s happening.”

Dante ends Church, and we file out. Dante tells Grimm to get in touch with the Nomads. I make a note to call Puma and let him know we’re coming. I just need to get Ashlyn to agree.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: ASHLYN

All I really want to do right now is take a shower and wash the police station cooties off of me. I don’t know what makes me feel dirtier; the guys wearing handcuffs leering at me or the guys carrying handcuffs looking at me like I’m trash. But before I can make a beeline to Reaper’s room, Tally waylays me. She explains that Dante and the other want to talk with me. Watching her walk down to where they hold their meetings, I’m not sure if I should follow her or wait here. I decide to wait. I don’t really want to go into their Chapel, I’ve had enough of conference rooms.

Tally returns with the men following behind her. Reaper comes to me and gathers me in his arms. I finally feel safe again. Kissing my temple, he pulls me onto his lap as

he takes a seat. The rest of the men sit scattered around the room, but they're all looking at me and waiting.

"What happened?" Dante asks.

I glance around the room and swallow down my nerves. Anger is the primary expression on everyone's faces and even though I know they aren't aiming that anger at me, the oppressive feeling in the room still make me nervous.

"You know the cops came to the clubhouse with some crazy idea that Reaper kidnapped me and that you were holding me against my will?" I start, watching everyone nod. "I told them I was here freely. They wouldn't take my word for it. Even with mom backing me up. They wanted me to answer questions off club property, so I agreed to go to the station, but only if Axel drove. I didn't want to go in their car."

"Good choice." Reaper whispers into my ear as he hugs me close. His approval and support bolster my courage.

"They tried to separate me from mom but neither of us agreed so they took us into an interrogation room together." I continue, reaching out to grab my mom's hand. "They asked me again if I was certain you hadn't kidnapped me, and I assured them I drove to the clubhouse in my car. That's when they told me they had several witnesses claiming they saw a man take me against my will."

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“Did they say who these witnesses were?” Dante asks.

I shake my head. “No, they just said that each one was a respected member of the community.” I say, using air quotes. “I demanded they tell me their names, but the cops seemed reluctant to share the information.”

“That’s ok. We’ll get their names.” Dante assures me. “Anything else?”

I shift on Reaper’s lap, causing him to tense up. I don’t know if it’s because I’m rubbing against his cock or because he senses he won’t like my next statement.

“They told me I was making a mistake getting myself mixed up with you guys and tying myself to Reaper.” I admit, and the memory riles me up again.

“Because I’m black.” Reaper states in a dead tone.

“Black and a biker.” My mom confirms. “But my girl showed them the errors of their ways.” She says, giving us both a smile.

Reaper looks down into my face. “Oh, yeah, what did you say?”

“I informed them of their stupidity. How I’d rather be with a sexy, badass biker who has honor and integrity than a loser who needs to insult and teardown others just to make themselves feel like men.”

Everyone but Reaper laugh so I turn and study him. He gives me a sad smile that makes me want to punch him and then kiss him to make it better. I’m so tired of him

feeling like he's not good enough for me. When I'm not sure I'm good enough for him.

"But that's not the only thing she said." My mom says and I feel the blush forming because I remember my words. "She told them she'd much rather be with a real man with a rock hard body than a bunch of flabby boys who eat too many donuts and sit on their asses all day."

"Oh, jeez." Flame whines as Reaper barks out a laugh.

Hearing his laugh makes me smile and fills me with joy. I look up in time to receive a hard kiss from my man.

"What are we going to do about whoever's targeting my daughter and you guys?" My mom asks Dante. "And I know you can't tell me everything. I understand the concept of club business. But this is my family we're talking about."

Dante grins. "I can tell you we're using all of our resources to identify who is behind the attacks on our club and who reported the fake kidnapping. The same someone is behind both."

"How do we keep Ashlyn safe?" My mom presses.

"I want to take her to Las Vegas tomorrow." Reaper says, squeezing me. "My uncle is the President of the Demon Dawgs there. His clubhouse is a fortress."

"Getting me out of town and out of his reach is a good idea." I admit, sitting up in excitement. "I've always wanted to go to Vegas after I turned twenty-one. Maybe we can go gambling, then have dinner at one of the casinos." I suggest.

He pushes my hair away from my face and gives me his sexy grin. "I think we can

manage it.” He promises me. “So, you’re ok with leaving town on short notice?”

I nod.

“What will stop the man from attacking you both once you leave here?” My mom asks with concern.

“They won’t be traveling alone.” Dante assures her. “A few of us were already making the trip to Vegas. Reaper and Ashlyn are just joining us. She’ll have plenty of protection.”

“Will everyone here be safe?” I ask, glancing at my mom.

“Most of the club will remain behind.” Grimm says. “I’m staying here and the Nomads are coming to town to help.”

I’m half listening to Dante and half thinking about our upcoming trip. When I packed, it was for a stay at the club. I don’t have clothes for a romantic night out. I must lose the gist of the conversation because I’m aware everyone is staring at me and I don’t know why.

“What?” I ask and Reaper laughs while Dante rolls his eyes.

“Where did you go?” Reaper asks me.

“I have nothing to wear in Vegas.” I tell him, honestly.

He frowns. “It’s hotter there, but what you have on will work.” He tells me.

I shake my head. “No, I have nothing to wear when we go out to dinner.”

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“No worries.” Reaper assures me. “You can go shopping for whatever you need when we get there. So I guess that means you agree to head to Vegas in the morning? You’re ok with missing soccer practice?”

“Oh. Yeah. I forgot about soccer practice. That’s fine. I can send my coach a text and let my teammates know.”

“Great. So that’s settled.” Dante says, getting up from our table and grabbing Tally. He swings her up into his arms and gives her a hard kiss. “We’re off to bed. We leave at nine.”

I watch Caitlin, Evie, and Kingsley all leave with their men, so I turn to Reaper and yawn in his face. Figuring that should be a big enough hint. I hear my mom chuckle, so I shoot her a smile as Reaper laughs. He tickles my sides until I’m squirming on his lap. “Let’s get you to bed.” Reaper says.

“Finally.” I moan. “Something I want to do.”

He snickers. “We’re going to sleep, trouble. The trip is over five hours and you’ve never ridden on a bike that long. Plus, I need to let Puma know we’re coming.”

Reaper carries me bridal style into his bedroom before letting me drop to the ground by sliding down his torso. Yum. I love the feel of his hard body against mine.

“You call your uncle while I take a shower. I need to get the stink of the cop shop off me.” I tell him as I make my way to the bathroom, stripping off my clothes as I go. Before I reach the door, I turn to look at him. I love the fire and desire in his eyes as

he watches me. Nothing makes you feel sexier than having the man of your dreams stare at you with need. Unless it's watching that same man toss his phone on the bed as he rips off his clothes to follow you.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: REAPER

Nothing is as sexy as watching the woman of your dreams strip. Unless it's watching water flow over her curves. Ashlyn's so fucking gorgeous. I just want to devour her. After pulling her into my shower, I grab the soap first so I can take my time washing her luscious body. Her pretty dusty pink nipples pucker as I rub my hands over her mounds. I pay special attention to her pussy and ass as I capture her mouth. Kissing Ashlyn is a religious experience.

The taste of her sends a calming balm through my system. Her sweetness and sexiness chases away the stress. The feel of her tongue as she battles with mine heats my blood and spikes my need to claim her. When she presses her body against mine, as if she can't get close enough, sends me into a frenzy. My hands roam over her, caressing and claiming. Loving and punishing. The world fades away, leaving just of the two of us.

"Randall." Ashlyn moans as I break the kiss so I can kiss her eyes and trail kisses down her neck before working my way back up. I suckle and bite the tendon on her neck, knowing I'm leaving a mark because fuck, I need to mark her as mine. Those assholes had her in a room. They questioned her and tried to turn her against me. But my warrior fought them. I never want her to be vulnerable. I want her in my arms. It's the only way I know she's safe.

"I'm proud of you." I tell her as I wash her hair. Her gentle moans and sighs have my dick bobbing and spearing toward what he wants most.

She turns to me with a question in her eyes after I rinse her hair. "Why?" She asks,

making me chuckle.

“Those assholes tried to intimidate you. They wanted to make you nervous or upset, so you said something they could use against the club, or me. Any hesitancy on your end would have been enough.”

She huffs. “Would never have happened. I know what I want. I know where I belong. With you. Nobody could trick me into saying otherwise.”

Wrapping a towel around my girl, I quickly dry myself off before helping her do the same.

“Come on, let me comb out your hair.” I offer, as I lead her back into my room. Sitting on the bed with my legs dangling off the sides. Shifting far enough back so she can sit between them. With long, gentle strokes, I comb out her damp hair. Her body relaxes as I remove all the tangles. Everything about Ashlyn is erotic, but this is also very intimate. I can see a lifetime of this ahead of me. I want it, but only with her. Her body jerks, telling me she’s getting sleepy. After tucking her in, I step out of the room to call Puma.

“Reaper, what’s up?” Puma answer on the first ring.

“I’m heading your way with the others tomorrow.” I tell him before explaining why.

“This is the girl your former gang held hostage? Do you think they’re the ones harassing her?” Puma asks. I guess I should know Dante updated him.

“I don’t think it’s the Spades.” I tell him about the coordinated attack before stressing how I want to get Ashlyn out of San Diego for a few days.

“You’re always welcome here, you know that. Your room is always waiting.”

I thank him before hanging up. Time to hold my woman. I strip down before climbing into bed, happy when she curls into me and slips her leg over my waist. I rub my hand up and down her thigh, stroking her firm ass with each pass. Her skin is so soft. I can't help myself. When she lays kisses on my chest, I press my face into her hair.

"I thought you were asleep." I whisper to her, just in case she is.

"I was, but now I'm not." She licks my nipple, causing me to jolt and her to giggle.

"Trouble." I growl.

She lifts her head up to look at me. "I could get used to this. Sleeping with you every night. I don't think I've ever been as happy as I am right now. But you want to know the best part?"

"What?" I ask her curiously as I capture her fingers between mine. I love how her pale skin glows against my darker hue.

"I know that tomorrow I'll be happier than I am today. And the day after that, even happier. The more time I spend with you, the more I look forward to spending every day with you."

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Her words burn into me because she's described exactly how I feel about her. The more time I spend with Ashlyn, the more time I want to spend with her. But we both need sleep. Tomorrow is a long ride. "I think my woman needs something to help her sleep."

"Oh yeah, you have those sleeping pills in here somewhere?" She asks, giggling when I pull her up to kiss her neck. "Or maybe some chamomile tea?" She suggests on a moan as I pull her up further so I can suck on her nipple. I shift so I'm lying flat, lifting her so she straddles me.

I take a long slurp of her pussy and hear her gasp in pleasure. "I think an orgasm or two works much better than tea or a pill."

"Hmmm." she moans in agreement.

With her knees planted on each side of my head, I flick my tongue along the outside edge of her pussy lips, relishing the flavor of my woman. Just like tasting her mouth, licking her cunt sends a calm through my system just before it sets off an explosion of primal need. I growl as every flick of my tongue against her clit causes more of her essence to flow. She's so wet and needy. My dirty girl.

Pushing my tongue into her, I feel her core flutter with greed. So, I slide my hands under ass to pull her closer. My dick is hard as a steel rod and furious because he knows he's sidelined. I want my woman's first experience to be one she remembers forever. Even if it means dealing with blue balls for the next few days. Pressing my finger against her asshole causes her to tense. I continue to circle it until she relaxes just enough so I can push my finger in. I slide my finger in and out, feeling her body

jerk before she grinds into my face. She lets out a keening wail as she gushes all over my face.

“Damn, baby. You’re trying to drown me. What a way to go.” I mumble as I revel in the feel of her essence all over my face.

I lift her up and lay her back on the bed as I go into the bathroom to get a warm washcloth. When I step back in the room, I see her watching me, her eyes glued on my dick, which is an angry purple and leaking cum. He jerks when she licks her lips.

“Baby girl, he’s already mad at me. Stop teasing him.” I warn her. She looks up at me and gives me a gorgeous smile.

“Well, we can’t have him mad. He’s too pretty to be upset. Is he lonely? Because I would love for him to come over and play.” She says as she shifts to all fours and stalks across the bed towards me.

I groan at the sexy image she makes, her gorgeous tits swaying. My knees almost buckle when she leans forward and licks the pre-cum off the head. “Damn, woman.”

“Tell me if I do something you don’t like.” She tells me with complete seriousness.

I want to laugh at the idea she could do anything I wouldn’t like. But as soon as her tiny hand wraps around my dick, my breath whooshes out. Fuck, having her touch me makes me feel like a teenager ready to blow. I grind my teeth together to gain some level of control, almost crushing them when I feel her mouth close around the tip. I can’t stop myself from grabbing her head when she hums. Fuck. She’s killing me. But what a fucking way to go. I slide my hand through her silky hair as she works my cock as if her life depends upon giving me pleasure. Fuck, I’m a lucky man.

I lock my knees to keep myself from fucking her mouth, but that makes me

lightheaded. “Baby, God, that feels amazing, but I’m hanging on by a thread. I’m going to blow if you don’t stop.”

She glances up at me and fuck I almost come at how gorgeous she is with her lips wrapped around my cock, but when she narrows her eyes at me as if I’ve threatened to take away her favorite toy, I can’t stop the pleasure from ripping through me like lightning. “Ok, baby, you want it, you got it. Now swallow every drop.” I order as my balls tighten and the tingle in my spine increases. Too soon, I’m shooting ropes of my cum into her mouth and I watch in awe as she swallows it all. Fuck, have I said how lucky I am?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: ASHLYN

Having my man’s cock in my mouth is equal parts erotic and fucking scary as hell. I know he’s holding back, trying hard to not take over and fuck my mouth. I appreciate his letting me do this at my pace as I explore my man’s reaction to every lick, suck and stroke I give him. When he warns me he’s ready to cum, I scowl at him for thinking that I’d want to stop. I’m proud when I take it all. That isn’t what scares me. No, what scares me is how fucking big he is. I know I’ve seen him naked, seen his cock locked and loaded. But knowing that I can’t get my fingers around his girth and that he stretches my mouth to its limits...

How the fuck is this monster going to fit inside me?

When I wake the next morning, I try to keep as still as possible as I revel in all that is Reaper. The sheet barely covers legs, leaving his long, lean, and muscular body visible to my hungry eyes. My mouth waters as I take in every inch of a body that reminds me of dark, delicious, and expensive chocolate. I feel my body sizzle as I imagine licking every inch of him. My eyes widen as his cock jerks and grows as I watch. Fuck, it is a monster. I must have let out a gasp, because I can feel Reaper’s body rumble with the chuckle that he lets escape.

“Fuck, baby girl. You get me hard just by looking at me. How am I supposed to ride today when you’ve got him so worked up?”

Shifting so I can look up into his soft brown eyes, I bite my lip. “I don’t think he’s going to fit inside me.” I blurt out. Maybe I should feel embarrassment at my words, but this is a genuine concern. “I mean, he barely fit in my mouth.” Reaper lets out a full on belly laugh and while I want to be angry, I’m too memorized by his beauty to work up to a snit. But I can still pout. “I’m just saying…”

He gathers me in his arms and treats me to a sweet kiss. “Baby, I promise you, he’ll fit. Once I’ve given you a few orgasms and your passage is slick, he’ll slide right in. I can’t promise you that there won’t be pain. It’s your first time. But I can promise you I’ll make it as easy for you as I can. The pleasure I give you after the pain will make it all worth it. Trust me?” He links our hands together and kisses my knuckles.

I melt into a puddle.

When he looks at me, I can’t help but smile. Reaper is the one person I can always count on. The one person who never lies to me. Not even to protect my feelings. “Of course I trust you.” I tell him, reaching up to kiss him. “I’ll always trust you. But I still don’t think you’ll fit.”

He tickles me until I’m laughing so hard I’m breathless. Then suddenly he lifts me out of bed to carry me into the bathroom, causing me to squeal in surprise. He settles me so my pussy presses against his cock. The heat of him makes my skin tingle. I wrap my hands around his neck and stare into his beautiful eyes. He’s watching me and not looking where he’s going, but he gets us into the shower without tripping or running into a wall.

Once we’re there, he gently lowers me to the ground so I’m standing in the stream of hot water. I enjoy the feel of the water before turning to grab my shampoo. Reaper

gets there before me. He lathers my hair by running his fingers along my scalp and down to the ends. Each pass is relaxing. I'm almost purring by the time he rinses out the conditioner. With amazing tenderness and care, he lathers my body until I'm so worked up; I want to jump him. So when his fingers pierce me, my body rocks against them. I'll take everything he gives me.

As it is, it doesn't take me long before I'm convulsing through an orgasm that rips through me.

"Fuck." I growl out as my legs almost give out. "Maybe we should just stay here." I mumble.

"In San Diego?" Reaper asks with a smirk.

"No, in this shower." I reply, making him laugh.

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“Come on, sexy girl. I promise you even more fun times when we reach Vegas.” Reaper says as he lifts his body wash to pour some in his hand. I intercept the stream and use it to explore my man’s body.

I’ll never tire of touching the smooth skin that covers his hard muscles. I feel his eyes on me as I caress his pecs before moving down to his abs. After spending a few seconds outlining his abs before shifting around to wash his back. I have to stand on my toes to reach up to wash his broad shoulders before exploring his muscular back. I feel my insides tingle as I explore his glorious ass with my hands. When I run my hand between his firm globes, he groans as his hand smacks against the wall.

“Fuck, baby.” Reaper groans as I let my finger dip into his asshole, causing him to jerk. “Shit. What are you doing to me?”

“Just playing.” I tell him with a giggle as I move down to wash his legs and feet before making my way back to his front. Saving the best for last. I soap up my hands to get them nice and sudsy, grinning at Reaper as I prepare to get his dick squeaky clean. “After all, we don’t want you suffering with a hard cock all the way to Vegas.” I tell him as I use both hands to work him. Once he’s fully erect, I soap up my breasts before kneeling down so I can press them around his pulsing shaft.

“Damn, little girl. You are so sexy. Seeing you down there with my cock between your tits. Fuck. What a gorgeous picture.” Reaper moans as he closes in on his orgasm. “Fuck, baby, yeah, squeeze those tits. I’m close, angel. Just... Oh yeah... Fuck!” Reaper roars out as his cum covers my neck and chest. He grabs me, pulling me up so he can capture my mouth with his. As he devours me, I feel him rubbing his cum over my chest and breasts. He breaks away to wrap his hands around the back of

my neck. “One of these days, I’ll cum all over you and rub it into your body. I want to mark you. Make you smell like me. I want every fucker who comes near you to know you are mine!”

How can something that sounds so dirty be so fucking hot?

“Oh, yeah. Let’s do that.” I tell him. “All of it. I want to do everything with you.” I tell him as he rinses me off before turning off the water.

“Once I claim that pussy of yours, I own you. I’m never letting you go.” Reaper tells me.

“Ok!” I say with all the enthusiasm rushing through me.

He leans his forehead against mine. “You still have time to change your mind.” He whispers as if he’s forcing himself to say the words, almost as if he doesn’t want me to hear them.

I reach up and twist his nipple. Hard. Causing him to jump back with a yelp.

“No more of that bullshit, Reaper. I want you and only you. So knock that off.” I grab a towel to wrap it around my body, ready to stomp off in anger.

Reaper lands a hard smack on my bare butt, causing me to yelp. “Ow.” I say scowling at him.

He grins at me. “You asked for that, baby. I’m claiming you, which means I’ll be smacking that ass anytime I want.”

I feel the wetness threatening to trickle down my leg. Fuck, why does that sound so sexy?

Reluctantly, I dress, my eyes on him as he does the same. Yep, this is what I want every day for the rest of my life.

“I’ll grab you some breakfast.” Reaper says, helping me into a chair next to my brother Flame, who is chowing down on a plate of bacon, eggs, hash browns and toast.

“Hungry?” I ask him when he only offers me a grunt as I take my seat.

“Starved.” He says as he stops long enough to drink some coffee. “I need to get to work.” He watches me as he takes another drink. “You ok with going to Vegas with Reaper?”

I nod and give him a smile. “Can’t wait. I’m excited to meet his uncle. I’ve heard nothing but amazing things about him. Reaper thinks the world of him.”

