



# The #2 Guy

**Author:** *Jax Hart*

**Category:** Erotic, Romance, New Adult

**Description:** I'm the number two guy. The one who takes the hits. The one who cleans up the messes. My hands get dirty. Daily. I used to be number uno. Primed to take over my own kingdom in the city that never sleeps. But I broke the number one rule: don't fall in love. I lost everything a made man works for. My kingdom. Almost my life. All for a slice of that girl's heart. Look out little Christine. I thought you gone from this life, out of my reach but now that I've found out your heart beats... I'm going to stamp the heck out of it. My name will be burned into it. Charring it. Destroying it. Just like you've destroyed me.

**AUTHOR's NOTE:** This is a spin-off novella from THE CHASE and THE SALVATORE SYNDICATE. My fans wanted Johnny to get a story. Due to my publishing commitment, I cannot give every secondary character a full-length novel. This is intended to be a short read for those who wanted Johnny to get his day. Enjoy! JH

**Total Pages (Source):** 29

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:10 am*

## PROLOGUE JOHNNY

The two of them make me sick. I wanna puke at the stars I see in Roque's gaze. He is the deadliest Don there ever was. Before he met her, there was nothing but death in the black irises of his eyes. But now all he sees is her. Feeling the ugliness churn in my gut, I turn away from Roque and Romina.

"You hate her, don't you?"

I feel Chloe's eyes on me. The little shit is young but old. She's seen too much for a girl of her age. "Nah, I don't hate Blue. But she is annoying as fuck."

Chloe laughs. "Sometimes she is. I'm so lucky to have them."

I turn to the girl. "You are."

"So, what's your story? I've read theirs's..." Her chin nods over to the couple lost in their own world. Roque and Romina, a modern-day Romeo and Juliet story. At least that's what Hollywood's dubbed them. But if you missed their story, this is the wrong book. You need to rewind to Savage Poet...

I shrug. "Mine's better. I can't believe he's a bestseller when my story has more angst, more drama, more utter heartbreak. Not to mention the sex is off the hook," I wiggle my brows.

"Ugh, gross. TMI, Uncle Johnny."

“Good. Stay away from boys. They’re nothing but bad news. Keep your head in the books, the ones that will teach you shit.” I snap a flower from the garden, shredding the petals then reach inside the pocket of my suit jacket for my smokes.

She rolls her eyes. “That shit will kill you.”

I shrug, “So will a broken heart.” The words tumble from my lips before I can stop them. There’s something spooky about the girl, no wonder Roque spilled all his secrets to her. Her wide innocent eyes make you want to just blurt your shit out loud, as if somehow, someway this slip of a girl could help you. My eyes scan the edges of the garden looking for threats, finding none. How did I miss the biggest threat was her? Christine? My eyes squeeze shut. Just saying her name in my mind is enough to feel a slash to my soul. “I thought Roque had her eliminated. But he saved her for me.”

“Where is she? This woman who hurt my Uncle Johnny. Maybe Romina and I will have a go at her?”

I snort, looking down at the sun shining down at the top of her golden head. “I have first dibs.”

“Are you telling me this tale of angsty, juicy heartbreak or what?” Roque and Romina are still lost in each other, necking under an arbor of roses.

“Sure. Walk down to the beach with me? I can’t stand still for long. If I do, my body starts twitching. I wouldn’t want to freak you out.”

“It’s okay, Johnny. I’ve always known you were kind of a freak...,” she grins, putting her arm through the crook of my elbow. We stroll through the garden until we reach stone steps leading down to the beach. It’s not the med but the Atlantic side of the Hamptons is nothing to sneeze at. Roque still has a safehouse out here but these days

he and Romina have converted it to a beach home, complete with its own artillery room.

“Don’t ever fall in love, Chloe. It sucks balls.”

She rolls her eyes. “Was it love at first sight?”

“No. But it sure was lust. We were at a club in New York. Roque, me and Rafe. We were in our usual VIP area above the fray. The hostess let in about five girls a cut above the rest. One was straddling me, already DTF. My hands were all over the broad when suddenly she was ripped off my lap and replaced. The woman was spitting sparks and her mouth was bold and sassy just like the eyeliner and smoky eye she was sporting. Her hair smelled like wildflowers after a spring rain and her skin was smooth to the touch. I wanted her on sight. She wrapped her hands around the back of my head and kissed me. It was hard. Thorough. We made out in the club, drank pink champagne as we grinded on the dance floor. I took her home. She rocked my world and trust me—I thought it couldn’t be rocked any harder. We went all night. She was insatiable. So was I. When I woke up, I thought she had gone. The bed was cold, but the sheets still smelled of her. Of us. I took a shower and padded out to my kitchen, following the smell of frying bacon and coffee. She was cooking, naked. I took her hard. Right then. Right there. Fuck. Sorry. Sometimes I forget you’re still young and I probably shouldn’t say this shit to you.”

“Um... I’ve read Roque’s diaries, remember? He was quite detailed on how and when he lost his V-Card...”

I smirk, “TMI, Chloe. Besides, men don’t have V- Cards.” I ruffle the top of her head. Her face turns red as our feet touch sand. I bend down to remove my socks and shoes. She does the same as we make our way down to the surf.

“What made her so different? What was it about Christine that made her stick to your

soul?”

My eyes cut to the thunder of the pounding surf. “A million different things, many you can’t physically see. Who knows why your soul cries for some and not others? Maybe there is something to that destiny shit. Anyway, she crawled into my heart and made a home. It was more than the sex. We cooked together. Worked out together. She was all woman but had crazy jitsu moves. That should’ve been my first clue she was law. We had the same taste in TV shows... classic cars... but now I don’t know. Maybe it was all a lie. Maybe we had no common interests, and she was just acting—playing me so she could worm her way in and gather intel. Anyway, I’ve known since before the trial that she lives. Like a fuckin’ chickenshit, I’ve left her where Roque has her stashed away. I want her but I hate her. Truthfully, I’m scared shitless I’ll see her and realize I loved a fake persona... the longer I stay away, it allows me to love the girl I thought she was... I’m a dumb fuck. Right?”