“Yeah, Puma is pretty great. He’s a monster. He’s at least seven feet tall. When he played for the Suns, he was muscular but nothing like he is now.” Flame says.

“I hope he likes me.” I admit to him.

“He’ll like you because you make Reaper happy. But are you ok with being out of town for a few days?”

“My class doesn’t start for a couple of weeks, so I’m good there. Although, I should call my coach and let him know I won’t be at practice for the rest of the week.” I concede. I pull out my phone and dial Coach Matthews. He doesn’t pick up, so I leave him a message letting him know I’m heading out of town for a few days. To cover my bases, I also call Jessica.

“Hey. What’s up?” Jessica asks when she answers the phone.

“I wanted to let you know that I’m going out of town for a few days. Reaper is taking me to Vegas for my birthday.” I tell her, smiling when I see Flame scowl.

“Wow. Where are you guys staying?” She asks. “Some place with an enormous bed for naughty deeds and a sunk-in tub to recover in after? Then you can hit the casinos and have a nice dinner with lots of alcohol.”

I laugh. “I like the sound of that. May have to drop a few hints. Although I’m not sure I’ll want to leave the room.” Flame’s groan is so loud and so long that I bark out a laugh. “I’m giving my brother nightmares.”

Flame picks his plate up as he rolls his eyes at me. “You’re a pain in my ass.”

I watch Reaper walking toward me, carrying two plates full of food. I’m not sure who he thinks is going to eat the second one. If I do, I’ll fall off his bike in a food coma.

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“Seriously, where are you guys staying?” She asks, drawing my attention back to the phone call.

“I don’t think we’re staying in a hotel.” I tell her. “Reaper’s uncle lives in Vegas. I think we’re staying with him. Although I may run the hotel idea by him. I want at least one night with just the two of us on our own.” I say, giving Reaper a look. He nods to let me know he got the message. “I left a message for Coach Matthews, but can you check with him? Make sure he got it?”

I end the call after she agrees, so I can dig into my breakfast. I guess we worked up an appetite in the shower, because I’m hungrier than I thought.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: REAPER

After breakfast, Ashlyn goes off to pack a bag. We haven’t planned for the length of our trip, except that we won’t be coming back to San Diego until the rest of the club returns from Chicago. I know I can keep her safe in Vegas. We have a plan in place to identify anyone trying to follow us. However, if someone slips our notice, they won’t get to us. Puma’s clubhouse is a fucking fortress.

“You ready?” Chaos asks me as I carry our breakfast plates back into the kitchen.

“Yeah. Just have to load up our bags.” I tell him.

“You can give your bags to Laser. He’s driving the SUV.” Chaos says. “He’ll be a few minutes behind us, watching our backs.”

I nod and head down the hall to get my girl. When I step into my room, I lose my breath. Standing in front of me is my goddess, dressed like every biker's wet dream. I don't know why she decided to change clothes, but hell if I'm not thrilled she did. Her well-worn jeans are no longer blue, but a shade between blue and white. A few tears in the fabric reveal her glowing skin. They hug each curve and since she's turned away from me, I can attest to the phenomenal way they hug her ass. Her long golden hair hangs in a long braid that reaches that perfect ass. Fuck me. When she turns to face me, I fucking lose it all over again.

Her tight Harley Davidson tank shows off her gorgeous breasts while emphasizing her muscular arms. She's not only a goddess, but a warrior. A princess and a fucking badass. And she is all fucking mine.

"Damn, baby." I moan as I wrap my arms around her waist. "You're going to cause accidents on the road."

She looks up at me and grins. "You always make me feel like I'm beautiful."

"You are fucking beautiful. The most beautiful woman I've ever seen." I tell her, capturing her mouth. When she melts into me, I groan. "Fuck woman, we have to go."

I reluctantly release her so I can grab her bag and my own in one hand, while taking her hand in the other. Outside, I find Laser and toss the bags to him. He opens the back of the SUV, shoving them in next to his gun case. Laser is our sniper. He'll play a key role in Chicago, just like he did when we rescued Ashlyn from the Spades.

I mount my bike, then hold my hand out for Ashlyn to climb on behind me. She fastens her helmet as I rev my bike. A sense of peace engulfs me when she wraps her arms around me. I feel the heat of her pussy against my ass. She is my present and my future and I wouldn't have it any other way. I glance in my side mirror as we ride

toward the gate, knowing that the next time we're here, I'll have claimed her completely.

We ride out in formation, a sight that never ceases to send chills through me. As a prospect, I rarely experienced this. Most of the time they delegated me to the SUV with Flame or Ghost at my side. However, since patching in, I've had several opportunities to ride in a group. Being newly patched usually has me bringing up the rear, but Dante wants Ashlyn surrounded. So Ghost and I ride tandem behind Dante and Chaos, with Scar and Byte behind us. Laser will go through the back gate in case anyone is watching us. No one but the Demons know of its existence. He'll travel the same route as we do, but he'll stay several car lengths behind us, until Smoke and Maestro can determine if we have a tail. They'll monitor the traffic cams as we travel through San Diego, then LA.

To keep communication lines open, we're all connected via bluetooth. Even Laser has Smoke and Maestro in his ear.

We're leaving San Diego when Smoke signals that we have a tail.

"Black SUV, California plates, Golf Charlie Delta 7. They're holding at four to six car lengths behind you. Laser, you're another four behind them."

"I see them." Laser chimes in.

I stiffen, waiting to hear the plan. Ashlyn squeezes my side and I know she felt me tense up. I pat her leg to reassure her. She relaxes, but clutches my shirt in her hand. I want to enjoy this ride with her, not deal with assholes. Maybe we should deal with them sooner rather than later.

"There's a gas station outside LA that has a Quick Mart. We could stop there so I can plant one of Byte's toys using the SUV." I offer.

“Let’s do it.” Dante directs.

We continue our trek. We’ve all seen the SUV trailing behind. He hasn’t tried to catch up to us yet, so it looks like he’s planning on following, not attacking.

We pull into the parking lot and head to the pumps for a top off. Ashlyn climbs off to stretch. We’ve been on the road for a couple hours, so I know she’s likely stiff. I pull out some money and lean close to her ear.

“Don’t react, but we’ve got an SUV on our tail. We have a plan, but I need you to be safe. Go inside the store and use the restroom, quickly. Then come back out and stick with Dante and Chaos. I have a job to do, but I’ll join you soon. Ok?”

Ashlyn nods and takes the money before backing away. “I really gotta go, baby. Want me to get you anything?” She asks as she backs away, keeping her eyes on me and ignoring the SUV pulling in. I grin at her. She’s playing her part to perfection. No nerves, just a cool mama on a bike ride with her man.

“Just a candy bar, baby girl. You know what I like.” She gives me a wink as she strolls into the store with Chaos.

The SUV drives by as I unscrew the gas cap on my bike. When it pulls up to another pump, I pretend to ignore them, but I keep watch. I replace the cap and glance around. Laser pulls into the station and I watch him drive around to the back of the store. After parking my bike closer to the entrance, I pass through the store and out the back. I glance around to make sure no one is watching and crawl under the SUV.

As prospects, Ghost, Flame and I built platforms under each club SUV. They hang low enough that we can slide in and ride in relative safety. This lets the driver of the SUV pull up next to a target vehicle and park. The driver stays in the SUV while the rider slides out from under the vehicle. I take my place and signal Laser I’m ready.

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He immediately pulls around to the front.

“See them?” I ask.

“Yeah. There’s an empty spot next to them.”

“Good. Pull in and get out. Don’t look at them. Just head into the store, but without your kutte.”

I feel the SUV stop and hear Laser open the door. He jumps down and walks away. I wait for a few seconds and I’m about to scuttle out when I hear another car door open. The passenger gets out and walks toward the driver’s door of ours. He then kneels down just enough to reach under the chassis. I watch him affix something to the undercarriage before he returns to his car.

“He’s one of them. His vest is on the front seat.” I hear him tell his friend. “I planted...” I don’t hear the rest because he slams his door shut. But I can guess what he’s saying. He planted a tracker. Well, I’ll take care of that, just as soon as I plant our device.

I slide out far enough to reach under theirs to plant Byte’s little prize. It’s a small but powerful electromagnetic bomb. Once the SUV hits fifty miles per hour, it’ll trigger a pulse that will wipe out the vehicle’s electronics, turning it into a worthless box of metal. Before I return to my spot, I yank the device he planted off and pocket it. I’m fairly certain it’s a tracker, but I plan on showing it to Byte.

Laser returns and we do a reverse. He parks behind the store where I can slide out and

go inside. I look through the window to see my girl chatting with Dante and Chaos. Dante is holding her phone and taking pictures of her while she poses against my bike. I tamp down the urge to kill my President and berate my girl, when I notice she has her back to the SUV tailing us. This gives Dante and Chaos a chance to study the men without drawing attention to themselves. I imagine they're also getting some useful images to send to Smoke. Byte is at the counter, so I join him after grabbing a soda. I slide the tracker to him as the kid rings up my purchase. Byte picks it up and studies it, lifting his eyebrow at me in question. I pay for my drink and walk out with Byte.

"It's a tracker." Byte says and I nod.

"Thought so. Asshole One planted it under our SUV before I installed your gift on theirs." I tell him with my back to the SUV in question.

"Want me to turn it off?" Byte offers.

I grin. "Hell no, I think I'll find another vehicle to carry it for us. I'm sure we'll run into an asshole between here and Vegas who could use some trouble."

Byte laughs and shakes his head. "They'll know you have it when we leave."

I shrug. "Just another way to fuck with them."

When we join the others, I wrap my girl in my arms. I lean down to whisper in her ear. "I saw you giving my President and SOA a show. Trying to make me jealous?"

Ashlyn turns to look at me, her eyes wide. "No. I was..."

"I know what you were doing." I assure her. "Just giving you a hard time. Did you get the photos to Smoke? Who's idea was it? Yours?"

She grins and nods, wrapping her arms around my neck. Lifting her up so she wraps her legs around me. When I capture her mouth, I savor her taste and don't stop until I hear the guys whistling. I offer them a smug grin before mounting my bike and helping her to climb on behind me.

We file out of the gas station, leaving Laser behind. He knows the plan. He'll stay out of sight until he sees the other SUV take off. Once they leave, he'll follow. Until Byte's gift delivers.

We're just pulling onto the freeway when Smoke gives us the good news. One black SUV carrying two assholes is now broken down on the side of the highway. One added benefit of Byte's bomb is that their phones no longer work, either. It'll be a while before they get some help.

CHAPTER TWENTY: ASHLYN

Once we're back on the freeway, I feel Reaper's body shaking with laughter. Doesn't take me long to realize their plan must have worked. I didn't realize how tense I'd been until I knew Reaper eliminated the threat. Tightening my arms around Reaper, I squeeze to show him my appreciation. He responds by rubbing my leg.

I relax for the rest of the ride. We're surrounded by desert, so the scenery isn't much, but the blue sky and open vista are relaxing. I'm feeling the miles and desperate for a break. I try not to shift too much and give myself away. The guys want to get to Vegas as quickly as they can. So I'm surprised when they pull off the freeway and stop at a diner.

"Stiff?" Reaper asks me as we disembark.

"Yeah." I respond, stretching.

“You’ve done well.” Dante says. “Five hours on a bike can be hard, especially when you’re a passenger. We’ve got about forty-five minutes to go.”

“We’ll eat and take a break, then it won’t be so hard for the last leg.” Chaos tells me as the server shows us to two booths. Ghost slides into one and I slide in across from him while Scar, Chaos and Dante take the booth across the aisle from us. Byte stops Reaper before he can join me. Reaper reaches into a pocket on his kutte to retrieve something that he gives to Byte.

“What was that?” I ask.

“A tracker those guys put on the SUV.” Reaper says. “Byte wants to examine it.”

“Why did you keep it?” I ask, tweaking my nerves. “Did you turn it off?”

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“No, it’s still functioning. They can’t follow us because we’ve disabled their vehicle.”

“But what if they send someone else?” I press.

Reaper puts his arm around me and hugs me close to his body. I feel calmer, because whenever I’m in his arms, I feel safe. But it’s his words that put my worry to rest.

“Relax, babe. I wasn’t planning on carrying it all the way into Vegas. I’ll either drop it on the side of the road or stick it on another vehicle.” Reaper assures me.

I nod and let out a long breath. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have freaked out.”

“Baby, if you need to freak out, just come find me. I’ll calm you down.” Reaper says, kissing my temple.

“Jeez, really? You two aren’t alone, you know?” Ghost grumbles.

“I didn’t mean it that way, pervert.” Reaper says flipping him off as Laser slides in next to Ghost.

“Who’s a pervert?” Laser asks.

“Him.” Both Ghost and Reaper reply together, making me giggle.

Dante waits until we all place our orders before he gets Laser’s attention.

“What did you see when you passed them?” Dante asks.

“Two very pissed off assholes.” Laser says with a smirk. “I think they knew we did something because they glared at me as I drove past. Although that could have been the one-finger salute I gave them.”

The guys laugh and I notice a few of the other customers casting wary glances at them. The sight of seven massive men in leather and tats draws attention. What I see are seven amazing men who would risk their lives to protect their family. After a while, most of the other customers turn their focus back onto their food. However, one woman continues glaring at us and at me in particular. The man next to her shoots us annoyed looks as he peruses the menu. The couple they’re with has their backs to us. I glare at the woman until she looks away.

After we order, I nudge Reaper so I can get out and use the restroom. I see the two women from the table near ours ahead of me, making the turn down the hall to the restrooms. I pause, debating on returning to my seat and waiting them out when the man grabs the server by her wrist before smacking her ass.

“Thanks, darling. You sure are pretty...” He says as I walk by. I glare at him, but he doesn’t pay me any attention.

In the restroom, I find an empty stall and do my business. As I wash my hands, I spot the two women behind me.

“Does your mother know you’re dating a black man?” She asks. “Maybe you should find yourself a nice white boy instead.”

I glance at her friend to see her looking anywhere but at me. Returning my attention to the rude bitch, I spout off without thinking it through. “You mean like that piece of white filth you’re with? My man is smart, sexy and kind. He’d also never hit on a

server behind my back like your man just did. Maybe you should take a good hard look at your own life before you start bad-mouthing others.”

I push past her and return to my table. Reaper stands just as the bitch comes storming out of the bathroom. I expect her to berate her husband, but she slaps the server and yells at her. “You bitch. You stay away from husband!” Her friend doesn’t return to her seat, instead she moves to the door and beacons her male companion.

The server backs away, cowering as she covers her face with her hand. I move toward her, only to have Reaper pull me back into him. Dante pushes past us.

“You need to leave.” Dante growls as he takes a stand in front of the server. Scar moves to the server and gently pries her hand from her face. He takes a handkerchief from his pocket and dumps a glass of ice water into it before holding it up to her cheek.

“Excuse me?” Shrieks the woman. “We are not leaving. We haven’t had our lunch yet. Maybe this slut can stop flirting long enough to bring us our meals.”

Dante stands tall over the woman and glares down at her. I feel a sense of satisfaction when she pales at the anger on his face. Her husband hasn’t moved.

“We’re just going to go, Sheila, Don.” The second man says after he scoots out of the booth to follow his wife outside.

“You should find yourself better friends.” Chaos tells them as they pass by him.

“Don, do something!” Sheila barks at her husband.

Dante doesn’t wait for the man to stand, but drags him out of the booth. The guy isn’t dainty, but he is all pudge. Dante man-handles him like he’s a ten-pound bag of dog

food. “Get out, both of you, and don’t even think of coming back here. You’re banned.”

“Who the hell do you think you are?” Don finally pipes up.

“I’m Dante, the President of the Demon Dawgs. My Vegas chapter owns this diner. Now get the fuck out before I pick you up and toss you out!”

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The man grabs his wife and drags her out of the restaurant, shooting angry glares back at Dante. They get into a beat up mini van and, with tires squealing, drive out of the parking lot.

“Are you alright, Stephanie?” Dante asks the server. She has unshed tears in her eyes, but she nods. “Put the cost of their food on my tab.” Dante tells her, “and make sure you give yourself a good tip.”

She gives him a soft smile as several of the other customers clap in approval.

Dante turns back to see me still standing next to Reaper. He must see an odd expression on my face because he asks if I’m ok.

“I’m so sorry. That was all my fault.” I blurt out. “She made me so mad, I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“What are you talking about, babe?” Reaper asks me.

“She made a derogatory comment about Reaper and about finding myself a nice white boy. So I told her that Reaper would never hit on a server like her husband just did. I shouldn’t have said anything.” I finish, lamely.

“Never be afraid to stand up for your man.” Dante says, placing his hand on my shoulder. Reaper growls, causing Dante to roll his eyes. When I bark out a laugh, Reaper squeezes me. “I’m serious, Ashlyn. You stood up for yourself and Reaper. I was going to toss them out as soon as I saw him harassing Stephanie.”

“Does Puma really own this diner?” Reaper asks as he waits for me slide back into my seat. I hear the bell on the door chime and turn to see Byte stroll in. I hadn’t even seen him leave.

“No.” Dante says, who returns the nod Byte gives him before turning his attention to a man who comes out of the back. The newcomer stops to talk to Stephanie. Dante stays standing while the rest of us return to our food. I pick up a fry, dip it in ketchup and pop it into my mouth, all the while watching Dante. When the man pats the server on the arm, Dante relaxes a bit. The man looks over at us and comes right to Dante.

“Thank you so much for looking out for Stephanie. She told me what happened. I’m Marco. I own this place.” Marco puts his hand forward for Dante to shake. Dante looks at it and then back at the man.

“You need to do a better job of protecting your staff.” Dante says. “They shouldn’t have to put up with assholes groping them.”

Marco drops his hand and nods. “I know. This was my fault. I was working in my office with the door closed because I needed to concentrate. I won’t do that again. Your meals are on the house. What else can I do to show my appreciation?”

“We don’t need our meals comped.” Dante argues. “We’ll pay. However, I want to make sure that couple never comes back in here.”

“Don and Sheila.” Marco says, nodding. “Don’t worry about that. They’ve always been rude, but I’ve never had a reason to ban them. Until now.”

Dante nods and offers his hand to Marco to shake before he returns to his seat to eat. I grin at him, so he gives me a wink. I turn when I hear Reaper growl again. “You should eat. Your stomach is growling.” I tell him.

“That wasn’t my stomach.” He responds.

“I know. I was hoping you’d take the hint.”

Ghost laughs as Reaper scowls at me before giving me a hard kiss.

“Did you do it?” Chaos asks Byte.

“You bet.”

“Do what?” Laser asks.

“Put that tracking device on Don’s car.” Byte says with a grin.

We finish eating and as we get up to leave; I see Dante hand the server three hundred-dollar bills. She blushes and tries to give them back, but he folds them into her hand and closes her hand with his. He says a few things to her, and she nods before giving him a soft thank you. By the dreamy look on her face, I know she’s fallen a little in love with him. Can’t say I blame her. Dante is hot on so many levels.

When we get outside, I follow Reaper to his bike and climb on behind him. I’m tired and ready to reach our destination, but I know this trip is one I’ll remember for years to come. I just wonder if my life with Reaper is always going to be this eventful.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: REAPER

For the rest of the ride, I think of how Ashlyn defended me to that cunt who suggested she date a white boy. Being black means I’m often on the receiving end of racist comments. I can’t say I’m used to it, but I’m prepared. Knowing Ashlyn defended me against a bigot gives me a sense of pride for my woman. But having her defend our relationship, fuck, that feels good.

When we pull through the gates of the Vegas chapter, the front door opens and Puma comes out. Grimm and Chaos are massive, but next to Puma, they almost seem puny. Puma's over seven feet tall. When he played basketball, he kept his muscles lean. He needed speed over bulk. But after the accident that ended his career, he bulked up. He's fucking terrifying to go up against and I'm grateful we're family. I've always been proud of him. He gives Dante a bro hug before greeting the rest of the guys, but then he turns his attention to me.

"Reaper, those colors look good on you." Puma says, his smile wide on his face. "But this girl is much too beautiful to be on the back of your bike." He laughs before pulling me into a hug and clapping me on the back. He turns to Ashlyn. "You must be Ashlyn. You're Flame's sister, right?"

"I am." Ashlyn says accepting a hug from him. She practically disappears in his arms.

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“You got the looks in the family, thank god.”

Ashlyn laughs as she moves back into my arms. Where she belongs.

“Smoke kept me updated on your progress. Heard you had some trouble at Marco’s?”

Dante tells him about our lunch stop as we move inside.

“So you lost them and then sent them on a wild goose chase?” Puma says with a booming laugh that captures the attention of everyone in the common room, including a little girl.

I hear her squeal with excitement as she races across the room like a tiny pink blur before throwing herself at Scar. Laughing, he picks her up to give her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. He turns and barely keeps her from falling as she launches herself at Laser. “Mommy, mommy, look, it’s Uncle Josh and Uncle Langdon.”

“I see that baby.” Alisa says, moving into Scar’s arms for a hug before turning to hug Langdon. I remember Alisa when I was a prospect. She came to San Diego asking for help, but stunned us all when she told us she was Scar’s wife. Scar married her to offer her protection from some cartel heir who was obsessed with her. I know she agreed to a divorce so Scar could marry Caitlin. “I heard you guys were coming.” Scar and Laser both kiss Alissa on the cheek before she takes her daughter back and turns her attention to us. “You must be Ashlyn.”

I half-listen to Ashlyn and Alisa trade introductions as another woman enters the room. She smiles at Dante, who gives her a hug. She was Caitlin’s art teacher and, as

we found out later, Dante's former high school sweetheart. The same woman Dante's father sold as a sex slave.

"Did you lose the guys tailing you?" Puma asks as he wraps his arms around Alisa. I raise my eyebrow at Puma, who smirks at me. I've spoken to him often over the past few weeks and not once did he tell me he's claimed Alisa as his Old Lady.

"Fairly certain. Smoke monitored their broken down SUV for the rest of our trip here. They walked back to the gas station and made a call. It took a couple hours, but eventually a tow truck and a second SUV showed up. The original two spoke to whoever was in the second vehicle, and a few minutes later, they took off. We think they're trying to pick up the signal from the tracker." Byte explains. "It should take them some time before they figure out we moved the tracker before they extend their search."

"Good. Ashlyn will be safe here. I'm leaving several prospects and patched members behind. You don't have to stay at the compound either. We're part owners of a casino where you can go shopping, gamble or eat without worrying about anyone hassling you." Puma says.

"They have a great spa, too, if you want to have a spa day." Alisa tells Caitlin.

"That would be fun, but I can't really afford it." Ashlyn admits.

Before I can assure that I'll cover anything she wants, Puma speaks up. "None of that. Our women never pay. Reaper will pay." He says, grinning at me.

I laugh and shake my head before pulling Ashlyn back against me. "You better believe I'm paying. This is your birthday trip. I want you to enjoy it. Go shopping and visit the spa. Tomorrow you are all mine. We're spending the day celebrating your birthday."

Ashlyn grins. “Really? Ok, can we go shopping now?” She asks Alisa, who nods.

“Let me get someone to watch Elina and we can head out.” Alisa says.

“Take Showtime and Mad Max with you.” Puma adds.

“Will you guys still be here when we get back, or are you taking off soon?” Alisa asks Puma, her hands grasping the shirt under his kutte.

“We’re leaving around six.” Puma tells her.

“Why so late?” Dante asks.

“Let’s go into Church and we can discuss the plan.” Puma suggests, giving Alisa a kiss before leading the way.

I kiss Ashlyn before handing her my credit card. I’ve never attended Church as a member before, but I’ve been in the room several times. Our Chapel in San Diego pays homage to the city’s Mexican heritage. Vegas offers homage to a very different culture.

The large table in the center of the room once sat in a conference room used exclusively by the mob. Puma bought the table at an auction before having the Demon Dawg logo etched into its surface. On the wall are various photos of locations in and around Vegas that supposedly hold the remains of various mob members. For example, he has an image of Lake Mead because rumor has it the mob used it as their favorite dumping ground. A fact that is being proven true with our latest drought. Puma uses these graveyards to drive home a point. The mob is supposed to be family, but they turn on each other for personal gain. Demon Dawgs are brother by choice and we’d die before we betray our family.

Not sure where to sit, I hang back until everyone has taken a seat. Puma nods his head at a chair near Byte, which I take.

“Need to patch in Smoke.” Byte tells Puma, who nods and gestures to the phone. A few seconds later, Smoke’s on and the meeting gets started.

“What did you find about the guys following Ashlyn?” Dante asks.

“I had to dig deep to get a line on who owns the SUVs. Each one I’ve seen has the same first three letters, GCD. They stand for God’s Chosen Disciples. They’re a religious group based here in San Diego. The leader is a real asshole called Theodore Jordan. He was in the army. They cut him loose when his wife found out he was having an affair with a woman in his unit. Later, they discovered the woman in question wasn’t a willing participant. He raped her repeatedly while several of the men in the unit protected him. The army cut them all loose.”

“So when he was out, he started his own church?” Ghost asks.

“Yeah. White, heterosexual males only. Military experience preferred. No woman. No blacks. No Mexicans. You get the picture.” Smoke says. “Sound familiar?”

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“Sounds like the assholes who attacked our businesses.” I say. “But why are these fuckers targeting us? Wait, wasn’t some religious group one of Renee’s customers?”

“You got it.” Smoke says. “Unfortunately, I think Ashlyn was just the last purchase in a long line of purchases. Maestro and I have been working through Renee’s accounts and her records. We found a pattern that suggests all the purchases made by this group have been women. For those transactions that involve a genuine collectible, she tracks the amount going out for the purchase and ties it to the amount coming in for the sale. However, she has several sales transactions that don’t have a corresponding purchase, only expenses.”

“Because she grabs the women off the street. Fucking bitch. Her expenses would be the drugs she uses to knock them out.” Byte surmises.

“Exactly.” Smoke agrees. “But there’s one more item. After any sale, she has an expense documented as shipping and handling. However, the entries that we think are for the women have considerably higher fees than the items we think are real collectibles. For those, she listed the fees as USPS, UPS, or Fedex. Whereas the fees for the women have TST listed and an account number. Maestro is looking into the account. See if we can find a name or something to work with.”

“You think whoever this TST is, they’re the ones who handed Ashlyn over to Deion?” I ask.

“Probably. Does TST ring any bells with you?”

I consider the initials but I can’t nail down anything. “TS could stand for The Spades,

but I don't know what T would stand for. Maybe The Spades Transport, but I've never heard the term before. Could be something they started after I left."

"Or, it could have nothing to do with them." Dante chimes in, and I nod in agreement.

"I could reach out to someone. He and I still chat once in a while." I offer.

"Let us finish digging on our end." Smoke says. "If we find nothing, then I'll tag you. But one more item. I checked on the holdings for God's Chosen Disciples and they own the flower shop that delivered the flowers to Ashlyn. So that's why they didn't list the buyer."

"Keep digging on Teddy and his church of assholes." Dante says. "We need to know how to protect Ashlyn from them and find out if he's targeting other women. Now, let's move on to Chicago." Dante says, glancing at Puma, who gestures for his Road Captain, Hawk to present the plan.

"The pilot and plane are ready to go. We'll leave here in groups of two, taking different routes to the base. The MP manning Gate Six is has the count and knows to look for our kutties before letting us enter. Once we're in, we'll meet up at the plane to load up our bikes. The plan is to land in Chicago around two am where we'll head to the clubhouse and meet up with others." Hawk explains.

"Laser will be in the SUV. He's bringing his sniper rifle." Scar reminds Hawk, who nods.

"Right, he'll need to stop at the gate and show him his kutte. Shouldn't be an issue." Hawk confirms.

"Why the cloak and dagger?" Chaos asks. "Do you think we're being watched?"

Hawk shrugs. “We don’t know. We’ve kept our eyes open and haven’t spotted anyone paying us special attention, but we’re not taking any chances. If I was Standish, I would have someone watching us. Especially if I believed I’d successfully kidnapped your women.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: ASHLYN

I follow Alisa and Desdemona outside to an SUV similar to the ones used by the San Diego chapter. A prospect is already sitting behind the wheel while a stunning Amazon waits by the open door. I know she’s at least six feet tall. She’s only a few inches shorter than Reaper, and she stands taller than the SUV. Her long blonde hair cascades around slim shoulders.

“Holy shit.” I whisper under my breath, but I guess I wasn’t as quiet as I thought, because Desdemona wraps her arm through mine and laughs.

“Showtime is a former Vegas showgirl. Part of the reason for her name. The other part is that she is ferocious. Puma found her outside the casino after a show. Five guys tried to attack her. He heard the commotion and came to help, only to see her take down the last guy. Puma asked her to prospect, and she accepted.” Desdemona explains.

“I grew up the youngest of six and the only girl. My brothers had no problem wrestling with me. Until I got boobs.” Showtime explains as she closes the door behind us. “This is Max, or Mad Max, as we like to call him.”

I greet Max, but I turn my attention back to Showtime. “Five men attacked you?” I ask her.

She nods. “It was late, and I was heading out to my car when these five idiots tried to make me their victim. They were drunk and stupid, which helped. Like most bullies,

they assumed threatening me was enough to make me wilt in fear. But all it did was piss me off. One thing you need to know about showgirls is we are strong. I was between two SUVs, so they couldn't attack me all at once. Only two at a time. I head-butted one and kicked the other in his junk. Pretty sure I heard a pop, which was satisfying. I enjoyed his scream."

We laugh when Max winces. Showtime taps him on the shoulder. "Sorry, man." She says, and he shakes his head.

"No need to be sorry, the dick deserved it." Max says, grinning at her. "But this story always reminds me to never piss you off."

"Good call." Showtime says before resuming her story. "I throat punched the third guy. The fourth tried to come at me like a bull, so I kneed him in the nose. Blood everywhere. By then Puma arrived, which scared the fifth guy so much, he wet himself. I slammed my forearm into his throat when he tried to run past me. It was very satisfying."

We laugh as Mad Max turns onto the strip.

"Where are we going?" I ask Alisa.

"Puma's club is part owner of a boutique casino. It's small, but has a unique flair. They call it 1%." Alisa explains.

I'm not sure what she means, but I get it as soon as we walk into the main lobby. It's a biker's casino. Hard rock pours out of the speakers. Various designs cover the surface of the concrete floor, like tattoos. In the center is a massive Demon Dawgs logo. But I can see other biker logos decorating the floor.

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“Are all the other logos legit?” I ask Alisa, who nods.

“Puma reached out and got approval from clubs around the US. The Demon Dawgs own most of Las Vegas, but this casino is an homage to the history of motorcycle clubs. Any club is welcome as long as they maintain the peace.” Showtime tells me. “I’ve met a few guys from other clubs and mostly, they’re friendly. I’ve had a few explain to me why women aren’t good enough to be anything more than Old Ladies or bunnies. But they change their tune when Chill joins the conversation.”

“Chill?” I ask. I know I haven’t met very many members of Puma’s club, but I know I haven’t meant anyone going by the name of Chill.

“She’s his SOA. Like Chaos is for Dante. She’s a cold-hearted bitch and I say that with all the respect and admiration that I can offer. She’s the ultimate badass.” Showtime says with complete admiration.

I ponder her statement and think about Izzy. She’s neither an Amazon nor a cold-hearted bitch, but I’m certain she’ll make a brilliant prospect and eventually a patched member.

Alisa leads us through the casino that is all black, chrome, and glass with splashes of red. Gorgeous motorcycles, mostly Harleys, are on display in glass cubicles. They sparkle and shine like everything else. The cocktail servers are all dressed like bikers. The women wear leather pants or skirts, boots, and tank tops while the men wear jeans, motorcycle boots and blank leather kutties over bare chests. They all give off a sexy and dangerous vibe.

A minor commotion stirs up near the blackjack table. One player grabs the ass of his server. She backhands him, so he falls off his stool as she walks away. I watch the man protest as two bouncers grab the guy under the arms and drag him out of the casino.

I snort out a laugh that has Showtime grinning. “Puma doesn’t put up with any bullshit like that. He’s all about respect. It works both ways. If an employee hassles a guest without provocation, he’d send them packing.”

“Where are we going?” I ask as we pass by the shops. I thought we’d come here to shop, but maybe I misunderstood.

“Spa first.” Desdemona tells me. “Have to get you all shiny for Reaper before we look at clothes.”

We step into a salon that looks like a tattoo parlor, but instead of ink and tattoo guns, the stylists have scissors, dyes, and combs. Although I hear the whir of a tattoo gun nearby. The stylists all look like they’re ready to whip out their guitars and shred them. I stutter step because I’m not sure I want to wear some of their styles. I don’t have a problem with purple and green Mohawks, but I’m certain I don’t want to have one when I attempt to seduce Reaper.

“They’re qualified stylists.” Desdemona assures me. “They dress the part. Funny how many regular people get a kick out of being styled by a badass biker.”

As I’m studying the various characters, one of them walks up to us. He’s fucking gorgeous and I can see why a woman would want him to be her stylist. He’s not wearing a shirt, only a leather kutte with no rockers. At least I don’t see any, because I’m too busy checking out his abs. Fuck, he’s built. He’s also wearing skintight leather pants that emphasize the size of his package. I blush when he beams at me and I know he’s caught me ogling him.

“Desdemona and Alisa, you two look gorgeous, as always. I see you brought me a virgin to play with.” His deep voice booms, and I hear a few snickers from the stylists standing close to us. I can’t stop the blush and I wonder how he knows I’m a virgin.

“He means a virgin in that you’re a new customer.” Desdemona whispers to me.

I nod to let her know I’ve heard her and give him a smile. “That’s me.” I tell him, trying to keep my voice steady.

He laughs again before taking my hand in his. “Let Nicholas take care of you, angel.” He says as he pulls me toward an empty chair. “You need very little work. You’re young and gorgeous. But we can always add some spice.” He whips a leather-like cape over me as he makes eye-contact in the mirror. “Tell me about yourself, honey.” He asks.

As he washes my hair, I spend a few minutes telling him how I play soccer, am going to school to get my degree in accounting, my family and my relationship with Reaper. I watch as he snips and styles my hair into a look that has me grinning. By the time he’s done, I’m a warrior queen. I look at my hair and how it flows away from face to make me look strong and powerful.

“Absolutely perfect.” Desdemona says, peering at me from one side while Nicholas finishes his touchups. “You look fierce.”

“I feel fierce.” I say in awe.

“Excellent!” Nicholas says, removing the cape and helping me step down. “Now all you need is your armor and you’ll be ready for the battle ahead.”

I raise my eyebrow at him in question. What battle?

“Honey, you’re a young, beautiful woman who knows her mind. Most men out there can’t handle a woman like you. You frighten them, so they’ll try to tear you down. You don’t let them!”

I can’t help but smile at Nicholas’s pep talk as Desdemona and Alisa lead me out of the salon after Showtime covers the charge and the tip. They whisk me into a nearby store with trendy and fabulous outfits on display. The two of them take turns selecting items for me to try on. None of them hit the mark, so we keep looking. When Alisa holds up a dress the color of bronze, I feel a tingle. It shimmers under the light and the material appears fluid. Like it’s made of liquid metal. It beacons to be touched and caressed. It is exactly what I want Reaper to do when he sees me in it.

I almost snatch the dress out of her hands so I can try it on. I take a few tries to figure out how the dress works. I’ve never seen a dress with so many angles, slits and straps. But I finally have it on and I’m speechless. I don’t have many curves. I’m tall and playing soccer keeps me thin, but this dress makes me feel curvy and sexy. It barely covers my breasts, making them look full and ripe. It’s backless, so my arms and back are on full display. The body of the dress nips in at the waist and in the ass. From there, the dress has two panels, one in the back and one in the front. Allowing my legs to play peek-a-boo on the sides. If I stand still, the dress forms a column that makes me look tall and elegant. Until I move, then I’m sexy and alluring.

“Come on, come on.” Desdemona calls out. “We want to see it!”

I step outside the dressing room and watch their jaws drop.

“Holy shit. You have to buy that dress.” Desdemona says.

“Reaper is going to cum in his pants.” Alisa says with a nod.

“You look like a fucking warrior.” Showtime says with a grin. “All you need is red

hair, and you'd be Boudicca come back to life."

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I smile at them and nod. This is the dress. I can't wait to see Reaper's expression when he sees me in it.

"Shoes." Desdemona says before leaving the store and returning a few minutes later with a store clerk carrying three boxes.

"Stunning." The clerk says as she lowers the boxes to a nearby table. "I have just the shoes to go with it." She pulls out a pair of high heels that make my feet ache to look at them. However, they are the same shade of bronze as the dress and look amazing next to it. I slip them on, ready for the pain, but I'm pleasantly surprised when they actually feel comfortable.

"These feel amazing, they're comfortable." I say with surprise, and the clerk grins.

"They are, aren't they?" She says, giving me a wink. "The designer's name is Vega. She's fairly new to the business, but I think she's going to be a great success. Her designs are sexy, but since she's a woman, she insists on them being comfortable as well."

I remove them, and as I hand them back to her, I spot the price tag. My heart sinks. They're much too expensive. I'm sure the dress is as well.

"I don't think I can afford them." I say, trying to keep the sadness from creeping in. I know Reaper gave me his credit card, but I can't imagine spending this much on one outfit.

"Nonsense." Alisa says. "Puma is paying. He told me to buy whatever you wanted for

your birthday. So wrap up the shoes and the dress. No way are you leaving here without them. I know Puma would agree. But we aren't done."

"No, we have to be done. I feel guilty enough. The makeover, the dress and the shoes..." I shake my head. "This is all too much."

"One more stop. It's a necessity. You can't wear this dress without getting waxed!" Desdemona says, as if she's offering me a treat instead of a threat.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: REAPER

Before we leave Church, Scar turns to Puma and asks him about Alisa and Elina and if there has been any movement from Juan Gutierrez.

"Juan's been silent since our return from Yuma." Puma tells him. "It's possible he doesn't know Alisa is here with me. Although, she doesn't stay in the clubhouse all the time. She and Desdemona go out quite a bit. So it isn't like she's in hiding. I think Juan's father, Sal, is keeping him on a short leash."

"What about Diego?"

"He's here. He lies low because he doesn't want the cartel to know he's still alive. Alisa has power of attorney over her father's assets, so she's handling his businesses and investments for him. We're hoping it keeps the cartel, and especially, his brother Don, from figuring out he's alive. Although, I think Sal knows the truth, and is ignoring it for now."

"Why would he do that?" Dante asks.

"We move large quantities of his product and he knows he can trust us. This makes him less inclined to cause us problems." Puma says. "However, it won't last long

because we're making a move. Our club took a vote after Yuma to turn legitimate. We like what you guys have in San Diego. We've established several new businesses. Profits increase each month. The casino is our biggest draw and its earnings are almost enough to replace the income from selling drugs. We aren't ready to pull the plug yet, but we're close. I'm expecting to lose Sal's support when we do. Which means Juan will come hunting for Alisa."

"You think Sal will retaliate? You have our help if you need it." Dante offers and Puma nods in thanks.

"I have a plan that will hopefully keep Sal from turning on us. We owned the drug trade in Vegas, but we're now working with another MC to have them take over. The Shadow Borns sell the drugs that we buy from the cartel. We're vetting them so Sal doesn't have to do it."

"Shadow Borns? Their President is Trouble, right?" Chaos asks.

"You know him?" Puma asks.

Chaos nods. "Yeah, I do. He prospected for Acid when I was in high school. They didn't get along. In fact, Acid is the one that gave him the name Trouble. He told him he was nothing but trouble."

"That could be good or bad." Dante says with a laugh. Chaos nods while Puma smirks.

"His club isn't like ours, that's for sure, but he seems trustworthy. I'll let you know how it goes."

"But you think once you're no longer in business with Sal, that he'll give the green light to Juan to go after Alisa again?" Scar asks.

Puma scowls. “I don’t know. If the bastard comes near her, I’ll kill him. If she would just agree to be my Old Lady, this wouldn’t be a problem.”

“You’ve asked her?” I ask in surprise.

“I’ve suggested it, but she doesn’t think it’s necessary.” Puma admits.

“Do you love her?” I push.