“I don’t know, Uncle Johnny. But I do know the only way you’ll get closure is by asking her. Go get her and get the truth out of her by any means necessary. It’s the only way you’ll ever have peace.”

My eyes meet hers. “You are a little minx, eh? Any means necessary?”

Her cheeks turn as red as a Maine Lobster. “It’s what Roque would do.”

I pick up a rock, hurtling it sideways, watching as it skips over the waves until it drops. “Yep. It’s exactly what he would do...”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:10 am*

### PROLOGUE CHRISTINE

Days turn to nights and I don't even know the difference. Locked up in a storage room for months or years; I have no clue what is going on above me. I'm buried alive. Living in a cellar. My captor is kind at least. I half hope he'll take me in his arms and tell me it'll be alright... that someday he'll set me free.

He wears a ring but clams up whenever I bring it up. I hate the fact that I am totally crushing on the gentle giant with his full beard and shaggy hair streaked with silver. He's husky and big. Wears flannel shirts and jeans. He's gentle and yet I see his edge. But all my years of training in the FBI could never prepare me for this life of endless solitude, spent living underground.

Sighing, my fingers trace over the rough edges of stone making up the wall next to my bed. Why did he keep me alive? Does he hate me? I hated him. No, loathed him with every fiber of my being. Until I didn't. Until somehow the feel of his hands on me was all I cared about. I don't even know if he got out alive or if the mob put a bullet in that thick skull of his. Guilt eats at me. I loved him, I loved him not. Definitely lusted. There's no doubt Johnny and I could let the world burn while we were in bed. Sometimes I wake up covered in sweat, slick with need between my thighs after dreaming about my ex-lover. Forced, to touch myself to sate the throbbing need that never seems to dissipate.

I'm awake but have no idea if it's morning yet. My captor does his best to keep me awake during the day and tells me when to sleep at night. He says it's to keep my circadian rhythm in line.... Says it's "good for my heart."

My heart.

My heart is a mysterious place. Sometimes even a stranger to me. Did I love him or hate him? I wish it would answer. Alone in the dark, the only movie I see is the one in my mind...playing all over again. Like the memory of my brother, Jack, taking me back to how this all started.

“It’s time. We’ve prepped years for this moment, I’m proud of you sis.” My brother, Jack clasped me on both shoulders. He was assigned to the crime unit trying to take down Roque Salvatore and was able to get me on as well. But Although Salvatore was the FBI’s target—Johnny was ours. It was some stroke of twisted luck that the two men were tight in both business and life. I read the file on him and Roque. Rented an apartment in Manhattan and played the part of just another girl living in New York hoping to make it in the city of dreams. Fate has a sick sense of humor because while I was angling how to catch Johnny’s eye somehow, my roommate, Selina caught Rafael Vásquez Edwards eye. Rafe, Roque and Johnny went to Princeton together and forged fucked-up brother hood. The three of them were the princes of Manhattan. But one by one, they would fall.

Rafe was the first. I’m not sure about Roque but Johnny—he fell but in taking him down, I took myself with him. “Get Them both, Christine. I’m counting on you.” But I didn’t get them. They got me and now I’m lost somewhere. Somewhere in the dark. All sense of space and time has left me. The door creaks open.

The smell of the food coming off the tray is tomato soup with... grilled cheese?

“Ah it must be lunch time, then?”

I sit up, crossing my legs on the bed. He doesn’t comment but offers a small smile instead. “I brought you a new Sudoko and some magazines.” He tosses them on the bed then turns to leave.

“Wait.” I grab his big hand, holding it. His cheeks turn red. He isn’t rude but he pulls his hand away. “Stay. Please? I’m going insane. Losing my mind. Can I please see the sun? Just for a moment....”

“No.” He’s firm. I feel myself crack. I’m strong but I let him finally see me cry.

“There now, girl.” He puts his bulky arms around me. I sob into his chest. His strong, low voice soothes me as he strokes my hair. “It’ll be okay. No one is gonna hurt ya’. I swear to ya’ that.” And he is right. Sometimes another man brings me food and supplies, but none ever lay a hand on me. None ever made me feel the need to defend.

“Why? Who? Who is keeping me here? Is Johnny dead? In jail?”

“I can’t answer your questions. But you know what you did and who you betrayed. You’re lucky this is your sentence.”

“Where do you fit in all this? Who are you?”

He moves away from me. “Eat. Do your puzzles. I’ll come visit later.”

“Please don’t leave me alone in the dark. I’d rather die than slowly go insane.”

He sighs deeply. “I like you. I do. But I can’t betray them.”

“Who?”

But he’s gone, leaving me with the memories playing like a movie in my mind again. This time I’m at the club, watching Johnny as another woman gyrates on his lap. Being in his physical presence was a punch to the gut. He was a magnet, sucking me in, drawing me closer. An unexpected surge of jealousy coursed through me when I saw the skank on his lap. I yanked that bitch right off and when I straddled him, my



eyes almost rolled back in my head as I felt what he was working with. He smelled good. Like cinnamon cloves and whiskey. His kiss tasted the same. It was too easy to forget who he was. Who I was. And what I had made an oath to do. I had to keep reminding myself he was a ruthless killer and thug. Sometimes when I was feeling weak, after he held me all night, I'd go home and pop the floorboard where I kept my parent's crime scene photos. The gruesome reminder of the justice that needed serving. I was that justice. Jack was depending on me to get it for my parents. Taking Johnny and Roque down was the plan. But that plan backfired. Somehow, they made me. The last thing I remember was opening my fridge for a bottle of water. Someone grabbed me from behind. The sting of a syringe plunging into my neck as I screamed is all I can recall. When I woke up, I was here. In the blackness. Over the course of days, a blanket appeared, then a bottle of water. Slowly, I earned my keeper's trust and as I did, more comforts of a home appeared.