“Hell, I don’t know. She drives me crazy. Every time I think we’re making progress, she puts the brakes on. Sometimes she even reverses. She can’t decide if I’m offering her my help just because Scar asked me to do it or because I really want to help her. Then she can’t decide if she’s asking too much of me by forcing me to settle down. I get it. She knows I’ve had more than my fair share of women. Not only did I have all the pussy I wanted while playing ball, but I get even more now that I’m the President of this chapter. No matter what I tell her, though, she doesn’t get that she’s it for me.”

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I can hear the aggravation in Puma's voice, and I feel for him. He's paying a tough price for all the women he's had in his life. It makes me grateful for Ashlyn. I've had a few women, but nowhere near as many as Puma. I still get hit on because I'm a biker and some women just can't resist the temptation, but again, nowhere near the number that Puma attracts every damn day.

"I could talk to her." Scar offers. "See where her head is?"

Puma slaps Scar on the shoulder, and I have to swallow my chuckle when I see Scar wince. "Nah, man. We'll figure it out. Can't blame her for doubting me. Never had to convince a woman that I want her for more than one night before. I lack that particular skill set. I need the practice."

Dante shakes his head as we step into the common room. I glance around, looking for Ashlyn, but I don't see her.

"Women aren't back yet?" Puma asks the prospect behind the bar.

"Not yet, Prez." He replies. "Showtime called and said they're almost done. One more stop and then they're heading back."

Puma nods as he pulls me over to join him at a table. "You and Ashlyn. Long haul?" Puma asks and I nod.

"She's the one. I can't imagine being with anyone else." I tell him.

"Last time we talked, you weren't sure about her." He reminds me.

I shake my head and lean back in my chair, gathering my thoughts. “Not that I doubted my feelings for her, or her feelings for me. Being with me won’t make her life easier.” I tell him honestly.

“Fuck that shit.” Puma snarls. “Do you really think that matters to her? What kind of bullshit, prissy bitch, do you take her for?”

Most people would start running when Puma bares his teeth, but I know he’d never really hurt me. I just laugh. “That was pretty much her reaction when I told her my concern.”

“Look, she’s a smart girl. She knows what she’s getting herself into. The world right now is full of hatred pointed our way. Not only are we black, but we’re not exactly model citizens. You don’t think she faces her own trials as a woman in this world? Most men are wimps who hate themselves and hate their lives. Instead of focusing on improvements, they tear others down. You be the man to build her up and support her and she’ll give you that back and more. That girl is a fucking warrior, and you’re fucking lucky to have her at your side.”

Nodding, I give him a wide smile. “I’m not pushing her away. I promise. Flame wasn’t too happy about my being with his sister, but he’s cool about it now. He knows I’ll take care of her. That I’ll do whatever is necessary to make her happy.”

“Good man. I understand tomorrow is her birthday. You have something big planned for her?”

“Her twenty-first.” I tell him, grinning. “Made hotel reservations at 1%, including dinner reservations for the restaurant, Blacktop. Drinks and gambling are on the schedule.”

He nods in agreement. “Good man. Treat her like a queen.”

“That’s the plan.” I see Hawk glance at Puma to get his attention. “You guys taking off?”

Puma glances over at his road captain and nods slowly. “Looks like it. I hoped to wait until Alisa got back, but we gotta get going.”

“Good luck.” I tell him. “Go get the bastards.”

“It’s a good plan. We should be able to take them by surprise.” Dante says as he comes to join us.

I watch the guys take off in groups of two and consider riding out with them to make sure no one follows, but Hawk assures me they already have a plan in place to track the guys and monitor their progress. With Ashlyn still out, I head to my room to relax and wait for her.

The room I have at Puma’s club is similar to the one I have in San Diego. Meaning, it lacks personality. But no one uses it when I’m not around. When I left the Spades, I stayed here for four months before returning to San Diego to prospect for Dante. I haven’t been back since the day I left for San Diego.

I open the closet to see if I can find something to wear for Ashlyn’s birthday. While I primarily wear jeans and t-shirts now, I used to dress better when I ran with the Spades. I had the money to splurge on clothes. Deion liked to hit the clubs, so I had some fancy threads. Being part of the Demons, I traded my silks for cotton and never looked back. I paw through the clothes and it feels like I’m looking through a photo album. Images of nightclubs and late night parties flicker through my memory. I pull out a few suits and try them on. Some are too snug, seeing as I’ve bulked up since I last wore them, but luckily I find a black suit with a royal blue silk shirt to wear underneath. I skip the tie, because who willingly wears a noose around their neck?

I hang the suit back up and, as I'm closing the door, I spot a black duffle bag on the floor. Since I don't recognize it, I grab it. Memories flood through me as soon as I zip it open. The sound of two gunshots coming from inside what was supposed to be an empty house. The door flying open as the kid stumbles out. On his face is a mixture of anger and fear as he pushes toward my car. He gestures me back when I move to help him, even as he stumbles against the passenger door. Another gunshot draws my attention to the house. I see a man standing with his gun aimed at the kid's back. I shoot at him to cause a distraction, allowing the kid enough time to slide into the front seat. I slam my foot on the accelerator and haul ass down the residential street, tires squealing as I take the corner hot.

Fuck.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: ASHLYN

When we arrive back at the clubhouse, we find the place almost empty. The prospect behind the bar is chatting with Hawk, the Road Captain, and Spark, their tech guy. But we don't see anyone else. None of the guys from San Diego are around, not even Reaper.

"Where is everybody?" I ask Hawk.

"On their way to Chicago." He responds. "They all made it to the plane with no incidents."

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I feel my eyebrows raise because I'm surprised he told me all that. I'm not an Old Lady or a member of the club. He smirks at me.

"It's club business, but I figure Reaper will tell you." Hawk replies. "Besides, this mission affects those you care about."

I nod in agreement. "Where is Reaper?"

"I think he's in his room. He went back there as everyone was leaving and I haven't seen him since."

I carry my garment bag along with my other bags to our room. When I enter, I see Reaper sitting on the bed, his head in his hands as he stares into a black duffle bag sitting open on the floor in front of him. When he doesn't glance up, I set everything down and move closer to him. Placing my hand on his back, he jolts in surprise. His tear-stained face leaves me terrified.

"Are you alright? Did something happen to Puma and the guys?" I ask, wondering how he would hear before Hawk and Spark.

"What?" He asks, running his hand down his face. "Puma? No, he's fine. I think. I don't know. They just left. I think." He shakes himself before focusing on me. "Sorry. I didn't know you were back. How long have you been here?"

I frown at his ramblings but answer him. "We just got back. Hawk said everyone got off ok and they're on their way to Chicago. But you aren't ok, what's wrong?"

He takes a deep breath before shifting so his back is against the headboard. He pulls me onto his lap so he can bury his head in my hair. “I’m ok. Just had a flashback that knocked me sideways.”

“Something to do with the bag?” I ask, glancing down to see a jumble of clothes and what looks like the handle of a pistol. I get a whiff of some smell, but I can’t place it. “What’s in there?”

“I forgot about that bag.” Reaper says, glancing over and down, his eyes cloud over with some memory. “Just found it when I was looking for something nice to wear for your birthday dinner.”

“So the bag is yours and it’s been here since when?” I ask.

He shifts me so I’m sitting next to him, then he leans over and lifts the bag to set it on the bed.

“Wait!” I tell him, causing him to freeze. I jump off the bed and return with a towel. I place it on the bed so he can lay the bag on it.

“Good idea.” He says. “I can’t remember all that is in here, but from the smell, I know the clothes have blood on them.”

“Blood from what? Or better question, who?” I ask, sitting on the bed again and glancing inside the bag, unable to keep my lip from curling in disgust.

“His name was Wylan Oaks.” Reaper says, pulling out a wallet. “I didn’t know I had this.” He opens the wallet and pulls out a California driver’s license and hands it to me. The photo is of a young man with dreadlocks piled on top of his head, the sides shaved short. He’s smug smile makes me grin. But I remember Reaper’s words. This is a photo of a dead man.

“What happened to him?” I ask Reaper in a soft tone. I feel like this is his memory and while I want to push the narrative forward, I don’t want to jar him.

“He wanted to join the Spades. I never understood why. He wasn’t like me or the other guys.”

“What do you mean?”

“I wanted to join because I was angry. Angry at the world after my arrest. I decided that if they were going to see me as a criminal, I might as well be one.” Reaper responds, shaking his head. “I was young and stupid.” He leans over and kisses my temple. “I’m so glad I didn’t meet you back then. I think I would have driven you away.”

I lean into him to give him my strength. “And the others?”

“They were in it for the money and the violence. They wanted to terrorize the city and have people fear them. But Wylan wanted something else. I don’t know what, but he came to us looking for something. I never discovered what that something was. Every new member has to prove themselves before they can join. I think I told you that Deion asks all the newbies to record themselves stealing something of value. This way, Deion gets something to sell, and he gets proof to keep the members under his control.”

“Which is why you pretended to steal something of value from Puma?” I contribute.

Reaper nods and gives me a slight grin. “Yeah. Deion switched things up, he wanted a current member to monitor the initiation. Make sure the candidate goes into a place and comes out with something of value and the recording. I volunteered to monitor Wylan. I honestly didn’t think he’d go through with it. He didn’t have the same drive as the others. Something was off about him and I knew if one of the other guys went

with him, they might kill him.”

“Did you think he was an undercover cop or something?” I ask, not sure where he’s going with the story.

Reaper frowns in thought, but then shakes his head. “No, I didn’t think he was a cop. It was more like he was searching for something. Some guys joined because they were from broken homes or lived with parents who either didn’t care about them or were too busy to pay attention to them. Wylan was seeking something, but I don’t think it was a pseudo-family he was searching for. I don’t know how to explain it. It was just a feeling I had.”

“So you went with him that night?” I push.

“Yeah. Deion, let you select your own target or he’d choose one for you if you didn’t have one in mind. Wylan already had a target selected. I drove that night and he directed me to a house in one of the nicer neighborhoods. He went in and I waited for him across the street. A few minutes after he entered, I heard gunshots. I didn’t really think about what to do. I started the car and drove to the front of the house. Wylan came staggering out.” He stops and I can see the vein in his neck pumping faster and faster and a dark stain on his shirt.

“What happened?” I whisper.

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“He ran to me and stumbled. I stepped out of the car, pulling out my gun. Just as Wylan got to the car, I shot at the homeowner to distract him. Wylan dove into the front seat and I took off. That’s when I realized Wylan was struggling to breathe. When we got under a street lamp, I saw blood on his shirt. I knew I had to take him to the hospital, so I drove straight there and helped him into the ER. I gave them a story about finding him when I was driving over to my girlfriend’s house.”

“They believed you?”

“Hell no, but they saw he was in terrible shape, so they took him into surgery. Told me to wait. I slipped out when they weren’t looking. Once I was back in the car, I drove straight here. Threw everything into this bag before Puma scraped the car. I never even looked inside the bag, just shoved it into the closet and forgot about it. I can’t believe I forgot about it. If someone searched the clubhouse, they would have found it.”

“Let’s go through it together. You can get rid of anything incriminating.” I tell him, reaching toward the bag.

Reaper stops me. “Don’t touch anything. Let me do it. You shouldn’t have to deal with this.”

“I want to help.” I tell him. “But I’ll let you go at your own speed.”

He reaches in and pulls out the gun first. After removing the bullets, he breaks it down. He lays the pieces on the towel next to the bullets. “Registration marks are gone. I wonder where Wylan got an unregistered gun?” He’s talking more to himself,

so I don't respond, but let him continue his search. He pulls out a jacket. "This was Wyland's. He left his jacket along with his wallet in the car. I remember the wallet falling out when I dumped everything in here."

I glance into the bag and see something. "Is that a laptop?" I ask. "Do you think that's what he stole?"

Reaper frowns as he pulls out a Dell laptop. "I guess. I know he didn't have it when he went in. What a weird thing to steal. Deion wouldn't have accepted it. It's not worth much."

He opens it and tries to power it up, but of course it's dead. "I'll see if Spark has a power source. Maybe he can gain access. Discover why Wyland grabbed it." He reaches back into the bag and returns with an older iPhone. "This was Wyland's phone. He would have had recorded his theft on it." Reaper shifts to grab his phone. He unplugs it from the charger and plugs the other phone in. "There's no passcode. That's helpful. And here's the video from that night."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: REAPER

"Deion, if you're watching this, then the first thing you need to know is that I don't want to be part of your gang. I'm here in this house to gather the evidence I need to end you, your gang, and the asshole who lives here. You don't think I know the truth, but I do. You and your fucking gang kidnapped my sister and sold her to this asshole. He raped her, stole her virginity and destroyed her. Her name is Vivienne Claymore. She's in a mental institution, unable to speak because of what you fuckers did to her. Now I'm getting the proof I need to take you all down."

Ashlyn leans closer to me. I feel her arm on my shoulder and her hand on my thigh, but her touch is more like a memory than reality. Because this video is a fucking nightmare. Wyland continues down the hall until he reaches an office. He scans around

the room until he spots the laptop. He picks it up before moving again. At first, all I can hear is his labored breath, but then I hear voices. I can't make out what they're saying until Waylon pushes open a door.

"When is she waking up?"

"Soon. Renee gave her the same dosage as usual. They're typically out for about 45 minutes. I picked this one up about twenty minutes ago. I'd give it another fifteen minutes and she'll be ready to play." Trask responds.

Two men stand next to a couch where a beautiful young girl lays unconscious. her black, curly hair partially covers her face, which is pale under her dark skin. She's naked except for her bra and panties. I only recognize one man. Trask. The other is an average looking white dude in his forties.

A muted curse from Wylan draws the attention of the two men. Trask swivels as he reaches for his gun. Wylan turns to run. The video blurs as gunfire and shouting pour into the room. I hear myself yelling and another gunshot as Wylan dashes to my car and dives into the front seat, where he drops the phone. I see blurry images of the inside of my car as I hear myself cussing while Wylan drifts in and out of consciousness. The video cuts off several minutes after I drag Wylan out of the car at the hospital.

"Fuck." I blow out as I lean back against the headboard, bringing Ashlyn with me.

"Well, now we know how Trask waylaid me that night." Ashlyn says.

I look down at my girl and shake my head as I stare at her beautiful face. I watch it shift from questioning to confused.

"You don't think Trask was working with the same Renee who drugged me?" She

asks me. “Isn’t that too big of a coincidence?”

I stare at her as her words sink in and though I have a mild urge to laugh, I’m too sad to manage it. “No, babe. I think you’re exactly right. Trask and Renee were working together.”

“Then why did you shake your head at me when I suggested it?” Ashlyn asks, smacking my stomach with her hand.

This time, I manage a small grin. “I wasn’t shaking my head at your theory, you crazy woman. I was shaking my head because I don’t deserve to have a woman as smart as you.”

Now she shakes her head. “You’re an idiot.”

“That’s what I was saying.” I tell her, capturing her hand before she can smack me again. I lift it to kiss her knuckles and then hold her palm against my face. “All this time, I had this and didn’t know. Fuck, how many women have suffered because of me?” The guilt crushes me as I think about the girl in the video. I wonder whatever happened to her.

Ashlyn shifts until she straddles me. She places both her hands against my face to force me to look at her. “You listen to me, Reaper. You didn’t know. If Wylen had confided in you, I know you would have gone in there, guns blazing, to get her out. You would have helped him get the proof he needed.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t do either of those things. I ran and hid.” I admit, feeling hopeless.

“Hey!” Ashlyn barks at me. “You were on your own, up against the entire gang for all you knew. What if you had seen this video back then? What would you have done? Taken on the Deion and all his men by yourself?”

I pull her down until I can feel her heart beating against me. Breathing in her scent calms me and helps me think. “I was on my own, but I still could have done something. If I’d just known. If I’d just taken a few minutes to review this recording.”

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“But you didn’t. You can’t change the past, Reaper, but there is nothing stopping you from using this to take down Trask. You have Smoke, Byte, Maestro and Spark. They can help you access the laptop. They can help you find the other man. Hell, they may even find the girl.” Ashlyn says. “Trask needs to pay for what he’s done, and he might help us identify who bought me.”

I suck in a breath. “You’re right. He worked with Renee, so he likely knew most of her customers.” I give her a kiss. “TST.” I mumble.

“What?” Ashlyn asks, her forehead wrinkling in confusion.

“Smoke found an account of Renee’s that was listed as TST. The Spades - Trask. I bet that’s what it stands for. On the video, Trask mentioned transporting other girls that Renee drugged. He was her deliver guy.” I snag her around the middle so I can lift us both up off the bed. After shoving Wylan’s gun into my nightstand, I take Ashlyn’s hand. “I have to talk to Spark and Smoke. They can hack the laptop and they need to watch the video Wylan took. Come on, baby.”

I drag her out to the common room and hand her over to Alisa and Desdemona. “Get something to eat, babe, and get some rest. Regardless of what we find tonight, tomorrow is your birthday and I’m going to make it one you’ll never forget.” I plant a hard kiss on her lips before I head to find Spark.

“I have something you and Smoke need to see right away.” I tell him. He nods at me before downing his beer.

“Let’s go to my office and we’ll patch Smoke in.” Spark says.

“Holy shit, where did you find this?” Smoke asks after he, Spark and Maestro finish watching the video.

I give them a rundown of how I found the video in the duffle bag. “I have the gun Wyland had with him that night. It’s unregistered. I don’t know why he didn’t use it.”

“Once the bullets started flying at him, he probably panicked.” Smoke says.

“Yeah, like I did.” I admit, still unable to shake how poorly I handled the situation.

“Fuck that.” Spark says. “I was here that night when you arrived. It was the first time you were ever in a gunfight, the first time someone shot at you. Stop beating yourself up. You distracted the shooter long enough to get you both to safety. Sometimes that’s all you can manage.”

“Reaper, knock it off. If you were in the same position today, you’d handle it differently. Look back on everything you’ve learned since that night and recognize the situation for what it was. Fucked up. So stop and let’s get to work. Because I have news. I think this asshole with Trask is the guy who bought Ashlyn.”

This grabs my attention and I force all feelings of guilt and inadequacy back down. I may have to deal with them later, but right now, my feelings aren’t important. Ashlyn is where my focus needs to be now.

“No fucking way.” I blurt out. “Are you certain?”

“Fairly certain. Here, look at these images and compare them to the asshole in the video.” Smoke says just as two photos show up on the screen in Spark’s office. One is the shot of a man standing in front of a crowd of people sitting in the audience. In the video, he’s dressed down in khakis and a sport shirt while in the photo, he’s wearing a suit and tie with his hair slicked back. While it looks like him, it’s the

second photo that leaves no doubt. Not only does he look more like the guy in the video, but he's standing in front of the house that haunts my dreams. He's standing in front of the same door that Wylan exited as he ran for his life.

"Fuck, that's him. That's the house, too." I tell my brothers.

"That is Theodore Jordan. The so-called minister who started God's Chosen Disciples. We found out more about him. He's the son of a prostitute who died of a drug overdose when he was thirteen. A preacher took him in. But not just any preacher. This preacher, who is the minister of Pious Life Church, already had a son a few years younger than Teddy. His name was Ron Chaney. We called him Nerd."

"Son of a bitch." I whisper as everything comes full circle. The asshole who raped and murdered five women before we took him down knows the asshole who is after my woman. What a fucking small world.

"Nerd's the one who attacked Tamara before she moved here?" Spark asks me and I nod.

"Yeah. He's the one who also raped Caitlin and kidnapped Tally." I explain. "He's dead, but fuck, now we're dealing with his foster brother?"

"Shield said we needed to watch Nerd's father, said the man was a real bastard with backward and dangerous views about women." Smoke says.

"Do we have eyes on Jordan?" I ask.

"You bet. Izzy and Cole are taking turns watching him." Smoke says.

"What about the Spades? Anyone have eyes on Trask?" I ask. "Fuck, we need more prospects."

Smoke laughs. “Yeah, I can’t believe we only had three of you at one time.”

“We were the best.” I say, rubbing my nails against my kutte, causing both Smoke and Spark to snort.

“We have eyes on Deion and Trask.” Smoke says. “Some buddies of Simon are thinking of prospecting. Grimm figured we’d use them to help keep watch on the Spades.”