But I still need to escape. I need to get out of here. I spent the rest of what I believe to be afternoon doing Sudoku, yoga and perusing through magazines. It must be sometime near fall if the ads for pumpkin spice drinks are any indication. But then again, part of psychological warfare is to make your captive believe what you wish. It could be spring for all I know. These could be old magazines. Who the fuck knows? My keeper blacks out any mention of dates in print. Keeping me lost in space and time. After I contort my body into as many positions as possible, I do planks, sumo squats and try like hell to remember my old routine, the one I did with my former roommate Selina. I wonder what became of her? Her relationship with Rafe seemed like the real deal. Guilt eats at me. I betrayed her as well. Lied to her about who I was. They might've thought that she was in on the sting with me and snapped her neck.

I shuffle into the shower then crawl back into my mattress of a bed. I drift off to sleep, pretending Johnny's strong arms wrap around me. I might've been playing a role, but in the dark and under the sheets—everything I felt was 100 percent real.

\* \* \*

“Wakeup.” A hand gently shakes me on the shoulder. “Johnny?” I breathe, snuggling deeper under the thin blankets. I roll over, putting my arms around him. But he tenses. Freezes. Of course, because he hates me.

“Wake up.” The hand shakes me harder. Blinking in the dark, I make out my captor’s handsome face. Well what I can see of it behind his sexy caveman slash lumberjack beard.

“Put this on.” He hands me a sweatshirt and a pair of womens sneakers. My heart picks up speed. Is he helping me escape? Is this my chance? But my hopes are dashed as I notice the other items he has in his hands.

“I’m not into that,” I try to tease, nodding to the blindfold, rope, and zip ties in his hands. Maybe he isn’t here to save me but to end me. Nervous, I scoot back not wanting to leave the basement anymore.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:10 am*

“Relax. I’m taking you outside like you wanted. Fresh air is good for the soul.”

I hesitate but let him put the blind on me. He gently places my foot in each sneaker and ties the laces. Then he takes my hand in his strong one and finally, I’m led out of the room that’s been my home for months. “Careful now. We are heading up some stairs.”

In my head I count fifteen to the top. He turns me left, then straight, then right and I almost stumble as a door opens and I’m... outside?

“Ah.” I breathe in deeply. It must be night. The smell of burning logs, leaves and dew surrounds me. The last time he brought me out the air smelled of cigarettes and summer nights. But he won’t let me take my blind off, instead he tells me we need to walk. I grip his hand tight, afraid again of where we might be going. Finally, he tells me to stop. I feel his hands untying the knot behind my head and then there’s nothing but stars. A million of them. I don’t know where I am, but I’ve never seen a night sky quite like this. The sky is indigo velvet and the stars flawless diamonds lounging in the folds. I’m so overjoyed by the beauty of the moment, tears well in my eyes. “Thank you,” I whisper hoarsely. “Please, could you cut my hands free?”

He grunts but takes a knife from his boot and slices through the zip ties at my wrists. “Don’t try anything stupid, girl.”

I rub my wrists. “I almost feel free. Almost. The air is so clean... I’ve never seen so many stars before. We must be far from a city.” I frown, realizing the clearing he brought me to is surrounded by evergreen trees as thick and tall as ones described in a fairy tale. “Where are we?” I breathe, knowing he won’t answer. An owl hoots from

somewhere above our heads.

“I couldn’t take you out during daylight. Your eyes haven’t seen sun in too long. The night is closer to the dim light of the cellar.”

“Will I have permanent eye damage?”

“Nah, that’s why I got you that UV light. People in Alaska use it during their dark winter to remind them of summer light.”

“Summer. I missed that, didn’t I? It’s my favorite season. My brother, Jack, he had a forty-foot sport fishing boat. Sometimes we’d moor offshore of East Hampton Bay. Eat Lobsters and drink beer. Play cards and swim at midnight. I smelled of the ocean and had salt in my hair, but I never cared...”

I swallow hard, thinking of Jack and summer days that I’d never live again. Not unless somehow, I get free. I turn to him, loving the feel of the night wind in my hair. A few strands blow in front of my face, the dark chocolate strands longer than they’ve ever been. “You’re a good man. I feel it in my bones. Please let me go. My brother’s been mourning me. I’m all he has left. I-I want to feel the sun on my face, have the chance to be a mother... get married...” I paint a picture of a life a woman like me should have the right to live, trying to appeal to him. “Surely you understand, you wear a ring...”

His face darkens. “You see what you want to see. What makes you think I’m a good man? I’ve kept you a prisoner here for someone else’s revenge. The world isn’t painted in black and white, little FBI. I live in the gray.”

“But you’d never hurt me.”

“I’ve killed. Buried bodies under the moonlight. Done the hardest drugs money can

buy. I don't do that shit anymore but I carry it all with me. You saw what you wanted to see; sometimes bad people are good and good people bad. You betrayed the wrong man, little FBI. You're lucky they didn't order me to bury you where I've buried so many."

His words turn over in my mind. "If it comes to that. Promise me something...?"

His sharp blue eyes land on my upturned face. This man is gorgeous. A gorgeous honest monster and yet I don't see him as anything but good. It emanates from the gentle kindness in how he's always spoke to me. "I can't promise you anything but that no one will ever hurt you the way a man can hurt a woman."

"Ah, so you do have somebody. Or did. A woman you'd die for." He breathes out hard, clenching his fists. Not willing to speak about his heart or the fact that it's wrapped in a band of platinum around his ring finger. "If the day ever comes when you're ordered to dispose of me, bury me on a night like this... in a place like this..."

"No. If the day ever comes when they tell me to do that, I'll send you to my brothers in the Royal Bastards. They'll keep you safe. Hidden."

"The Royal Bastards? Who are they?"

His lips smirk. "Ever watch Sons? The RBMC are the biggest international MC in the world. Their connections are deep. Even the Salvatore would think twice before starting that war."

"Send me there now?"

He shakes his head. "I couldn't guarantee your safety. A pretty, young thing like you? Some hot-head would want to make you his ol' lady. Little FBI and all..."

I shudder. “I need a break from men. From romance... Maybe permanently.”

“Yeah, I figured.”

“Is he...,” I swallow hard. “Alive? Or did Roque order a hit?”