“I might know of a way to get more information.” I muse. “Killian Stokes is Deion’s cousin, and I’m still friendly with him. He isn’t part of the gang, but he is their money guy. Killian cleans money better than anybody, and Deion relies heavily on him. He might know if Deion was getting money from Renee.”

“Would he tell you?” Spark asks with some doubt.

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I nod. “Yeah, he would. His sister is a therapist who works with rape victims. They’re close. She practically raised him. She’s why he never officially joined the Spades. He would never condone the crap Renee was doing to other women.”

“Call him.” Smoke orders.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: ASHLYN

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Ashlyn

“What’s wrong with Reaper?” Alisa asks as I join her and Desdemona.

“He’s upset and angry with himself.” I reply honestly and then tell them about his discovery of the duffle bag and its contents.

“Poor guy.” Desdemona says. “The guys will help him discover the truth and they’ll put an end to it.”

I nod, hoping that’s true. “I hope so. He’s taking it hard. Thinking he could have saved that girl and any others that might have been that bastard’s victims since that night.”

Desdemona nods. “I know what’s that like. I still feel guilty about my former roommate, Krista. If it hadn’t been for me, she wouldn’t have been at that party. I thought when I was free of Miguel, I could use my fame and money to find her. But

so far, no such luck.”

“You can’t let the guilt weigh you down.” Alisa says. “And Reaper needs to know that, too. It can crush you. Believe me. I know Elina’s father died because he was married to me. Landon and Josh have tried to keep the truth from me, but I know. I’m doing everything I can to keep Juan from hurting anyone else I care about.”

“Is that why you won’t give in to Puma?” Desdemona asks her. “To keep him safe? Because I have to tell you, you’re just pissing him off and you’re missing out on what could be an amazing life. If anyone can hold his own against Juan, it’s Puma.”

“I don’t want to see Puma hurt or killed and if either happened to him because of me...” Alisa shakes her head as she wipes away a lone tear. Both Desdemona and I each grab one of Alisa’s hands. Alisa gives ours each a squeeze before letting go. “Ok, enough about sad stuff. Tomorrow is your birthday and I have something for you.” She says, putting a wrapped present on the table. “This is from Elina and me, but don’t worry, she didn’t help pick it out.” She assures me, which kind of has me questioning what it could be.

“This one is from me.” Desdemona says, putting hers next to Alisa’s. “Well, me and Diego.” She says, gesturing toward Alisa’s father who is sitting at the bar with his back to us.

“Thank you!” I tell them. “But you guys didn’t have to get me anything. Taking me out today and helping me get ready for tomorrow is enough.”

“Nonsense.” Desdemona says. “Besides, these aren’t just gifts, they’re necessities.”

I’m curious about what I’ll find inside these brightly wrapped packages. Taking Alisa’s present first, I open it to find a set of brass knuckles. “Uh, thanks.” I say, turning them over in my hand.

“It’s also a switchblade.” Alisa explains, taking it from me and holding it so I can see what she’s doing. She slips the knuckles onto her fingers before using her thumb to flick open the blade. It’s lethal. “There’s a carrying case in there so you can store them in your purse. But I keep mine in my bra.”

I gape at her. “You carry brass knuckles in your bra?” I ask, unable to keep the shock and awe from my tone as my voice goes up on the last word.

Alisa and Desdemona laugh and I stare at both of them as they reach inside their shirts to pull out ones identical to mine. “Alisa had a set when that bastard Twerk kidnapped us. They came in handy. I bought myself one and now I always carry it. Caitlin has a set, too. She used them the last time someone kidnapped her.” Desdemona explains. I remember Caitlin telling me about the many kidnapping attempts made by her ex. And how she fought back using weapons she hid on her person.

“You’re part of the Demon Dawgs now and one thing you can always count is that you’re now in more danger than you could ever imagine. The guys will die protecting you, but it is always a good idea to know how to protect yourself.” Alisa says.

“And this will help.” Desdemona says, pushing her present closer to me.

I stare at it with wide eyes before picking it up. “Is it a gun?”

They both laugh, even though I wasn’t trying to be funny. “No, of course not. But it’s not a bad idea to carry a gun.” Desdemona says. “This isn’t one, but it is useful if you find yourself in danger.”

I open it to find a thin black tube. I turn it over, but I can’t for the life of me figure out what it is. “Uh, thanks?” I repeat, which has both of them laughing again. I’m glad I’m providing them amusement in that both of them are driving me nuts not to

mention scaring me.

“It’s a security baton.” Desdemona explains, taking it from me and with a flick of her wrist, it transforms into a long stick. “It doesn’t take much effort to inflict damage, especially if you go for the knees or his junk.”

“Damn.” I say as I take it from her. I retract the baton before mimicking Desdemona and flicking my wrist. The steel stick snaps into place. I slash the air a few times, getting a thrill at having such a weapon. If I had had these when facing off against Deion and Trask, I could have done some damage. “These are outstanding. Thank you!” I tell them. “I feel like I could defend myself now.”

“I would recommend taking self-defense classes.” Alisa says. “I’m taking them, and when Elina is older, I’ll make sure she takes them as well. You should learn to shoot, too.”

“I’m taking lessons as well.” Desdemona says. “I’m never going to be a victim again.”

“They should offer courses at Crossroads.” I muse.

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“Caitlin’s shelter?” Desdemona asks, and I nod. “Good name and an excellent idea. I know the type of women she’s expecting to come to her for help, and they will benefit from knowing how to protect themselves. Not only will it make them safer, but it will build their confidence.”

“What’s going on over here?” Reaper asks, startling me when he comes up behind me.

“Birthday presents for your girl.” Alisa says. “You’re taking her out tomorrow, so we’re giving her our gifts tonight.”

Reaper picks up the brass knuckles, raising his eyebrows when he flicks open the blade. Then he closes it, placing it back on the table before grabbing the baton. He flicks it opens and slashes the air a couple times. He glances at me as he hands it back. “Where do you think I’m taking you tomorrow? Into battle?” He asks.

I grin at him. “No, but you better behave yourself.” I warn him.

He grins back at me as he shakes his head. “Oh, I will.” He leans down and gives me a kiss before he heads to the bar and takes a seat next to Diego. I knew the two of them became friends when the club was in Yuma. Both had sustained major injuries and wound up convalescing together. They’re infirmity buddies.

I spend the evening chatting with the girls and discussing Caitlin’s project. When I yawn, Reaper comes over to take my hand to help me up. “Let’s get some sleep, my warrior queen. You need your rest for everything I have planned for tomorrow.”

“Night girls and thank you!” I call out to them as I let Reaper lead me away.

Back in our room, he takes my gifts and places them on the nightstand. “You won’t need these tonight.” He tells me before coming back to me. “I’ll protect you. I plan on wrapping my body around yours. Keep you safe.”

I shiver with anticipation. Reaper’s arms are the safest place for me. Surrounded by his hard body and powerful arms is my idea of heaven. The only thing that would make it better would be him inside me. I press my hand against the bulge in his jeans, feeling sexy and powerful when he sucks in a breath at my touch. I continue rubbing until I feel him harden and lengthen.

“Ashlyn.” He growls. “I’m supposed to be taking care of you.” He reminds me.

I stare into his eyes as I undo his belt and jeans so I can take his cock in my hand. “You’re so beautiful.” I tell him as I relish the feeling of him.

He grins at me, lowering his head to kiss me. “You’re the beautiful one, baby. And you’re all mine.”

I close my eyes and take a deep breath, then nod. “All yours. You know what I want for my birthday?” I ask him.

“What?” He asks, cupping my face in his hand and brushing his thumb along my cheekbone.

“You. All of you. Make love to me. Brand me as your woman.” I tell him. “That’s all I want. Let’s stay in here all day tomorrow and just make love.”

He searches my eyes and then shakes his head. My heart stutters and I feel my eyes water. He leans forward to kiss both my lids. “Hey, none of that. I’m not saying no to

you or to us. Just your suggestion for staying in here all day. I have plans for us tomorrow. Plans for you. I want your day to be everything you could ever want, and I promise my plans include making love to you.” He assures me.

“Yeah?”

“Oh, yeah. But before we take that step.” He starts, causing me to frown. “You need to understand what it means. Because, baby, once I have you, I’m never letting you go. You’re mine. You’ll be my Old Lady, you’ll be my wife, you’ll carry my kids.”

I wrap my arms around him and bury my face against his chest. “Best birthday ever.” I whisper. I pull back and smile at him. “Since tomorrow is all about me. I say tonight should be all about you.” I pull his kutte off and lay it on the chair near the door. Putting my hands against his warm skin, I rub my hands up his abs and chest as I push his shirt up and off. I flick and suck his nipples as I maneuver him to the bed. When he sits, I drop to my knees and remove his shoes and jeans, leaving him gloriously naked. I lean back on my heels to admire what’s mine. Happy birthday to me.

“I don’t know what you’re thinking right now, baby, but if you could look at me like that every day for the rest of our lives...”

“I’m thinking that I must have been a very good girl to deserve you.” I tell him honestly. “And I’m going to show you just how good I can be.” Leaning forward, I take his lengthening cock in my mouth. Moaning as the taste of his pre-cum hits my tongue. I never thought I’d enjoy this as much as I do. His own groans have me sucking harder, licking longer and taking him deeper. When his hands grab my hair and yank until I feel a sharp pain at my roots, I know he’s close. I take him all the way to the back of my throat, so I can bury my face in his pubes. I nuzzle him while working my throat. That’s all he needs to send him over. Hot streams of cum flow down my throat and I swallow every drop. I lean back when he places his hands on

both sides of my face to pull me back.

“Fuck, baby. Now I know what I want for my birthday. And every day in between.”
He grins as he captures my mouth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: REAPER

Ashlyn not only drains my balls with that amazing blow job, she saps my strength. I help her undress before pulling her under the covers, wrapping my arms around her. I fall asleep thinking of her and the plans I have for her the following day. It's her birthday and I plan on spending the entire day worshipping her.

Puma once gave me the best advice for dating. He said that if you're trying to show a woman, you really care about her, then show her how much you know about her. I intend to spend the next day showing Ashlyn that I know everything there is to know about her. Which is one reason I wanted to bring her to Vegas.

A knock on the door wakes me up in the morning. I glance over to see Ashlyn still sleeping. Taking care not to wake her, I get up and throw on my jeans before answering the door to find Spark. Stepping outside, I close the door behind me.

“What's up?”

“Have you called your friend yet? Deion's cousin?” Spark asks and I shake my head. “I'm calling him this morning, before he goes to work. It's the best time to catch him without others overhearing the conversation.” Killian has his own apartment and a full-time job. He typically keeps his activities with the gang for evenings and weekends.

“You need to call him.” Spark says. “I just got off the phone with Shield. The cops are looking for you. That kid, Wylan Oaks? An anonymous tip came through naming

you as his murderer.”

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“What the fuck?” I explode. “I didn’t shoot him. Did you tell Shield about the recording?”

“Yeah, he saw it. He thinks it’s Trask who made the call. If the cops go after Trask while he’s still a member of the Spades, it will be a war. But if you can verify that Trask acted on his own, maybe convince Deion that Trask is a liability, we could save some lives.”

I nod. He’s right. Deion can be an asshole, but he’s fucking loyal. He’d never leave Trask to face the cops on his own. However, if Deion learns of Trask’s involvement with Renee, he’ll be more likely to brand Trask a traitor and turn him over to the cops himself. Or kill him.

“Ok, I’ll make the call. Let me grab my phone.” I duck back inside the room to find Ashlyn stirring. “Hey, baby, Happy Birthday!” I say, leaning over the bed to give her a kiss. “I have to make a couple of calls. Club business. Why don’t you take a shower and then get dressed to spend the day visiting the sites? Pack whatever you need for dinner and for spending the night away from here. I booked something special for us.”

Her smile widens as I give her a preview of our day. Seeing her happy makes me wish I didn’t have to deal with the Spades and their bullshit, but if I hurry, I can get everything done so I can focus on my woman.

I grab my phone and back out of the room. I hear Ashlyn’s phone chime and turn to see her answering with a smile and a thank you. Probably her family calling to wish her a happy birthday.

Killian answers just before the call goes to voicemail.

“What?” He barks. Killian was never much of a morning person.

“Is this line secure, and are you alone?” I ask him.

“Yeah, we’re good. Who is this?” He answers.

“Randall.” I tell him and hear him suck in a breath.

“Why the fuck are you calling me?” Killian asks, and I know he’s seconds away from hanging up.

“Deion has a problem. He could be in trouble.” I rush to tell Killian before he can disconnect. “I think Trask is into something that will blowback hard on The Spades. Unless it’s worse than I thought and Deion is knee deep in human trafficking, too. Specifically selling virgins to sick fucks.”

“What the fuck!” Killian explodes. “No fucking way. Deion would never allow that shit in his gang. You know how he feels about women. Besides, Athena would kick his ass if he ever condoned raping women.”

Knowing Athena, I know Killian is right. She’s a ball buster and a hard ass. She’d have no trouble taking a gun and shooting a man for hurting a woman. In fact, I was fairly certain she’d done that exact thing at least once.

“I don’t believe Deion knows what Trask is up to.” I assure him. “The proof I have includes a video and bank records. They show activity between Trask and a person who we know was selling virgins to the highest bidder.”

“What do you need from me?” Killian asks.

“I may not believe Deion is involved, but I have to know for certain. I have enough to take to the cops, but I don’t want to involve the Spades in a war if it is just Trask.”

“How long do you think Trask has been involved?” Killian asks.

“I don’t know. A couple of years, at least. The video evidence I have is from right before I left.”

“That fits.” Killian responds. “About two and half years ago, Trask stopped asking me to manage his money. He said he found someone he trusted more. Pissed Deion off because he felt like Trask was dissing me, but I didn’t care. Never liked the fucker. I’m still managing the money for everyone else in the club. So, not only do I know where the money goes, I know where it comes from. I know what each of them is doing, even if it’s off the books. Everyone but Trask.”

“And Deion couldn’t hide money without you finding out?” I press.

He barks out a laugh. “Fuck no. I love my cousin. Hell, he’s like a brother to me and Athena. He may know how to manage a gang and plan heists that bring in the dough, but he has no clue what to do with the money once he has it. If it wasn’t for me laundering their money for them, they’d all have gone to jail years ago.”

“Yeah, that’s what I was hoping you’d say. I may have left the Spades, but I didn’t leave because of Deion. Although, I owe him a few punches for putting his hands on my girl.” I tell him about Deion using Ashlyn to trap me.

“What a dumb shit.” Killian snorts. “Although, if you really want to hurt him, tell him you’ll have your girlfriend tell his girlfriend what he threatened.”

“Deion has a girlfriend?” I ask, flabbergasted.

“Yeah. She’s sweet. Too sweet for him. Her name’s Tanya. She’s one of Athena’s patients. Deion wants to find the guy who hurt her and tear him apart. But she won’t tell him who it is. She’ll only say that he’s powerful with several connections and an army of ex-military at his disposal. I think she’s trying to protect Deion.”

I feel my blood go cold. “Oh fuck. It can’t be.” I talking to myself, but Killian answers.

“What are you mumbling?” He demands.

“It could just be a coincidence, but we’re looking into a guy who buys virgins. He’s a minister and we’ve gone up against a couple of few of his men. They’re all ex-military types. What are the odds?”

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“I’d say the odds just raised in your favor for getting Deion to work with you on trapping Trask. Want me to set up a meeting?”

“I can’t until I get back into town. But yeah, I think Deion and I need to meet soon.”

“If you send me some of the evidence you have, I can get it to Deion without Trask knowing.” Killian pushes. “If he’s involved with the guy who hurt Tanya, Deion will take him out.”

“I need Trask alive, at least for now. He’s trying to pin a murder he committed on me. He’s got the cops looking for me. I’d like to point them at Trask. But not if Deion will sacrifice the gang to protect him. Can you just tell him enough to make sure he knows Trask is not a friend?”

“Yeah, I can do that. I’ll let you know what happens.” Killian says, signing off.

I hold the phone, debating on my next move. Spark and Hawk are the best place to start. I find them and fill them in on my conversation with Killian, specifically about Tanya and what he knows of her attacker.

“Fuck, that poor girl. We need to end this guy, and soon.” Hawk says.

“In the meantime, go take care of your girl. We’ve got things under control here. If you hear from Killian, let us know, but other than that, take your girl and give her a killer day.” Spark says and I grin. Because fuck yeah, it’s my girl’s day.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: ASHLYN

“Happy Birthday!” Briony sings out when I answer the phone.

“Thank you.” I tell her, laughing at her exuberance.

“So, what are you doing today?” She asks. “Anything special?”

“I’m spending the day with Reaper. According to him, we’re going to be very busy.”

“Busy as in getting busy?” She asks, and I can’t help but smile.

“Definitely. But he has the whole day planned. He’s taking me to visit some of the attractions first and then he has the whole evening planned out. Not sure what we’re doing first, but I know we’re going out to dinner at a nice restaurant, probably doing some gambling and he’s booked a hotel room for tonight.”

“He sounds like he’s taking care of my girl.” Briony says with a laugh. “Can’t wait to hear all about it. When are you coming back?”

“I don’t know. We haven’t really made plans past today, but I imagine we’ll be home in a couple of days.”

“Just make sure you do everything that I would do and then some!”

I laugh as she ends the call. Hopping out of bed, I hurry into the shower. My body tingles in anticipation of the day. A whole day with just Reaper and me. No club, no annoying brothers, blood or otherwise, no distractions. Just us.

Reaper comes into the bathroom as I’m drying my hair.

“Damn, I missed the show.” Reaper says with a grin as he strips down.

“But I didn’t.” I say with a smirk as I turn to watch.

He chuckles as he ducks under the spray.

I finish getting ready as he showers, then follow him back into the bedroom. I notice the bag holding my dress is missing. “What happened to my dress?”

“I had Showtime take our stuff over to the hotel.” Reaper says. “Didn’t want to carry it on the bike.”

I nod and smile at how Reaper always seems to think of everything.

“Who was that on the phone?” He asks as he pulls on a clean pair of jeans.

“Briony. Just wanted to wish me a happy birthday.” I tell him, admiring his ass as he bends over to pull out a t-shirt. It’s maroon and looks amazing against his dark skin, especially when he pulls on his black kutte. He turns to look at me, one eyebrow going up in a question. I glance down and see that I’m standing naked, holding the towel but not making a move to get ready. “Oops.” I say, tossing the towel aside and grabbing my clothes.

We pass through the common room and I wave at everyone wishing me a happy birthday. As I strap on my helmet, I notice my face hurts a little. I laugh when I realize it’s because I haven’t stopped smiling since I woke up. Like most people, I’ve always looked forward to my birthday, but I know that hands down this one will be better than any of the others. Even the ones at Chuck E. Cheese when I was a kid.

Seeing the Vegas strip from the back of a motorcycle is its own adventure. My head is on a swivel as I take in everything. I don’t know where we’re going, but I’m so excited to get there that I’m practically bouncing on the seat. I can feel Reaper laughing at me, so I squeeze my arms a little tighter around his waist. He pulls into a

parking lot and leads me down a shaded path until we enter the Venetian. We find a restaurant to have breakfast before he pulls me toward the canal. As we approach the ticket booth for the gondola rides, I'm almost skipping. But my smile dies a little when I see the look on the face of the ticket seller. I'm about to suggest we do something else when Reaper stares the man down.

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“Problem?” Reaper asks in a tone that should tell the guy his only answer better be a ‘no’.

The man glances at Reaper, then me, before giving a shrug and taking his money. Reaper glares at the man for a few seconds longer before turning around and taking my hand. As we make our way to the boat, I squeeze his hand. He turns back to me and gives me a distracted smile. I stop, letting his hand drop from mine, which forces him to turn around and face me.

“Don’t.” I say to him, and he raises one eyebrow. “Do not let that asshole ruin this. He’s nothing. You are my everything.”

Reaper sighs as he pulls me into his arms and lays his forehead against mine. “I’m sorry, baby. You’re right. It just pisses me off. He sees me and he sees you and I know what he’s thinking.”

“Yeah, he’s thinking what a lucky bastard you are because not only do you have a hot girlfriend, but you’re built like a Greek god.”

Reaper laughs and I relax. “I do have a hot girlfriend. But a Greek god?” He asks, holding me tight as he kisses the top of my head. “I don’t recall seeing too many black Greek statues of gods.”