“It’s time to go,” He answers gruffly.

“Please. Just a few minutes more?”

“It’s getting cold.”

“The cold is all I know now...the stars—I need to make a wish.”

“You need more than a wish and a prayer to get out of the mess your in.”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“He’s not a good man.”

“You sure about that? From what I know, he treated you like his queen. He and Roque took a trip to the diamond district in New York before shit went sideways. Heard he bought the biggest diamond they had... for you...”

“I could never be with him.”

“He could never be with you. I would never be with a woman who betrayed me. You took a bad gamble and lost girl.”

“So what? Is this my new life now? To be kept in your cellar?”

“At least he gave you a life. Let you keep it.”

“Johnny lives?”

“It was Roque’s decision.” And with that he puts another set of zip ties around my wrists. The blind fold is next, and all the stars are gone. This is my fate, my new lifetime sentence. I’m not enraged though, after all I knew the risk—the possibility of what would happen to me if I failed. Double-crossing a mafia Don was just plain stupid. I crossed two. Roque Salvatore would relish spilling my blood. Which is why I’m so puzzled that someone chose to let me live. But I’ve never been one to cower or back down from a fight. I guess my life underground is better than having none.

1

Johnny

Two weeks later...

“Would you calm down? You’re bouncing so much—my notebook keeps moving.”

My knee is bouncing. I’ve got three pieces of extra Bubble Chew inside my cheek and the nerve above my left eye is twitchy. “What? Am I ruining your mojo? Ruining your next kiddie plot? Spoiler alert, the prince is a douche. No—a cock-blocking little prick of a douche.”

The bastard smirks. If he wasn’t my best friend, he’d be skewered to a pole, naked while wild animals feast on him.

“Jealous of my success?”

“Please,” I snort. “No one is terrified of you now. You’ve made a mockery of our livelihood. Who ever heard of a savage poet for a Don?”

“Don’t mock me, John-John. It’d be a mistake to underestimate me.” Both my knees bounce. My heart feels like a wild rabbit that just got sprung from its cage. Not because of Roque but because of Christine. “Her family still thinks she’s dead. Not a trace of DNA or an article of her clothing was ever found. That bastard brother never stops trying to find a clue though. I’ve handled him. Got him put on a case in Libya so he can’t snoop around in the states.”



“Good. Let it stay that way. She’s mine for the rest of her life, anyway.”

He smirks. “You know there is a way out... put a ring on it. Worked for me. She can’t testify against you.”

“Well, jackass, you were the one who hid her in a cellar. Not me.”

His pen finally pauses from the paper. “I’m not going down for your toy, Johnny. I spared her life for you. That’s it. If you fuck this up again—”

“I won’t. I don’t love her anymore.”

He studies me for a minute before resuming whatever bullshit he is putting down in ink. Sensing my disdain, he speaks without taking his eyes off his words, “It’s a poem for my wife.”

“Totally pussy whipped,” I reply, with a snort while tipping my head toward the window.

“Like you won’t be as soon as you see her. Maybe this was a bad idea. I’ll text Rog to call it off.”

“Don’t you dare. You’ve cock-blocked me long enough.”

“Please. You cock-blocked yourself. Why did you wait so long? Scared she won’t want you anymore?” He taunts, knowing that’s exactly why but I play it off.

My lips tip up. “I might not be as smart as you. Or as polished. I’m rough as shit but the one thing I definitely know how to do is lay it down. Ask your ex, Julietta. Remember how she screamed for me?”

“I’d rather not remember.”

“One look at my cock and Christine is gonna be begging for it. Especially since you’ve had her hidden for so long. No one touched her?”

“No. We don’t do that shit. Rog kept her fed. Well fed. Who knows, she might be a porker by now.”

“I never minded a little cushion for the pushin’.”

He shakes his head at me. “Red was right. You’ve got the maturity of a fifteen-year old.”

“She said that shit about me?” It’s no secret that his lady and I butt heads. Mostly because we fight over him. Roque’s been my right-hand man as much as I’ve been his. When he hooked up with Ro again, I felt like an abandoned dog.

“Why are you coming anyway? You wanna watch?”

“I have business in Springdale. I own the Inn there, remember? Besides, I know the real reason you stayed away. You didn’t trust yourself. You wanted to punish her as much as you wanted to fuck her. You needed time to cool off.”

“Book us a couples massage. I’m blaming you for this shit. So, I can swoop in like a hero... Actually, yeah, let’s stage this shit. I’m gonna kick the door in, tie Rog up and make it look like I’ve finally found her. I’m gonna Stockholm Syndrome the shit outta this situation... yeah, you are right. I had some dark nights when I believed ending her would end this never-ending torment for her that runs through my blood.”

“You dumbass. Stockholm Syndrome is when a person falls in love with their captor. Not the other way around.”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“I know... you didn’t let me finish. I’m gonna ‘rescue’ Christine only to take her as my captive, in your Inn. You owe me.”

“I saved your ass and hers.”

“So? I’ve got some serious blue balls for her Roque. Ever since you told me she lives, I’ve been celibate. I haven’t even stuck my dick in a woman’s mouth.”

He pinches the bridge of his nose. “I’ll call Sally, my innkeeper. Don’t piss her off. I’ll never hear the end of it.”

Adrenalin races through me as I remember Christine. I’ve fucked plenty of women but the way that girl did it for me... I just can’t explain. Pure animalistic chemistry is the closest thing I can think of to describe what it was like between us. At least I hope it was for her, too. I mean the girl did rat me to the Feds after I laid it down on the regular...The back of my neck starts to sweat. My foot is shaking as my knees bounce. I jerk my head to the side, cracking my neck.

“What?” I challenge Roque with my best voodoo hitman eyes.

“Need a Xanax?”

“Yeah, thanks.”

“I was joking.”

“You never joke.”

“I do now. Blame it on the women in my life.”

“That’s okay. I left a stash on your plane.”

“Did you leave anything else? The Feds still do random searches. They still can’t let Savage Poet go. They know it was all bullshit.”

“I have some E, Oxy and a little blow.” Now Roque’s eye twitches. “What? I have enough to share. Ever since Red came back you’ve had a real stick up that ass.” Oh shit. Now I’ve done it. Both this eyes twitch and now his knee bounces. “Dude. You should see yourself right now.”

He drops his journal. I slap the pen from his hand. And we go at it like two jerkoffs. Mostly play fighting like we used to when we were frat boys.

2

Johnny

“Do I need to go over the plan again?”

Rog lifts his brows. “My wife is gonna have my ass if she ever finds out about this...”

“Take it up with him,” I nod over to Roque.

“Ya’ shittin’ me? My wife is his biggest fan.”

“What can I say? The ladies love me.”

I duck under the bar to smooth my hair and check my teeth. I’m not handsome or smooth like Roque. I have tiny, jagged scars on my face telling my story of growing up street. My nose is a bit big. My jaw is square. I’m not handsome or look like some slick movie star but I’ve never struggled when it came to getting the ladies. Maybe it was my rep of being thug or the power I had, but I simply think I was good in bed. I have a big tool and I knew how to lay pipe. The ladies always came back for more, but Christine was the one who I wanted to give more to than just a good time between the sheets. After she betrayed me it hurt so bad, I took my own blade and slashed the tip across my chest. I wanted a scar I could actually see to remind my dumbass not to fall for love again. I should just kill her and end it. But I can’t. I’ve been in a funk thinking she was dead. Now that I know she lives; my traitorous heart is excited again. I need to get her out. Exile her pert little ass from my soul. I gotta purge the

girl from my system somehow. If I don't, I'm royally fucked.

I unload the clip from my gun, filling it with blanks. Rog and Roque are wearing bullet-proof vests under their clothes just in case. "Let's do this shit," I tell them as I rack my new clip.

"This is gonna be great in the sequel to Savage Poet."

"You and your damn books again." I shake my head.

"I want my character to have a bigger role," Rog drawls. "Maybe a couple of chapters?"

"We'll discuss it later."

"But make sure you tell Dev it's all fiction. Yeah?"

Roque smiles. "Pure fiction. Just like I told the Feds."

"Are you done being in love with yourself?" I pop my shoulder. My girl is below with no idea I'm about to stage a fake rescue. Her hell living in the basement of a bar run by an MC might be coming to an end...but she's going to be mine to torture however I deem fit.

"I'm going down to give her breakfast. You are gonna 'sneak' up on me from behind with rope. We'll struggle. Make it look legit. Roque will run down to see what is going down; then you pop him with the fake rounds and rescue your 'queen' only to hold her hostage in a five-star resort. I think I got it down?"

I nod. Then turn to Roque. "I can't wait to empty a clip into your cocky-egotistical ass."

“Bring it,” he smirks. “You know I only did this because your family. If it were anyone else, she would have been taken care of.”

“I know. But I’m still pissed. If there’s a scratch on her—”

“Yeah, yeah,” he rolls his eyes. “You protecting the woman who almost brought down my entire Syndicate exposing the connection between me and Creed MC and who singlehandedly was responsible for your own family putting a hit on you is almost adorable John-John.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose. “I’m pumping you with two clips Salvatore.”

“Bring it, ass wipe.”

I lift my gun firing an empty round in the air just for sound effects then kick open the backdoor to Rog’s bar for more theatrics. He’s retired Creed MC but just like the mob once you’re in an MC you’re in for life no matter how you try to spin it. Or reinvent yourself. I can’t believe anyone actually believes the giant man is just a bar owner.

“Where is she?” I bellow, knocking empty chairs and flipping tables over just to make Christine really think I’m tearing Rog’s bar apart looking for her.

Rog grins like a mother fucker as he beckons me to take a swing. “Just to make it look real, right?” I hiss.

I hit him with a right hook just under his left eye. Not hard enough to really hurt but the rings on my knuckles cut up his flesh. Then, I fire a few rounds in the ceiling.

He growls as lights pop. “My wife is gonna have my ass.”

“Not my problem.”

I'm going for the trap door Roque told me about. Unrolling a shitty rug, I find it and pop that bitch open. It smells a bit dank. Like old beer and dust. It's wet, dark and I practically taste her fear in the air as I descend the wooden steps.



## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

Ignoring the light switch, I creep deeper into the maze of underground tunnels. “Miss me, baby?” I taunt into the stillness of the dark. “I hear your fear sweetheart. Did you think I was dead? That my own mob did me in for what you did?”

Christine is a fox. Literally and mentally. I’m sure my presence is throwing her for one hell of a loop. She thought I was dead. Just like I thought she was. I know it.

“Come out little minx. You have ten seconds to crawl on your knees to me.”

“I’ll never get on my knees for you.” Her throaty response comes from the shadows. A smirk plays across my lips.

“Oh, sweetheart, one of your best positions was on your knees. Or have you forgotten the taste of my thick cock between your lips so soon?” I try to fight it, but even speaking of it out loud gives me a semi. Christine was the best I’ve ever had. And I had plenty. Too bad she was a snitch, a Fed who wasn’t after my dick or heart. She was only after my downfall.

“Scared, little double agent? You think you could play a Lamatti and get away with it?”

“You’re too stupid to fear.”

Now my back’s up. I know I’m not the brightest candle on the mantle. Never was. I sucked at math and science but excelled at killing and getting it on. Doesn’t mean I’m not a bit sensitive about being called dumb though. “The way I see it is you have two choices here, Christine. Come with me and be my pet or stay here and let Roque

finish what he always wanted. He only kept you alive for me. But if you aren't good for what you were always good for...", I break off, shrugging in the dark.

"You're a killer. A criminal. Bringing you down was justice."

"Oh yeah? That's funny, babe. Because the only word that rang in my ear as my big cock rammed ya' good was 'god.' Not thug or killer."

"What can I say? I'm a good actress."

"Liar." The word rolls off my tongue like smooth silk. "I felt you come all around my thick dick, babe. The ecstasy I gave you was no lie."

"Can I help it if I came to the thought of you locked up? That shit turned me on."