“That’s because they only had white marble.” I assure him. He chuckles as he shakes his head at my silliness.

When we settle into the boat, Reaper pulls me close. I’m not sure he appreciates our

gondolier's voice as much as I do. But I think it's very romantic and sweet. When we debark, he leads me through the various stores so we can window shop.

"I want to buy you something." He tells me as he pulls me into a jewelry shop. My heart stutters at his words and I hesitate. "What's wrong?" He asks me.

"Um, I don't need anything." I tell him. "I wasn't expecting anything..." While I love Reaper, I know I'm not ready. For sex, hell yeah, but not the wedding ring and wedding. Not yet. I don't know how to tell him without making him feel like I'm rejecting him.

He gently takes my face in his hands. He takes slow, even breaths. I mimic his breaths until I feel calmer.

"I'm not buying you a ring today. One day. But not today. Ok?" He asks and I try to nod but he still has a hold of my face. "I love you, Ashlyn, and one day I want you to be my wife, but that day is not today and it won't be tomorrow either. We're taking this as slow as you need. I only want to buy you a necklace or a bracelet, something to commemorate this day. But we don't have to go with jewelry. We can buy something else, somewhere else." He gives me a soft kiss before releasing me and taking my hand.

As my panic attack abates, I know I'm being foolish and panicking for nothing. We look at the necklaces and the bracelets but nothing draws my attention until I see the pendants. Besides religious symbols, I see various Celtic and Nordic designs. But the one I'm drawn to is a platinum Nordic sword. The detail is exquisite. Looking at it, I feel as if someone made it just for me. I turn to tell Reaper I want to see it, but he's already calling over the sales clerk. A few minutes later, he's fastening the sword around my neck. It hangs from a platinum chain that he bought to go with it.

"My warrior goddess." Reaper whispers into my ear.

“Thank you.” I tell him, giving him a kiss as I finger the pendant.

“How about we head over to the hotel and do some gambling before we change for dinner?” Reaper says, taking my hand.

We make our way over to the casino, 1%. According to Reaper, the restaurant, Blacktop, has amazing food. The afternoon flies by as we try our hand at slots, then black jack and finally roulette. I don’t know how much we win, or lose, because I’m too busy having fun while also glaring at the women who keep giving my man lustful glances.

“Good thing I didn’t buy you a real sword.” Reaper says, laughing as he pulls me back into his arms after I make a move toward one woman who will not take a hint.

“I’m right here!” I complain. “Don’t they see we’re together?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Reaper says, trying to placate me. “I only see you. And all the men who keep staring at you.” He growls and I laugh. I glance around and see his point. Two college guys are walking backward with their eyes fixed on me. He doesn’t see the women looking at him, just like I don’t see the guys looking at me. While we gamble, I try a variety of drinks while Reaper sticks to beer.

“I have to use the little girl’s room.” I tell him. We head down the hallway to the nearest restrooms. I duck into mine while Reaper enters his.

As I’m washing my hands, the door opens, and a man enters. My heart races until I realize I recognize him. “Coach Matthews? What are you doing here?”

“I’m here to rescue you.” He tells me, drawing a syringe out of his pocket. “Reverend Jordan sent me to save you.” I scream when he lunges for me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: REAPER

Hearing Ashlyn's scream turns my blood to ice. I slam out of the bathroom to come face-to-face with two guys intent on keeping me from my woman. I land one punch before the other has me in a head-lock. I struggle and land a gut shot with my elbow while kicking the knee of the first guy. As I struggle, I hear a door open and a shout, then I'm free. I turn to see four members of the Shadow Borns holding down my attackers.

"Ashlyn." I cry out, shoving my way past and into the woman's restroom, skidding to a halt when I see the sight before me. Ashlyn, standing tall over a man cowering at her feet, turns my dick into a steel rod. Fuck, I've seen nothing hotter. She's breathing heavy, but I think it's more from anger than exertion. In her right hand is the baton Desdemona gave her, the brass knuckles are on her left. Before I can reach her, Ashlyn brings the baton down again, so it swipes the man's hand, causing him to cry out.

"Baby." I say calmly as I feel and hear others enter the room behind me. I glance back and see Trouble along with two of his men. "The others?" I ask them.

"On their way to less comfortable surroundings." Trouble tells me and I nod, knowing he's taken them to their version of El Bodego.

Turning my attention back to Ashlyn, I speak soft and slow as I gaze at the wild woman in front of me. "Sweetheart, can you come here? Please." I can almost see sparks shooting out of her eyes as she glares at the man cowering at her feet.

"What the fuck happened here?" Trouble asks.

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“Can you grab him while I take care of my woman?” I ask him. He gestures for two of his men to proceed while I circle around and gently pry the weapons from Ashlyn’s hands. I close up the baton before shoving both into my pocket. Wrapping my arms around her, I pull her into my body to calm her and bring her back to me. “Ashlyn, baby, are you alright?” I ask her, kissing the top of her head as I rub my hand up and down her back.

When she stirs, I pull back so I can see her face. Her eyes are damp, but she’s fighting the tears. I see her lip tremble before she takes back control.

“What happened?” Trouble asks. “Do you know this guy?”

I shake my head, but I feel Ashlyn nod.

“His name is James Matthews. He’s my soccer coach. And he’s the fucking asshole who just tried to kidnap me.” Ashlyn says, her voice growing harder with each word. “He tried to sedate me with that.” She says, pointing to a broken syringe on the ground near the wall.

“Fucker.” Trouble says, landing a hard punch into the asshole’s gut. “Want us to take him?”

“Not yet.” Says Ashlyn and I glance down to see her glaring at the man in question. “How did you find me, asshole?”

“I’m not telling you a thing, bitch.” Matthews growls at her. “You dare attack me? Woman should be soft. You’re a disgrace to your gender.”

Ashlyn snorts out a laugh. “Fuck that. Now grow a pair and answer the fucking question.”

I share a smirk with the other men. When Matthews still doesn’t talk, I pull the weapons back out of my pocket before handing them to Ashlyn. “I suggest you talk. She’s already taking you down on her own. Imagine what she can do to you with our help?” When Matthews stays silent but continues to glare at her, I add in my suggestion. “I suggest punching him the junk with the brass knuckles. If you hit him hard enough, he won’t be able to breed.”

“Fuck you. My wife is pregnant with my child, you piece of shit. Oomph.” He grunts when Ashlyn punches him right in the nuts. He turns pale and then an ugly green color while the rest of us wince.

“I’ll do it again.” Ashlyn promises, pulling her fist back.

“No, wait.” Matthews cries out. “Briony told me. I was with her when she called you this morning. I heard the entire conversation.”

I see the hurt pass over Ashlyn’s features as she realizes one of her friends betrayed her, but then puzzlement replaces the hurt.

“Briony didn’t know I was in Vegas.” Ashlyn says.

“No, but we knew you were here. We just didn’t know where to look. There are several of us here, looking for you. You belong to the Reverend. He wants you back before he spoils you.” Matthews says, jabbing his chin at me. The look on his face morphs into something I can’t describe. It’s one part furious and another part, something. I can’t place it and the look is gone when Ashlyn smacks him across the face, breaking the skin on his cheek.

“You sick son-of-a-bitch. You’re married? Then what the hell were you doing in Briony’s bed?” Ashlyn demands.

“God put women on this earth for two things. Childbirth and catering to the needs of men. My wife is pregnant and unable to fulfill her duties. Briony was there and willing.”

Ashlyn’s glare turns murderous. “You’re pathetic.” Ashlyn spats. “You knew Briony had a crush on you and you used that against her. Did she know you were coming here to kidnap me?”

“Of course not. Men like us don’t explain ourselves to women. We needed to know your plans for the day and she helped me discover them. Once we knew he was taking you out for the day, we knew you’d hit some of the major attractions. I saw you getting out of the gondola and I’ve been following you ever since.” Matthews says.

“Are you the one who put that note in my locker?” Ashlyn continues.

“Yes.” Matthews admits. “You belong to the Reverend.”

Ashlyn nods and I see Matthews relax. I’m not surprised when Ashlyn rears back and slams her reinforced knuckles back into his crotch. His scream pierces our ears.

“We need to call the cops.” Ashlyn says and I see the other men ready to argue with her, but I understand where she’s coming from, so I nod.

“We don’t need the cops.” Trouble argues. “We can dispose of him.”

Matthew struggles to break free, but Ashlyn releases the switchblade and holds it up to his eye so he freezes and focuses on her. “I want him arrested and in jail. His wife

needs to know what he's done. She shouldn't have to deal with the stress of his disappearance. She needs to get herself as far away from him as she can get. I'll press charges, so he goes to jail. He can always disappear later."

"He'll find you." Matthews snarls at her. "He owns you."

"No. He doesn't." Ashlyn says as Trouble takes out his phone. "He's garbage, so are you. Luckily, I know some guys who will make it their mission to dispose of the trash."

"Security is on the way. They'll hold him until the cops get here. They'll want to talk with you." Trouble tells Ashlyn, who nods before looking at me.

I can see the sorrow and fatigue in her eyes. Pulling her into my arms, I nod my head toward the door for Trouble to follow us.

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“She’s exhausted. I have a room booked here for the night. It’s her birthday. I want to take her upstairs and let her rest. Can you call me when the cops arrive? We can come back down to meet with them.”

Trouble takes Ashlyn’s hand and kisses her knuckles. “Happy birthday, little warrior. You two go ahead. The cops I’m calling will be fine holding him for twenty-four hours. I’ll tell them you’ll go to the station and file charges in the morning. How does that sound?”

“Wonderful.” Ashlyn says, beaming at him. “Thank you.”

“One more thing, Reaper. You’re one lucky bastard to snare a girl like her. Although, if I were you, I’d be very careful to never piss her off.”

I lean down and capture Ashlyn’s mouth with mine as I finger the pendant around her neck. “Wise words. I won’t piss off my warrior princess, especially when she’s armed.”

Ashlyn grins at me. “I did good, huh?”

“You protected you, so yeah, you did great.”

I guide her to the elevator. She leans against me as we wait. I see her yawn in the reflection of the elevator doors. “Tired?” I ask her and she nods. “When we get upstairs, I’ll run you a bath and order up some room service.” When I see the pout, I chuckle.

“I ruined our evening.” She whines. My warrior princess must be tired. Ashlyn isn’t one to whine unless she’s exhausted.

“You ruined nothing. Soak in the tub and we’ll eat dinner. We can see how you feel after. If you want to sleep, then sleep.” I tell her as the doors open. I’m happy it’s just the two of us inside as the doors close again.

“No sex?” She asks, and I can hear the disappointment.

“We’re having sex.” I tell her. “You think taking a nap is going to stop me from waking you up and ravishing you later?”

She turns and grins at me. “Promise?”

“Promise.” I say, kissing her as the doors open on our floor.

CHAPTER THIRTY: ASHLYN

My fatigue disappears with Reaper’s promise. Reaper opens the door to our room, but instead of letting me go in first, he steps inside. He comes back out only a minute later, surprising me by lifting me up into his arms and carrying me into the room.

“Had to make sure no one was in here.” Reaper says. “I think from now on, I’ll be vetting every room before I let you enter.”

I giggle even though I know he’s serious. “That wouldn’t have changed what happened today.” I remind him. “Matthews snuck in after I was done. I wonder how he planned on getting me out of the casino.” I muse.

“He had help.” Reaper says. “Two guys were outside the bathroom. Trouble and his men took them out. Luckily, they were nearby when I heard you scream. I couldn’t

get to you.” Reaper says, leaning his forehead against mine and closing his eyes.

I place my palm against his cheek and wait for him to open his pretty brown eyes. They’re a rich chocolate color with specks of gold. Gorgeous. “You got to me. That’s all that matters. We make a good team.”

He grins and kisses me. “We do.”

I hadn’t been paying attention to where he was carrying me until he sets me down on the counter in the bathroom. As he turns on the faucet for the tub, I glance around the bathroom. It’s stunning. The black and white theme from the hotel flows into here, along with the chrome and red highlights. The tub is large enough to fit both of us, giving me ideas that have my skin tingling. I watch Reaper pour something into the tub and soon the room smells like lavender. I breathe in the relaxing scent as Reaper returns to me.

“I’m taking care of you. I want you to relax and try to put Matthews out of your head. Ok?” I nod as he gently pulls my t-shirt up over my head. I watch his hands remove my bra and see his smirk when he palms the brass knuckles. He kneels to remove my boots and chuckles when finds the baton. Shaking his head as he removes the rest of my clothes until I’m standing before him, naked. I feel tears prickling my eyes when I see the love and adoration in his. “How did I get so lucky?” Reaper whispers, causing me to huff out a laugh.

“That’s what I was thinking.” I tell him.

Grinning, he leads me to the tub and holds my hand as I climb in. I feel like a queen with how he treats me. As I sink into the fragrant hot water, I let out a sigh. “I needed this.” I tell him. “Want to join me?”

He grins. “More than you know, but I want to order us room service. You need to eat.

We'll take a bath together later." He leaves the room, but returns holding a fluffy white robe. Placing it on the hook behind the door, he smiles at me. "Put this on when you're done. Only this." He says sternly, which has me rolling my eyes and laughing.

"Yes, sir." I capitulate.

"I like the sound of that." He says with a wink, grinning when I flick water at him.

As the heat soaks into my skin, I watch the steam rise from the water. I let the memories of Matthews and the knowledge of Reverend Jordan float up and away along with the steam. This is my birthday, dammit, and I will not let those bastards ruin it for me. Rejuvenated, I step out of the tub and dry off. After using the entire tiny bottle of lotion on my damp skin, I slip on the robe. I pause at the door when I hear voices in the other room. Cracking the door open, I feel a sense of relief when I see it is just the server moving covered dishes from his trolley to the table. I grin when I see the table has a tablecloth and two lit candles in the center.

Once the server leaves, Reaper shuts the door. I step out of the bathroom. Reaper turns and smiles when he sees me. "Hungry?" He asks and I nod quickly. "Good, I think you'll like what I ordered."

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He pulls my chair out, kissing me on the top of the head when he scoots me close to the table. With a flourish, he removes the covering.

“Macaroni and cheese?” I squeal, dancing in my chair, making Reaper laugh. “My favorite.”

“I know. Besides, its great comfort food and pairs just fine with champagne.” He assures me as he lifts the bottle of bubbly from the bucket. He pops it opens and pours us both a glass. After handing one to me, he clinks his against it. “To my best friend and the most beautiful woman in the world. I love you, baby.”

I grin at him as I take a sip. He laughs again when I wrinkle my nose. “You don’t like it?” He asks. When I shake my head, he reaches for the glass, but I pull it away.

“I like it. It’s just not what I was expecting.” I tell him. “Everything is perfect. Thank you.”

He grins as he lifts the cover off his plate to reveal a hamburger. “Does champagne go with a cheeseburger?” I ask with a smirk.

“I’d rather have a beer.” He admits with a grin.

We eat our dinner talking about everything but Matthews and Jordan. They don’t belong here in our little bubble. Not on my birthday and not when I have my favorite man and my favorite food.

Once we finish, Reaper piles the plates back on the trolley and wheels it out into the

hall. I finally take in the room and the massive bed. I can't help myself, I'm nervous. Now that the time is here, I realize I'm a little scared. That is, until Reaper steps up behind me and wraps me in his arms. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm a little nervous." I admit, turning so I can press my face into his chest. The feel of him relaxes me. I love how we fit together like two pieces of a puzzle.

He places his finger under my chin and lifts it until he can see my eyes. "We don't have to do anything tonight. You know that, right?"

I smile and reach up to kiss him. "I know. I'm not nervous about you. About us. I just don't want to disappoint you." I finally admit. "You've made this day perfect. I want it to be perfect for you."

He grins as he cups my face with his hands. I stare into his eyes and get lost in them, lost in his soul. He's the best person I know and I honestly don't know how I got so lucky to fall in love with someone who loves me back as much as he does.

"You being here has already made this perfect for me. So you can stop worrying about disappointing me. You could never disappoint me. As for the rest of it. I'm going to take care of you. It's my pleasure and my job to make this night perfect for you, if you let me."

Shifting out of Reaper's arms, I turn to the bed. I can feel him behind me, but appreciate that he doesn't speak or move. Instead, he's giving me the time I need to process what I want. And what I want is him. All of him. Turning to face him, we lock eyes as I unleash the robe. I stand naked in front of him as I let the robe drop to the floor. And even though it isn't the first time he's seen me naked, it feels different. This is the beginning of a whole new adventure.

"Make love to me, Reaper." I whisper. "Claim me as yours, because you are the only

man I ever want inside me.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: REAPER

My mouth is drier than the surrounding desert. I’ve seen Ashlyn naked a few times now, but watching her drop her robe and offering herself to me brings me to my knees. She’s absolutely perfect. My warrior princess. Strong and soft. Courageous and timid. Sexy and innocent. Perfect.

Suddenly I’m the one who is nervous. The one who’s worried that I won’t live up to her expectations, but I shake away those thoughts. They don’t belong here in this room with us. Because I know without any doubt that I’ll make this night perfect for her. How can I do anything else for the woman I love?

Stepping forward, I trace my finger along her jaw, then her throat and down the center of her chest. Grinning, I step over to the table to grab the last glass of champagne. Dipping my finger into the liquid, I then circle her right nipple until I see it pucker. I blow on it before leaning over and sucking it into my mouth. Smiling when I feel her tremble. When I repeat the process on the other side, I get a whiff of her arousal. My cock strains against my jeans.

“Reaper.” she whispers, and I glance up to see her face. The love I see in those pretty brown eyes reaches deep into my soul.

“Just relax, baby.” I tell her. “I’ve got you. Lay on your back in the center of the bed.” I order her. When she turns to do my bidding, I quickly divest myself of my clothes.

I hear her gasp, then moan as she watches me stroke my dick while I take in all of her beauty.

“Are you certain he’ll fit?” She asks, and I stop myself from laughing because I can hear the concern in her voice.

“I promise, he’ll fit. You might feel some pain or discomfort, but I promise you, you’ll feel pleasure. I’ll make sure of it.”

She smiles at me. While I see the trepidation in her eyes, I also see trust.

“Just close your eyes and feel everything I’m doing to you. Say the word ‘red’ if you feel scared or need me to stop.” When she gives me a quick nod, I shake my head. “I need your words, baby.”

“I trust you, Reaper, but I’ll say the word ‘red’ if I get scared or need a minute.” She assures me.

When she closes her eyes, I kiss and lick my way over her abs and down to her mound. I grin when I see she’s waxed, she removed all but a single strip. I know she’s primed when my breath on her folds has her back arching and her essence gushing.

“Fuck, baby. So responsive.” I commend her and I’m rewarded when she uses her own fingers to continue playing with her nipples. Nothing sexier than a woman who knows her body and knows how to give herself pleasure.

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I bury my face in her pussy and lick her clean before suckling her clit. Another gush of her cream gives me the lubricant I need to slide first one, then two fingers inside her. She's so fucking tight. My assurance that he'd fit may be a lie. I scissor my fingers to prepare her for me. I continue to tongue her clit as I work my fingers in and out of her pussy until I feel the flutter of her first orgasm take hold. My dick hardens to steel at the feel of her channel clamping down on my fingers.

Waiting for her to recover, I rest my head against her thighs to kiss her soft skin. I smile when she shudders. She whimpers when I pull away. Her fingers grasp for me. "Where are you going?" She mumbles, and I have to stop myself from laughing. Does she really think I'm going anywhere?

"Just getting a condom." I tell her as I reach into my jeans to pull out the square foil.

"Don't. I want to feel you." She says. "I have the implant. I want nothing to come between us."

With a smile, I toss the condom on top of my clothes and crawl onto the bed, arching over her. "You sure?" I ask her and she nods. Leaning back, I rub my cock through her folds until he's covered in her essence. Placing the head at her entrance, I push just far enough for the tip to enter. Locking my eyes on hers, I push in and pull out. Each time I push a little further until I feel her barrier. "This will hurt a little." I tell her. "I hear it feels like a pinch, but then I promise I'll make you feel better. But if you want me to stop or slow down, just tell me."

She responds by shifting her body toward me. I feel my cock push through the barrier, causing her to hiss. That hiss morphs into a groan as I slide in and out of her

passage. When she moves her fingers to her nipples, I press my thumb against her clit. The overload of sensations has her screaming my name. Her breath comes out in ragged gasps as I feel the first flutter of her impending orgasm flow through her channel. I shift my angle so I'm hitting her G-spot with each thrust. Her face, flush and shiny with pleasure. I want to look down, to watch my cock disappear into her, but I can't tear my eyes away from her face as her eyes close and her mouth opens into a perfect 'o'. Fuck me, but she's even more beautiful as I watch her splinter into a thousand pieces.

She screams my name on a long wail as her back arches and her pussy clamps down hard on my dick, triggering my orgasm. I fall forward, pressing my face between her breasts as my hips jerk sporadically, my cum spews into her.

"Fuck, baby." I groan as I gather her in my arms. I know I need to clean us both up, but right now, I just need to hold her.

"We need to do that again." Ashlyn says as she buries her face in my neck. "Multiple times. Every day."

I chuckle and briefly wonder if one can die from too many orgasms, and if so, why it doesn't happen more often? "We will, but first, let's get you in the tub." I shift and hoist her into my arms, carrying her into the bathroom where I place her on the counter. She hisses when her ass hits the cold marble. I start the bath, filling the tub with lavender suds again, before stepping between her legs. She widens them to let me in.

"Why am I taking another bath?" She asks before stifling a yawn.

"A bath will help minimize the soreness." I tell her, giving her a kiss. "How do you feel?" I ask her.

She smiles at me as she runs her hands over my shoulders and down my pecs. “Wonderful. This is hands down the best birthday ever.”

I grin and kiss her again. I can’t seem to stop wanting to taste her. She’s like a drug and I’m definitely hooked.

Once the tub is full, I lift her and lower us into the hot, fragrant water. I take my time cleaning her with long, gentle strokes as she relaxes against me. We don’t speak for several minutes, we just enjoy the feeling of being alone together. I think she’s dozed off when she finally speaks.

“Thank you for my day.” She whispers as she locks her fingers with mine. “I’m lucky to have you.”

“Same.” I whisper back, kissing her ear. “Same.” I help her dry off as the tub drains, then lift her and carry her back to the bed. “Let’s get some sleep...” I start, but she interrupts me.

“Then we can do that again?” She asks, her face alight with pleasure.

“We’re definitely doing that again.” I promise her, as I wrap her in my arms.

We both drift off and sleep hard. I wake to find Ashlyn straddling my waist, her hands pressing against my pecs as she rubs her pussy against my cock. He’s more awake than I am and he’s enjoying her administrations.

“What are you doing?” I ask, trying for humor, but when she grinds down on me, I can barely get the words out. “Fuck, woman.”

She grins at me. “Exactly, I want you to fuck your woman, Reaper.” She says with a challenging glint in her eye.

“You’re not too sore?” I ask her as I feel her wetness covering my cock.

“I’m sore.” She admits without stopping. “But I want to feel you inside me again.”

Well, who am I to say no?

I rise to capture her nipple in my mouth while thumbing her clit. It acts like the button it is, sending shock waves through her system. She has her hands on my head, pressing me closer and I grin. My baby girl loves to have her nipples sucked. As I lavish her nipples with my tongue, I run my finger through her pussy lips to gather up her cream. When I rub my finger against her backdoor, she rockets through an orgasm. Once her body stops quivering, I lift her so I can slide her down onto my cock. This time I watch as her gorgeous body takes every inch.

Seeing her pussy stretch to accept my girth, I moan. Fuck, I’ve seen nothing so perfect. I look up to see she’s also fixated on our joining. Grabbing her hips, I lift her up and pull her back down as I jerk my hips up to meet her thrust for thrust. She’s moaning and mewling, and I relish the sounds of her coming undone. I lean forward to bite her nipple at the same time as I thrust into her hard and she shatters. Her scream sends my orgasm careening through me.

We’re both sweaty and out of breath, but I pull her down to my chest, keeping us joined. I rub my hand up and down her back as our breathing returns to normal.

“Wish we could stay like this.” Ashlyn murmurs.

“We could order breakfast and eat it in bed before we get ready.” I suggest. “We have to go to the police station before we head back to the clubhouse. Dante and the others should be back today.”

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She shifts so she can bury her face in my neck, causing my dick to slide out, and I feel our combined cum dripping on my hip.

I let her lie there, releasing her warm breath on my neck until she's ready to shift. "Ok, shower and then breakfast. But let's have breakfast downstairs." Ashlyn says. "If any more of those fuckers are around, I want to show them they don't scare me."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: ASHLYN

We leave our baggage at the front desk, Reaper already having called the clubhouse to have a prospect claim them. He takes my hand and we head to the restaurant's breakfast buffet. My mouth waters as I plan out what to eat. I didn't know sex worked up such an enormous appetite. After last night, I plan on being hungry all the time, because sex with Reaper is just too fucking good.

Reaper raises his eyebrow and smirks when he sees my heaping plate. I smack his arm with a laugh. "So I burned off some calories. You don't have to look so smug."

He laughs and bounces his eyebrows. "Of course I'm smug. I got you to scream my name a few times. Believe me, that's all a guy needs to feel smug. Knowing he fucked his woman so well that she's starving the next morning."

I shake my head at his words as I dig into my breakfast. "Does the club know about Coach Matthews and that he tried to kidnap me?" I ask him.

He nods as he takes a bite of toast, swallowing before speaking. "I called Grimm and Wildcard, Puma's VP, last night after I ordered us room service. They know we're

heading to the police station this morning.”

“Good.” I say as I finish my scrambled eggs. Now that I’m no longer starving, I take a minute to glance around the restaurant. Most of the other diners are wearing leather jackets, many have on kuttes. So I immediately notice two men who couldn’t look more out of place in their khakis and polo shirts. But what really gives them away are the matching glares on their faces as they stare at us.

“Think they know?” I ask Reaper, nodding at the men.

Reaper turns and scowls at them before turning his attention back to me. “I hope so. Maybe it will make them go away.”

“I could buy a t-shirt that says I got laid on the strip.” I offer.

Reaper snickers and shakes his head at me. “No.” He picks up his phone.

“Backup?” I ask and he nods.

“Wait.” I tell him and he frowns at me.

“They may or may not be after you, so I’m not taking any chances. They may be here looking for their friends or trying to keep you from pressing charges against Matthews. If any of those things are true, I want to make sure we have protection.”

“Then I think it’s time to put an end to their speculation.” I say, rising from the table. Reaper jumps up to stop me, but I’m already across the room by the time he catches up to me. He wraps his arms around me and I know he’s going to pull me away, so I speak before he can. “You can go back to Reverend Sicko and tell him he’s too late. He can do us all a favor and fuck himself. His church of worthless assholes will crumble around his ears. I’m pressing charges against Matthews this morning. ” I

glance around and see a few people looking at us with curiosity, so I raise my voice. “These assholes follow a man who calls himself Reverend Jordan. The reverend and his flock of white males believe women are only here to serve men. Oh, and their reverend tried to buy me because I was a virgin.”

I watch with satisfaction as several tough-looking men and even tougher looking women stand up and move toward the two assholes who now look desperate to be anywhere but here. They both shoot up and run out of the restaurant. I grin when I see a few angry bikers following behind them.

“Feel better?” Reaper asks, and I nod.

“I do, actually.”

He takes my hand and we head toward the monorail. We need to retrieve his bike before heading over to the police station. I don’t know if pressing charges against Matthews will help stop Reverend Dickhead and his minions, but I hope he at least loses his job as our coach. I’m also hoping his wife leaves him.

“I’m a little worried about Matthews’ wife.” I tell Reaper. “Do you think they’ll hurt her? Or stop her from leaving Matthews?”

Reaper frowns. “She may not want to leave him, but you’re right, if she’s on her own then the reverend and his men could pose a threat.” He pulls out his phone. I only know he’s talking to Flame when he mentions me. “Yes, I made sure she had an amazing birthday. Do you think I wouldn’t take good care of your sister?”

“Flame?” I mouth and Reaper nods.

“So you’ll go with Shield to check on her?” Reaper asks. “Good. We’re on our way to the police station now, so I imagine his wife will hear about his arrest soon.

Ashlyn's worried that his religious gang might hurt her. The wife's pregnant. I wish Crossroads was already up and running."

I can't hear Flame's response, but soon Reaper ends the call.

"He's checking with Caitlin. She mentioned renting or buying a house to offer sanctuary to women who might need help before Crossroads is ready."

"That's great. I love Caitlin. Even after everything she's been through, her thoughts are always about helping others. I hope Dante and the others have captured Gerard and end him. She needs some peace."

"You know I can't talk about that. It's club business."

I frown at him. "You can't tell me that if the guys find and then end Gerard, that Scar won't tell Caitlin? That he'll let her spend her days worrying about him attacking her again even if they ensure it will never happen?"

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Reaper opens his mouth and closes it. “Yeah, you’re right. If they are successful in stopping the men who threatened Caitlin and the other women, then the guys will tell them.”

“So I’ll hear about it.” I say with conviction, causing Reaper to chuckle and give me a kiss before he places my helmet on my head.

“You realize that we have these secrets to protect all of you. Right?” He asks.

“I know, but you guys have to take into consideration that what we don’t know could also hurt us.” I say as I climb on the back of his bike, wrapping my arms around his waist.

The trip to the police station only takes a few minutes. As we reach the doors, I can feel Reaper tensing up, so I snuggle up to his side and wrap my arm around his waist. He glances down and smirks at me.

“I’m ok.” He says squeezing my hip.

We approach the counter where an older officer sits. He eyes us with interest, giving Reaper’s kutte a longer look. I don’t see animosity or suspicion in his eyes, just curiosity.

“Good morning. What can I do for you?” He asks with a smile.

I smile back. “I’m Ashlyn Barnes. We’re here to file a complaint against someone your police officers arrested last night at 1%. James Matthews.”

He nods as he picks up the phone. “The told me you’d be coming in today. Let me call the officer in charge and someone will come up to take you back.”

Reaper and I just sit down when we see an officer head our way. She introduces herself as Officer Medel. After greeting us and shaking our hand, she guides us through the building to a small break room.

“Would you like anything? The coffee is disgusting, but I can get you a soda or some water.” She offers as we take seats at an empty table.

“No, but thank you.” I reply. “We just had the breakfast buffet at 1%.”

Officer Medel smirks. “Really? Did you see the commotion? We had a report of two men chased out of that casino with a dozen or so bikers and their women screaming insults and threats about religious zealots buying virgins.”

I smirk back and nod. “Yeah, we caught the beginning of that show.” I admit.

She laughs and pulls out two notebooks and two pens. She hands one of each to me and the other set to Reaper. “I need you to write, in your words, what happened yesterday at the casino. Then we’ll get them typed up for you to sign.”

“Is he still in custody?” Reaper asks.

She nods. “Yes. He’s demanded a lawyer, but since we haven’t charged him yet, he hasn’t spoken to anyone from outside. We need your account of the attack and for you to sign a complaint against him so we can charge him. I have to warn you. He’ll likely be out on bail later today. I ran his record, and it came back clean. So even though he tried to kidnap you, I doubt the judge will set the bail so high that he can’t pay it.”

I nod in acceptance. I know even the accused have rights and I don't want to live in a country where they don't, but sometimes I wonder if the rights of the victims are ever going to be as important as the rights of the accused.

Reaper and I sit in silence, the only sound coming from pens against paper. We both finish about the same time and hand our accounts over to Medel, who takes them with a smile. "I'll get these typed up and printed so you can review and sign them."

When she leaves, Reaper gets up and buys us each a bottle of water from the vending machine. I'm still full from breakfast, so I pass on food, but he comes back with a bag of Fritos and a Snickers bar. He opens the Fritos and hands me the bag, knowing I can't resist them.

"Thanks." I say with a grin as I pop a chip into my mouth.

We talk about school and the club while we wait.

"Here you go," Officer Medel says, handing us each a printed copy of our statements. "Please review. If you identify any necessary changes, let me know. If not, please sign them."

We both take a few minutes to read them through before signing and handing them back. She trades my statement with another set of papers and asks me to review them. They're the charges against Coach Matthews. I review the charges before signing them. "Is that it?" I ask as Officer Medel takes the papers from me.

"Yes. I'll call you if he gets out on bail. I imagine you'll stay safe." She says, smiling at Reaper, who nods back.

"I'll be with her. We're heading back to the clubhouse. She'll be safe there." Reaper says.

“Good. I hope you enjoy the rest of your stay in Vegas. Take care of yourself when you return to San Diego.” Officer Medel says as she leads us out of the building.

“Back to the clubhouse?” Reaper asks, and I nod, but then shake my head.

“Can we just go for a ride?” I ask causing Reaper to beam at me.

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“I’ll never say no to a ride.” He says as he leads me to his bike.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: REAPER

Riding a motorcycle is freedom. Riding a motorcycle with your woman against your back... well, there are no words to describe the experience. Except fucking perfect. I drive Ashlyn down the strip before taking off through the suburbs and out into the desert. We ride through a few back roads as the sun rises high in the sky. I know we should get back to the clubhouse. Dante and the others are returning from Chicago and they’ll likely want to leave for San Diego soon. I find a turnabout and pull in, when Ashlyn taps my leg. Worried, I stop the bike and help her disembark.

“What’s wrong, babe?” I ask her, shifting to face her as she removes her helmet. She fidgets under the high sun, her face flushed from the wind and the heat, her long golden brown hair falling down her back and over her shoulders. She’s so fucking beautiful. The sight of her slams into my heart.

“We’re heading back to the clubhouse?” She asks and I nod.

“Yeah, Dante and the others get back today. Why?”

When her face reddens even deeper, I have to hold back a grin. I know my girl, and the only reason she blushes this deeply is when she’s thinking about sex.

“Do you think we could find a place? A place with no traffic?” She asks as her blush deepens. “Where we can be alone?”

I reach over to run a finger along her jaw and then over her luscious lips. “Are you thinking of riding me, or would you like me to bend you over my bike and fuck you?” I ask her, grinning.

Her eyes widen before she smiles and nods her head quickly. “Both.”

I laugh as I help her back on the bike. It isn’t hard to find a spot out of sight of the road behind a couple of rocks. I check the ground and the area for rattlesnakes before I let her get off the bike. Then I remove her boots and peel off her jeans. “Keep your socks on. The ground is hot.” I tell her as I unbuckle my jeans and release my cock. Getting him hard doesn’t take long. Having Ashlyn wrapped around me always keeps him at half mast. Seeing her partially naked and eager for my cock has him fully erect and ready to play. Pulling her up onto my bike, I have her straddle me so I can tease her pussy.

Ashlyn leans her hands back so they’re clasping the handlebars. She’s already creaming, but I use my thumb and fingers to work her clit and pierce her channel. Curling my fingers, I find that spongy area that has her moaning and in no time, her hips jerk. When I press my thumb down hard on her clit, she detonates. With her essence gushing out, I lift her hips and impale her on my cock.

“Fuck!” I shout out as her greedy little pussy pulls me in. Her tight velvet walls flutter around me. I control her movements until suddenly she clamps down on my cock and I come much too close to blowing my load. I thrust through her second orgasm, focusing on her face as she milks me for her pleasure.

“Reaper!” she mumbles as she comes down from her high.

When her muscles relax, I pull out and lift her off the bike. Pushing her down so she’s bent over it with her forearms on the seat, I push her legs apart so I can step between them. “This is going to be hard and fast, baby. I won’t last long.” I warn her

as I slam myself home.

“Reaper!” she shouts as I pound hard into her. “Oh, god, oh, god.” She chants as I fuck her hard and fast. I know she’s still new to this. I can feel her essence dripping out of her with each thrust. My baby likes it hard and fuck yeah, I’m giving it to her hard.

Too soon, my balls tighten and the tingle shoots up my legs as I cum hard inside her. My spunk adding to her cream. I can only hear the wet splotching and our labored breathing as I glide in and out of her.

Ashlyn drops her head and now I’m worried I may have been too hard. “Ashlyn, baby, are you alright? Did I hurt you?” I ask as I stroke her back.

“I think I passed out.” Ashlyn says. “I know I saw stars.” She says in a much stronger voice.

I laugh and can’t help but feel like a king. It’s always a good feeling when you can fuck your woman into another orbit. I yank open the saddlebag and remove a wet wipe from the container I keep in there.

I quickly clean us both and help her get dressed. She leans her head against my back as I rev the bike and return to the road. This is what riding a bike with your woman does. It creates a bubble where it is only the two of you and the world is perfect. If I had taken the time to consider it, I probably would have seen that it was the calm before the storm. That evil was just waiting to crash back into our lives and destroy our peace.

We pull into the clubhouse to see Dante and the others have returned. I don’t see Puma’s bike, but most everyone else’s is there. I find my President and brothers drinking beer and laughing.

“There you are.” Dante says as he welcomes us. “Happy birthday.” He tells Ashlyn with a quick kiss on her cheek.

“Now that you’re here, we’re having Church.” Dante calls out. “Where’s Puma?”

“He had to go out.” Wildcard says. “Got a call while you were all riding back here. He said he needed to go help someone, but that he’d be back soon.”

“He went by himself?” Chill asks, and I can see the aggravation on her face.

“He said it wasn’t a big deal. Some girl he knows needed help. A guy was hassling her. He’ll be right back after he scares the shit out of him.” Wildcard says. “He’s a big boy. He can take care of himself.” Wildcard assures her.

“He still should have backup. As far as I know, he’s the only President we have. No offense, Dante.” She says to my Prez.

“None taken. I guess we can wait until he gets back.” Dante says. “In the meantime, Reaper with me. Smoke and Spark have some news.”

I turn to Ashlyn. “I gotta go, you’ll be alright?” She nods as she stands on her toes to kiss my cheek.

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“I’m good. I think I’m going to call Briony and ream her for having a relationship with a married man. Then I’m going to ream her some more for telling that married man where I was so he could try to kidnap me.”

“Wow, that’s a lot to cover.” Babe says, his eyes wide. “Sounds like you two had as much excitement as we did.”

“Did you catch the bastards?” Ashlyn asks him, and he looks at me for help.

“You brought it up.” I tell him with a laugh, following Dante.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: ASHLYN

I probably should give Babe a break. I’m not going to though. But, I only press him for just the information that I think I should have. “Can you at least tell me if you got the bastards?” I ask him.

He nods.

“Ok, thanks.” I tell him before heading off to Reaper’s room and the conversation I don’t want to have, but can’t avoid. I figure I’ll get more details about the Chicago trip later from the other women. Or at least as much information as they get from their men. Sometimes this ‘club business’ rule is a real pain in the ass. But the guys like their secrets and we girls like ferreting them out.

The prospect retrieved our luggage, because I find it sitting on the floor next to the bed. Fingering the garment bag containing my sexy-as-sin dress, I feel

disappointment. I really wanted Reaper to see me in it. Not sure when I'll be able to wear it, but I know I will one day. I can't wait to see the look on Reaper's face when he sees me in it. Especially since I know it will make him desperate to fuck me. I shiver as I think of the possibilities. That dress is ideal for fucking in public.

Grabbing a change of clothes, I duck into the bathroom to take a hot shower. My body tingles and I'm a little sore from riding Reaper and his bike. Grinning, I recall Reaper pounding into me as I'm bent over his bike. We need to do that again and soon. I let my mind flip through all the sex scenes from the various books I've read. I want to try each and every one of them with Reaper.

I dry off and change into jeans and a loose shirt before I pull out my phone. Taking a deep breath, I call Briony.

"How was your birthday?" She answers with such enthusiasm and joy that I relax. I doubt she could fake this much excitement, so the odds are low that she knew about Matthews' plan to kidnap me.

"It was pretty perfect until Coach Matthews showed up and tried to kidnap me." I tell her.

She sucks in a breath and then releases it in a loud whoosh as if I'd punched her in the stomach. Maybe I had.

"What?" Briony asks. "Wait. What? Coach Matthews? He's in Vegas? He couldn't have been, he was just..."

"Because he spent the night with you? He was with you yesterday morning when you called me to wish me a happy birthday?" I press.

"Well, yeah." Briony says.

“How long have you two been seeing each other?” I ask her.