Squinting, I make out her shadow slowly coming from the dark. I rush forward jerking her by the hair. "I said on your knees. Once, I treated you like a princess but now you're just my fallen queen."

My hands shake as they move through the silky strands of her dark hair. Her eyes burn with hate as they glare up at me, but I don't care. It's a miracle she's alive, here in the flesh for me to have and hold again. I'll never let her go again. Even if that means holding her captive for the rest of our lives. Everyone thinks she's dead anyway. She's mine to keep. Forever. Every thought I had about making her bleed, smash her heart to pieces goes up in smoke. I don't want her hate when I still crave her love.

I grab her by the elbow, jerking her upright. "Are you coming with me? Or staying in this dank basement? Your choice."

She grumbles a few curses but follows me through the tunnels toward the stairs. I

pause on the bottom step, turning to jerk her against my body. “You want out? I’ll take you back to the light... for a kiss.” I purse my lips playfully, feeling my heart and cock jump at the smell of her skin so close to mine.

She leans in with lips a breath away from mine, “You haven’t changed at all, have you? You’d die for pleasure, wouldn’t you?” She’s quick. My eyes are hooded, half-shut, anticipating the feel of her tongue dueling with mine. Her hands go for the spare gun tucked behind the waistband of my pants. I move fast, pinning her against the drywall, with my gun still in my left hand, I grab her wrists with my right, slamming my hips into hers.

“I’ll have you bent over and begging by sundown,” I smirk, letting my lips hover above hers. It takes everything I have not to succumb to the desire to take her mouth.

“Never. I never wanted you. It was all an act. All I wanted was you locked up for life.”

Anger heats my blood. She’s lying. She has to be because there’s no way I’ve been burning for a bitch who never wanted me back. “Maybe it started out that way,” I trace a finger down her clenched cheek, “But you and I both know we were explosive in the sack.”

She has the audacity to laugh. “You haven’t changed at all. Have you? You’re still the same old Johnny good for nothing but killing and fucking. Not much else up in that thick skull of yours. Maybe it’s not your fault, when you have such a low I.Q. what else could you have done with your life?”

Her words cut deep. I know I’m a bit of a wild cannon, the guy with the bad jokes, loud laugh, and grubby hands. But I’m loyal to the core. I’m no snitch and I’m good at both the killing and the fucking. I was born with bad ADHD and had a learning disability. Reading gave me a headache. All the letters swam on the page. Forget

math. But I had a way with the ladies, my easy nature when I was chilling at the club combined with my beefy hands and muscles never caused one to complain. But then again, Christine was different. She seemed classier than the rest. She's slim with a delicate nose and dainty hands but underneath all her femininity the woman was a viper. She bit my heart and left her poison to ruin me. Now it's my turn to make her feel the pain. Turning away from her smug face, I jerk her by the elbow, pushing her up the stairs in front of me. She hesitates at the top step, so I help her along by firmly placing my hand on that ass, pushing her forward.

"Hey!" She snarls, trying to bat me away.

"You wanna stay down here in the dark?" I hiss, biting her ear. Her spine stiffens. Her head hangs in sweet defeat. "That's what I thought." My husky laugh moves a few silky strands of her hair. She jerks her arm free, blinking madly as her eyes adjust to daylight streaming in through the windows of the main bar room. I can't help my smirk. Rog is still playing possum, laying on a broken table. Christine's gasp has me turning my head. Roque's eyes are cold chips of ice as he points his gun at me. "You'd betray me for her?"

He's quite the actor. I force my smirk away, replacing it with my own "game" face. "She's mine to punish. She used me to get to you." I point my gun full of blanks right at his chest.

"And your foolishness almost brought down my crew. You know what this means Johnny, old friend or not—there are no second chances in the mob."

Christine's fingers inch toward a pool stick. Her hate towards Roque radiates from her. "She will pay for her crimes against us." I vow, meaning every word.

"I can't take the chance she'll seduce you again, John-John. It needs to end here."

I move forward, pushing Christine behind me as I fire two blanks at Roque's chest. He fires back, purposefully aiming a tad wide. The red stain of his fake blood starts spreading across his crisp, white shirt. I know he's fine, having watched him place the bag of blood under his shirt myself. All that acting he did playing himself in his own story on the big screen really is paying off now. Christine gasps. I yank her past him, out the back and into the truck I had planted there. "I killed my best friend for you. You better be worth it." Her shocked eyes meet mine as I throw her into the back, zip tying her hands. I climb in front, checking to make sure the child locks are on before peeling out the lot and driving toward the B&B slash spa for some much-needed sweet interrogation of my newfound prize.

Christine

I can't believe he came for me. After all I did. All the lies and betrayal. The thing is, I never thought I'd fall for my mark. That the heat between us would be real. I tried to stop it. Fight the attraction I had for him and I lied to myself every time we touched. I told myself it was for a greater cause—the utter destruction of the Lamatti Crime Family. But all I ended up causing was my own self-destruction. He killed Roque Salvatore for me. Roque frickin' Salvatore, the world's most notorious mob boss since Al Capone. I swallow hard. I hated Salvatore just as much as I hated Johnny. My parents were killed in the crossfire of a mob hit gone bad in 1998. I'll never forget the pain of losing them. My brother and I swore vengeance but not by being vigilantes. We wanted to join the FBI; a perfect way to avenge our parents. The Lamatti's are trained killers who spit on the law. When I joined the bureau, I only had one mission in mind: Find and destroy the Lamatti's and any crime family connected to them.

“Where are you taking me?”

“To bed? Where else?” His eyes meet mine in the rearview. Despite the self-loathing bubbling to the surface, I feel the heat between my thighs and the sweet pain of my budding nipples. Johnny's cock is a gift to women, and he knows how to work it like no one else. I bite my lip knowing I'll never be able to resist him if he gets me naked. I'll need to escape or finish what I vowed to do—kill his Brooklyn ass.

“Why did you kill Roque... for me?”

“Don’t flatter yourself. It was for me. With him out of the way, I can take over.” My chin jerks up. “Everyone thinks you’re dead. Your brother has already buried you. If you ask me—he cheaped out. I would’ve at least picked a better-quality headstone.