“We just hooked up the night before last. He asked me out for a drink after practice. You know, I’ve been interested in him ever since he took over the team.” Briony says, and I can hear her building up her defenses.

“Did you know he’s married and his wife is pregnant?” I ask, not letting up. I’m trying to keep the anger and accusation out of my tone, but I know I’m unsuccessful.

“Married?” Briony stutters. “That’s not possible. He can’t be married. Wait, what do you mean he tried to kidnap you?” Now Briony sounds pissed off and I really hope she isn’t pointing that anger at me.

“I was in the restroom at a casino when he barged in. He had a syringe with some kind of drug to knock me out. I fought him off. He might have succeeded, but Reaper and a couple of other bikers stopped him. I filed charges against Matthews this morning.”

“Oh, my god.” Briony whimpers. “He found you because of me, didn’t he? Because I asked what you were up to. That son of a bitch. He asked about you, wanted to know if everything was ok because you left town. I told him it was your birthday, and that Reaper took you on a trip. He suggested I call you and wish you a happy birthday, find out your plans so I wouldn’t worry. I swear, Ashlyn, I didn’t know. I would never have betrayed you like that.”

I take a deep breath to calm myself because I believe her and she needs my sympathy, not my wrath. “Yeah, I know. He admitted he used you.”

“His poor wife. I can’t believe I slept with a married man.” Briony continues. “That son of a bitch. He never wears a wedding ring. He never mentioned having a wife. Hell, he doesn’t have photos of her in his office!”

I think back and realize she's right. I didn't know the bastard was married. He flirted with the girls, especially Briony, but he always seemed harmless. And not once did he come across as a dickwad who would cheat on his pregnant wife, or kidnap one of his players for a psychopath.

"We need to call the school and tell them what he did." Briony continues. "He can't be a coach any longer. If they don't fire him, I'll quit. Hell, I'm calling the school right now."

I chuckle in relief at her outrage. There's my friend. "I'm pretty sure the cops will contact the school and if not, Reaper will talk to them. If Flame hasn't already gone down there." I assure her.

"Yeah, you're right. Flame probably called them as soon as he heard what happened. I'm surprised he isn't pounding on my door, ready to kill me for setting you up."

"You didn't set me up. I'm sorry if I came across like I thought you had."

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“You were upset. I don’t blame you. I’d be pissed off if the roles were reversed.” Briony says. I’m about to end the call when she comes back with a question. “I know you probably need to go, but you have to tell me. Did you and Reaper, you know? And if so, how was it?”

I laugh. “It was fucking phenomenal.” I tell her. “I finally know what I’ve been missing and I’m making sure to never miss it again.”

I end the call as Briony moans about it not being fair that I have a stud while she’s still looking for hers and all she can attract are lying, worthless bastards.

When I get back out to the common room, I move immediately to Alisa and Desdemona. “Your gifts came in handy.” I tell them as I take a seat.

“We heard.” Alisa says. “Are you alright? Tell us everything about how you took him down. Don’t leave out any details.”

“And you can give us the details of how you spent the rest of your night, too.” Desdemona says, grinning.

I laugh and give them the details. Of my encounter with Matthews only. Chill joins us as I describe how I interrogated Matthews.

“Well done. Men like him should have their balls busted so they can’t procreate. Too bad you didn’t get to him before he got his poor wife pregnant. Of course, maybe she loves him and didn’t realize what a tool he was. One thing some of these fucked up religious nutters know how to do well is lie.” Chill says with a laugh. “How long are

you and Reaper staying in Vegas?”

“I don’t know. I think that’s up to Dante. We’ll be going back with them.”

Chill nods. “Yeah, that’s what I figured. I was going to offer to teach you some more self-defense moves, but we won’t have time.”

“I was planning on finding a class or two in San Diego. I definitely want to learn more. Taking Matthews down helped me release some of the fear reverend psychopath instilled in me with his taunts.” I tell her.

“Good.” Chill says. “I can do some research and identify a few instructors who I think you should work with. If you want me to.”

“That’s a great idea. Thank you.”

“It might be a good idea to find someone who would be willing to work with the residents of Crossroads.” Desdemona adds. “A woman would be best, but I know Ghost has some serious martial arts skills.”

“How do you know that?” I ask with surprise. I had no idea that Ghost was into martial arts.

“I saw him in action when we were fighting Twerk and his men in Yuma.” Desdemona says. “He played dead that night, then glided through the house taking out all the men. It’s how he got his road name.”

Chill nods. “You’re right. I remember seeing the video. I saw some of his moves, he’d make a good teacher. Worth asking him.” Chill turns her attention to the clubhouse door when Showtime walks in and heads straight to her.

“Chill, we have a problem.” Showtime begins, ominously.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: REAPER

“I hear Ashlyn handled herself well.” Dante says as we enter Spark’s office.

“Yeah, she did. She was a fucking warrior. Took down Matthews and got him to talk.” I tell him as Spark and Byte both turn toward us. “We went to the police station and filed charges against Matthews this morning. She also riled up a room full of bikers and their women after another two of the reverend’s followers spied on us at breakfast.”

“I saw that.” Spark says, laughing. “Got a call from a guy in security at 1%, he sent over the video. Funniest thing I’ve seen in years. I don’t think those men have run that fast since their army days.”

“You id’d them?” I ask.

“We did more than that. Trouble got those two who were helping Matthews to talk. Between what the Demon Dawgs and the Shadow Borns uncovered, we have enough to take down the reverend and his God’s Chosen Assholes.” Spark says.

“Fuck, yeah!” I exclaim, punching the air, but then I realize I need more. “What do we know?”

Dante grins at me. “You did most of the heavy lifting. That video you found gave our nerds a starting place. They have all the proof we need to prove Trask shot Wylan.”

“How? I watched the video and I couldn’t tell who shot him. Hell, I don’t know if you can even prove it’s Wylan on the video.” I protest.

“Ah, the magic we nerds can perform.” Spark says with a glare at Dante, who only grins wider.

“We processed the audio and the video.” Smoke says. “We found reflective surfaces in the video that gave us a good enough image of Wylan to prove it’s him. Not to mention we have his voice on the recording. Shield found a recording of a call Wylan made to 911 reporting his sister’s disappearance. It’s enough to prove that it’s Wylan speaking on the video. But that isn’t the best part. Maestro?”

“I ran the audio through several iterations and pulled out this.” Maestro adds. Spark leans over and hits a key on the keyboard. I hear Trask’s voice coming through the speakers.

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“Fucking don’t let him escape.” Trask shouts. “I shot him, but if he gets away, he’ll bury us.”

“Holy shit. I didn’t hear that when I watched the video.” I say.

“Too much noise.” Maestro explains. “I stripped the audio into several layers, so we have everything said that night by everyone.”

“Is it enough to get the cops off my back?” I ask.

“The cops still want to talk to you, but yeah, once they arrest Trask and get him in the box, you should be home free.” Byte says.

I pace the room and consider what they’re saying. “We can’t go to the cops yet.” I tell them. “If they go after Trask now, they’ll find themselves in a war with the Spades. I talked to Deion’s cousin two days ago and asked him to convince Deion of Trask’s disloyalty. We need Deion to see this video first, to make sure he knows what Trask was doing with Renee. If he knows Trask was dealing in skin, he’ll turn him over to the cops himself.”

“Or kill him.” Dante states, and I nod. Because yeah, that’s also an option. “The cops need to arrest Trask in order to clear you.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I need to talk to Deion. If I can lay it all out for him and explain that Trask needs to go to jail, then I think I can convince him to follow our lead.” I offer.

Dante nods. “Ok, see if you can talk to Deion without Trask overhearing. If Trask knows what we’ve got on him, he’ll bolt.”

Pulling out my phone, I call Killian.

“Randall, good. I was about to call you.” Killian answers. “Deion is on his way over, alone.”

“Good, because I’ll need your help with him. I want to send you a video that he needs to watch.” I respond.

“Why do I need to help him watch a video?” Killian asks, and I can hear the smirk in his tone.

“I need you to keep him calm after he watches it, asshole. He’s going to be livid once he sees it, and I need him to listen to me and do what I say.” I explain.

“Must be some video. I can’t promise anything but give me a few minutes to talk to him and we’ll call you back when I think he’s ready to be reasonable.”

“I don’t have the years you’d need to make Deion reasonable.” I chide him. “But call me when he’s at least calm enough to listen.” I hang up and turn back to my brothers.

Dante clasps me on the back as Spark hits his keyboard. “I’m sending you the video to forward to Killian, along with the separate audio feeds from Maestro. You can send Killian what he needs to convince Deion.”

“While we wait, let’s go over what we found on good old Reverend Teddy’s laptop. Because this sick fucker needs to be sent directly to hell.” Byte says.

I study the images Spark displays on the wall monitor. Images of eight young women

appear on the screen, a kaleidoscope of color and features. The only similarity between them is their youth. Until you read the information under each image. All of them have reported missing dates. Spark types a few more keys and additional information displays for each.

“Reverend Dickhead had these images on his computer, along with a file for each. We ran a search and determined that each girl has an open missing person file on them or had one at one time. They disappeared over the course of four years, with each disappearing two to three months after the previous girl.

I point to the girl occupying the bottom right corner of the screen. “That’s the girl in the video.”

“It is. Her name is Tanya Webster. Hers is the only incomplete file on the reverend’s laptop, which makes sense. Wylan stole it before he finished with her. She’s also one of the few whose current whereabouts we know. By all accounts, she should be dead. A couple of kids found her body dumped in a park late one night. Someone beat her badly and likely dumped her when they thought she was dead. She survived, but she didn’t give the cops any information about who hurt her.”

“She’s Deion’s girlfriend.” I share along with the information I learned from Killian in our previous conversation. “Fuck, when he sees that video, he’ll go ballistic. He’s been after the guy who hurt her. No way can Killian keep him from killing Trask and the reverend, even if it costs him all his men or even his life.”

Dante takes out his phone. “I’ll send Shield and Flame over to Killian’s to stop Deion if he tries to leave.”

I nod as I consider what I plan to say to Deion to convince him to work with us and to not go off half-cocked.

“Can I finish with what we found on the reverend’s computer?” Spark asks. “Because I think you need to hear everything.”

“Yeah. Sorry.” I say to him and shift my focus back to the screen.

“This won’t take long.” He assures me before continuing. “The reverend kept notes, detailed notes. He documented everything. He followed a pattern for each. Every quarter, he purchased from Renee a list of three to four girls who she identified as virgins. He’d pick from the list and then, within a couple of weeks, she’d deliver the girl to him. He’d rape each girl multiple times a day for three months. Then he’d sell the girl on to a new buyer or give her to one of his men as a reward.”

“What the fuck?” I explode. “Was he breaking them? Training them for other buyers?”

“No.” Byte says. “The asshole had a whole manifesto on his computer about his plans. He believes he’s God’s chosen son. That he needs to produce the next heir. And the only way to do that is to impregnate a virgin. If the girl remains barren after three months, her womb is no longer pure and he must try again with a different girl.”

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“Fuckers.” I mutter and Byte nods in agreement.

“I think he’s sterile.” Smoke adds. “He’s raped all these women multiple times for several months and none of them became pregnant? It’s the only answer that makes sense. He’s shooting blanks and, of course, blaming the woman for her inability to conceive.”

“Fuckers.” I repeat just as my phone pings. I pull it out of my kutte and see Killian’s number. “Showtime.” I say, answering the call.

“Randall.” Killian’s voice comes over the speaker. “Deion’s here. He’s not happy, but he’s willing to hear you out.”

“Make it fast.” Deion snarls. “I don’t associate with traitors.”

“Yeah, you do, Deion.” I snarl back. “But I’m not the traitor. Shut up, watch the video, and then we’ll talk.” I send Killian the video and I can hear it play over the line.

“What the fuck is this?” Deion asks after it plays to the end. I have to give Deion credit. I didn’t think he’d be able to keep his mouth shut to the end.

“It’s the recording Wylan made that night. He never wanted to be part of the Spades, he was trying to find his sister.” I glance at the monitor and see the image of Wylan’s sister. According to the reverend’s records, he gave her to one of his lieutenants before she wound up in a mental hospital. “Was Trask the one who delivered Ashlyn to you?”

“Yeah.” Deion seethes. “He did. Told me he found her outside her apartment complex. Your girl said he lied about that.”

“She was right. He’s been lying to you for years. He’s been working with a woman who finds, drugs, and sells virgins. Ashlyn was one of her victims. So was Tanya. We have a snippet from the video where Trask admits to shooting Wylan.”

“I’ll kill him.” Deion promises.

“You can’t.” I order him and glance at Dante. I’m hoping Shield and Flame are in place. Dante nods at his phone laying on the desk. Seeing Shield’s name, I nod. Shield is listening in and likely ready to move. “Look man, I want him dead, too. But I need the police to arrest him for Wylan’s murder, or they’re going to pin it on me.”

“Fuck!” Deion explodes.

“Deion?” Dante speaks up.

“Hey fucker, don’t tear up my apartment.” Killian gripes. “Shut up and listen.”

“What?”

“Help us capture Trask and deliver him to the cops and we’ll make it worth your while.” Dante promises.

“How?”

“Figure you might want a piece of the asshole who hurt Tanya.” Dante says.

“You have him?” Deion asks.

“Not yet. But we will. You can help send him to meet his God, after we deliver a little hell on earth. Do we have a deal?”

“Yes.”

“Good...” I cut off what I was going to say when Chill comes charging into the room.

“We need everyone out here.” She says before retreating.

“Deion, Shield and Flame are outside. Hook up with them and go get Trask. Shield will deliver him to the cops.” Dante says. I end the call with Deion to follow Dante and the others out the door.

EPILOGUE: ASHLYN

“Is it Puma?” Chill asks, glancing at Alisa as she rises from her chair to face Showtime.

“Maybe.” Showtime says. “There are two bikers from the Shadow Borns at the gate, one of them is Trouble. They have a woman and a child with them. He claims the woman approached him asking for help for Maklin Brooks. She thought he was a member of his club. He brought them here.”

“Son of a bitch!” Chill says. “I knew he shouldn’t have gone alone. Bring them in, hurry.”

Desdemona and Alisa are now standing, and Desdemona has an arm around Alisa’s shoulders. I can see the worry in Alisa’s eyes and wish there was something I could do. Thinking of Reaper, I turn to where he disappeared earlier only to see Chill heading that way. I’m hoping she’s on her way to get Dante and the others.

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In a matter of seconds, Dante and Reaper follow Chill back into the room. Wildcard, Byte and Spark are with them.

“Do we know who the woman is or why she’s with the Shadow Borns?” Wildcard asks.

Chill shakes her head. “She told them Maklin Brooks needed help.”

I see everyone’s eyebrows rise in unison, which would be amusing if the situation wasn’t so serious.

When the door opens again, a woman around Desdemona’s age enters. She’s tall with long blond hair and stunning looks, even with the bruise blooming on her right cheek. She’s holding a small child who looks to be five or six. He’s a gorgeous little boy with the blonde hair of his mother, but his skin is much darker than hers. I suck in my breath when I see his eyes. Because I know those eyes. They’re the same color and shape as Reaper’s. And Puma’s. I turn to look at Alisa and I see her staring at the boy. I don’t think I’m the only one who’s noticed. When I share a look with Reaper, he shrugs. I don’t think he’s missed the family resemblance, either.

Behind the women are two bikers that I remember meeting the previous evening. I remember the name of one, Trouble. He’s the President of the Shadow Born motorcycle club. They helped me question Coach Matthews. The other has Captain on his kutte with the name Scorch.

“Wildcard.” Trouble says, reaching out his hand to shake hands with Puma’s VP. “Dante.” He says, moving to shake Dante’s hand. “I didn’t know you were in town.”

“Quick trip. Reaper here is one of mine and we came to visit Puma, his uncle.” Dante says. “What’s this? I hear Puma is in danger.”

Trouble nods at the woman. “This here is Corinne and her son, Mal. She came to our clubhouse by mistake, looking for Puma. She needs to tell you her story.”

As Trouble, Dante, and Wildcard talk, Alisa rises and moves to the woman and the child. She brings them to our table and offers them a chair.

“How about I take Mal here to meet Elina.” Desdemona offers. Turning to the woman, she introduces herself. “I’m Desdemona Konstantin.”

“The artist?” Corinne asks and Desdemona beams at her.

“Yes, I am. Alisa has a little girl, Elina. She’s in her room playing. There’s a prospect watching her and he’ll be happy to watch Mal.” Desdemona offers.

“My dad’s back there, too.” Alisa chimes in. “He loves kids and he’ll take excellent care of Mal.”

Corinne looks reluctant.

“Little ears.” I say, drawing her attention. She glances at her son and then nods at Desdemona.

Desdemona holds out her hand out to Mal. He looks at his mother and then back at Desdemona. I don’t think he’ll go willingly until Desdemona speaks to him. “I know a little girl who would love to meet you. She’s been pestering her grandfather to let her watch Turning Red. I bet she’d like some help convincing him to provide the snacks.”

Mal looks at his mom, who smiles encouragingly. He slides off her lap to take Desdemona's hand.

"Corinne." Trouble prods her. "Tell them what you told us."

Corinne nods and takes a deep breath. "I think Malik is in danger. A man broke into my condo earlier today. He ordered me to call someone named Puma and get him over to my place, alone. I didn't know who he was talking about." She places her fingers on the bruise under her eye. "He hit me." She takes a deep breath before continuing. "He said he knew Puma was Mal's father. That's when I realized Malik is Puma. I called the number the man gave me and Malik answered." Corinne takes a breath and I see tears filling her eyes.

"Puma doesn't know about Mal." Reaper says, and Corinne shakes her head.

"No. We had a one-night stand. I was living in Florida and met him in a bar after one of his games. We had an immediate attraction. I didn't know who he was until after we had a few drinks. He invited me to his hotel room, and I went. He used protection, and I was taking birth control, but I was getting over a sinus infection." She shrugs. "I didn't know I was pregnant until several weeks later. By then, Malik was back on the road."

"You could have reached out to him." Reaper pushes, his anger flaring. I see Dante put a hand on Reaper's shoulder.

"We need to focus on finding Puma." Dante reminds him and Reaper gives a sharp nod, but continues glaring at the woman. I know he's angry on Puma's behalf. Puma loves his family, whether by blood or leather. Discovering he has a son he's never met will gut him. "Continue with what happened today." Dante presses her.

"I called and told him I was in town and needed his help. He agreed to meet me.

Alone.” Corinne says. “Once he agreed, the man locked us up in Mal’s room.”

“How did you get out?” Wildcard asks.

“I have a ladder in each of the rooms. In case of fire. I used it to get Mal and me out of the building. I hid in the parking lot. My plan was to stay out of sight, then stop Malik before he entered the building. He didn’t show, but the man came running out. He jumped into a car and took off. I wasn’t sure what to do. I thought I should find Malik and warn him.”

“How did you know where to look?” Chill asks.

“I kept track of him during his career. I almost reached out to him after the accident, but I read stories about how he wasn’t handling the aftermath very well. When I read he retired and stayed in Vegas, I moved here. I thought that one day, if Mal wanted to meet his father, I’d reach out to him again.”

“Why did you come to us?” Trouble asks. “You thought he was part of our club. So you knew he was a member of a motorcycle club?”

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She nods. “I saw him once, on his motorcycle. I’ve seen Sons of Anarchy, so I recognized he was wearing the kutte thing that members of an MC wear. Since I didn’t know which one, I followed two men wearing kutties to your clubhouse.”

I hear every club member groan at her words. She doesn’t realize how lucky she is that she followed an ally. If she had followed a different biker, well, who knows what would have happened to her and her son?

“Any luck getting a hold of Puma?” Dante asks.

“It’s going to voicemail.” Chill answers and I look over to see her on the phone. “Spark went to see if he can track his phone or his bike.”

“Give us directions to your condo. We can split up and look for him.” Wildcard orders as Dante’s phone rings.

He steps to the side to answer it.

“What the fuck happened?” Dante shouts. All of our attention turns to him. We’re all certain he has news about Puma, but when his eyes find mine, my heart stops. “Tally has him? Ok, good. We have a situation here, so keep me informed. Fuck.” He hangs up and steps toward me. “I’m so sorry honey, but it’s Flame. He’s been shot. He’s at the hospital. Tally is operating on him.”