My foot lifts, kicking the back of his seat. “YOU BASTARD!” It gives me a small bit of satisfaction as his body slams forward causing his seat belt to tighten.

“Save the fight for later my feral kitten. I can’t wait to feel you scratch the hell outta my back.”

My fists curl into my palms. Never. Never will I ever, let him feel the satisfaction of me clawing his back out in ecstasy again. I sit back, take a few deep breathes, trying to get centered so I can rely on my training to get myself out of this. I will escape him no matter what it takes. No matter what it costs. I need to find out just where the heck I am if I’m going to make that happen.

Despite the shitty situation I’m in, the landscape is breathtaking. I have no idea where I am. When I was grabbed, I was drugged and hooded. I woke up in that dank cellar not knowing if it was hours or days later. But the bulky, silver fox of a man was good to me. By the smells and sounds coming from above, it didn’t take long for me to realize I was beneath a restaurant or bar. He never hid his face, proclaiming I’d never be free, so it didn’t matter. However, he refused to give his name. My mouth grows dry as my eyes drift up the tall pines to the soft sky. Sky. It’s been so long since I’ve seen you. The big brute of a man who was my jailer had kind eyes despite his hard body. He made sure I was clean, well fed and even supplied me with an endless supply of books. Sometimes even a magazine. Oh my god, scruffy! The man found a stray behind the restaurant and let me keep it. The cat came and went as it pleased but its litter box was in the cellar with me. The tiny cat kept me sane. Curled up by my feet at night and helped me feel less alone in the dark. I wet my lips, “The man. The man who was hiding me... did you kill him, too?”

“So, what if I did?” Johnny’s voice was hard. Cold. I bit back my cry of anguish. He would pay. There was no other way out for either of us.



4

Johnny

My knuckles are white on the wheel. I heard the affection in her voice when she asked about Roger. Saw the softness in her eyes. Jealousy pierced through my gut hot and fast. If she caught feelings for the Silver Fox during her captivity, I was gonna stomp the shit outta that burning flame. Rog is gonna go ape at how much I trashed the place and then there's the matter of cleaning up all that fake blood Roque spilled. A grin splits across my face despite the jealousy running like a herd of wild buffalo through my veins.

I turn the wheel harder than necessary into the drive of the B&B I had vacated for my reunion with my "lost love." My balls tighten as I imagine her naked in the Roman Spa bathhouse that Roque had built last year. There's every type of scented oil, floating candles in the shape of lotuses and I made sure every type of kinky sex toy would be on hand for what I have planned for my little federal agent.

"Where are we anyway? It's beautiful," she murmurs as I open the back door and haul her out. She closes her eyes, breathing in deeply as the smell of fallen leaves and curling woodsmoke are on the tongue of the wind. I don't think. I don't hesitate as I press her up against the car and lower my mouth. I capture her lips, invading on her gasp of surprise. But she won't surrender. She tastes of all my heartbreak. It wraps around my chest, squeezing tight. I release her, spinning around. I don't want her to witness the look on my face. Because I just realized I'm her prisoner. I'm the free man walking around in chains. I motion for her to follow me inside. I stride lazily as if I didn't give a fuck. I half expected her to bolt. At least try to escape. She didn't

move for a few beats, but finally I hear her tiny footsteps crunch on the leaves covering the drive. I stop short at the stairs. I must have caught her off guard. From the corner of my eye, a round object comes at me. I dodge but not fast enough. The boulder she managed to pick up from the garden gives a good whack to my thick skull, but it wasn't a direct hit.

"Fuck, Christine. Really? If you knock me out how you gonna ride my train later?"

"Do you even know what a train is, Johnny?" She rolls her eyes.

I lick my lips. "Babe. You're wounding me." I splay my hands over my heart. Hiding the real pain, she causes behind humor. That's right. I'm Johnny the wise guy not Johnny the heartbroken guy. "Who says I wouldn't invite more people into our bedroom?"

"Our bedroom?" She raises a brow. "As if you could handle anyone else after me?"

Her taunt has me hot under the collar. But damn if I don't want to take her down a peg or two. "I've handled plenty after you. After all, I did think you were dead." Her face pales at my direct hit. Good. Let her think my cock didn't ache for her ghost every damn day and night for years.

She pushes by me, purposefully knocking into my side. My eyes move down to her ass, skinnier than before but still curvy. My hands start to itch, thinking of all the ways I'm gonna worship it. "Don't even think about running, girl. You and I—we have a lot of reconciliation to do. Starting with you apologizing to my cock for almost getting us both whacked and buried in chains on the bottom of the Hudson. If my family had their way, that's where we'd both be right now.

"I'm not coming near your cock, Johnny. It was all for the sting. Nothing more."

“Baby, when I’m done with you... every piece of you is gonna sting. Even your soul.” I made my vow in a low voice, but she saw it in my eyes, the very need that came from my pain to do it. My words ring true and she knows it. For the very first time, I saw her fear. I had her. She’s still mine despite her best attempts to pretend otherwise.

She twists open the backdoor to the inn, stepping through. My cell dings with a text from Roque:

Savage Douche:Rog is pissed AF. You really sold it to your girl. Don’t let her break you again or I will do what the code requires.

Me:Tell him to calm his man tits. His insurance will cover it. Say it was a bear looking for food.

Savage Douche:Change my caller ID for me in your phone.

Me:What’s yours for me?Savage Douche: #2?

Me:Worry about your own women. I hear the boys at Chloe’s school are sniffing around.

Savage Douche:They’re all dead. It’ll be an all-girls school...

“Who’s that?Your clean-up crew? Are you the #1 now that you offed Roque?”

I roll my shoulder blades then pop my neck. “I like the sound of that. The #1 guy.” I grab her by the hips, pulling her close to me. Her hands tighten on my forearms. Her body language is all wrong, all tense as her upper back tries to arch away from my body. But I’ve thirsted for her too long. Dreamed of holding this body that I thought was long gone from this Earth. My hands move down to her hips. On a grunt I pull

them flush against mine. My head lowers.

“Baby, I’ve died for you. I don’t care if you fake this kiss. Just give me one. One like we used to share before we go to war. Please?” My words soften her, I see it in her eyes. But then I close mine as my lips descend to take what I missed the most. Our moans are in harmony as our tongues touch. In seconds I have her pushed against the wall. My cock is heavy, jutting up and proud. I nudge it between her legs. “Fuck, yeah,” I moan into our kiss as she rides the head of my cock through our clothes. Why the fuck did I stay away for so long? One look at her and I knew I could never kill the love of my life. But that doesn’t mean in this moment I’m not pissed as all fuck.

It’s instinct. Simple lust but I feel her tits harden just from the pressure of my chest on hers. She isn’t faking shit. She might hate me because of my sins... what I do as a job but who I am as a man—my heart is different with her. Hell, everything is always different with her. And I hate her for it. Hate her for making me vulnerable. Hate her for betraying my heart when she’s the only one I ever gave it to. My hands move to the back of her head, fingers twist and twine in her thick hair. It takes everything I have to keep the tears choking my throat at bay. That’s right. I’m a big, strong ox of a man with a low average IQ but I am not afraid to cry when I feel shit. And this woman—makes me feel everything. My heart beats hard, hers is as fast as a hummingbird’s wings. I rip my mouth away already feeling the pain of her running through me again. It burns but I can’t stop myself from wanting all her fire. Anger bubbles hot to the surface. We could’ve had it all. Instead she chose betrayal. My two fists break through the drywall on either side of her head showering her with specks of broken pieces. Broken Pieces. Seems like we both are made of nothing but that.

Her hands push against my chest as the fog from my kiss just cleared from her head. Her cheeks heat. Reluctantly, I let her slip from my arms. “Come on, I’ll show you to your room.”

Her brow arcs, “Why, so you can lock me in?”

“At least you’ll have a spa bathroom and a real bed. If your nice, I’ll even let you watch Netflix.” She flips me the bird, making me grin. “I’ll fix some food. Go.” I point to the stairs, “Last room on the right. Don’t pull any shit, Christine. I won’t hesitate to smack that ass of yours and you know it. Or maybe you’d like that?” My voice lowers as do my eyes. She responds by turning on her heel and sprinting up the stairs. Ten seconds later her door slams. Whistling through my teeth I count to thirty, will my dick to go down and follow. I crack the door open seeing a glimpse of skin before she enters the bathroom. I shut the door fast before I act like an animal and take what she’s not ready to give. I want it all. Hearts and flowers be damned. This girl is getting all the fucked up jagged pieces of me. But I’ll love her with the fierce tenderness only a warrior can give. I just hope she’s smart enough not to turn her back on our second chance. Roque will end her if she doesn’t come around and if he does... I’ll go with her. I finally get it. How and why Romeo followed his Juliet. I’ve been half alive thinking mine was gone. If She dies, I’ll follow. How fucked up is that when I’m not even sure if she even likes me?

5

Christine

My hands tremble as I turn on the jets. Just when I had become accepting of my life in the cellar—he came. I still can't wrap my head around it. I thought for sure he was dead. That the mob put a hit on him for falling for me. I was so close to putting him and Salvatore away. But Salvatore was never my prize. Johnny was. I lied to my bosses, hid my truth. My revenge against the Lamatti's was personal and had nothing to do with my sworn oath of my badge. But the way his hands felt on my skin. The way he commanded me with his kiss... or the way his brow would furrow while trying to solve Sudoku on Sunday mornings while we both sipped dark roast... those are the things I wasn't counting on. The damn, stupid fool really fell for me. And for a moment I was free falling too. I let myself forget for the moments I soared while pinned under him until my brother reminded me with autopsy pictures what was at stake if I failed. My mother was Irish and my father the one with Italian blood and connections to Sicily.

Jack.

My head hangs. He believes they won. That I'm a ghost. I suppose in a way I am. If I escape Johnny, I doubt I'll make it far unless I can get to a Fed safehouse. I try not to crumble under the hot spray as I remember my keeper. He kept me prisoner, but he was kind.

“Be strong. Get out of this. You are a survivor.” I wash my hair that's now down my back wondering just what kind of sweet torture Johnny has in mind. I need to throw

him off his game. I could seduce the fuck out of him and hope to escape when he's asleep somehow. Or kill him. I could break a glass, knock him out. I squeeze my eyes shut. I can't kill him. I just can't. Turning off the taps, I grab a towel and venture into the bedroom. With my towel firmly tucked around me I try the door. Just as I had suspected he locked it from the outside, on my bed are piles of new clothes. Soft, clean, and warm. My fingers run over the softest pair of jeans, but I just can't. I won't be his dressed up and kept whore. Held prisoner for my crimes against his heart when he's the legit criminal here. Not me. I pick up my old clothes, giving them a good shake before squaring my shoulders and rapping on my side of the door. "You can let me out now." I press my palm flat against the door, bowing my head when I hear the deep rumble of his voice coming from the other side. "You gonna be a good girl? My good girl?" That's what he used to call me in more playful moments.

My voice cracks when I answer. "I can't promise you that. I can't promise you anything," I answer truthfully. The lock unclicks and when I open my eyes, his are right in front of me.

"Why? Why baby? We were so good together. Why couldn't you just come clean to me and change your mind?" He bites his lip as if his words pain him. My eyes shutter remembering the way he tasted. He's also freshly showered, and the delicious smell of his skin has me biting back a moan of my own. This man could undo me, and I always knew it.

"You killed my parents." My words erase the web of desire building between us. His face twists into crisscrosses of lines. Worry fills his eyes. I want to melt. Melt straight into a man who almost made me forget my purpose when I soared in his arms. He's so big. Warm and strong. I often pretended to be someone else when I was with him. I could sleep nestled in his embrace for hours, sated and content. The damn oaf cherished me and in return I broke him. "I was twelve and you were sixteen. I know it was you."

“Is that what this is about then?”

I lift my chin.

“Come,” he gently takes my hand. “We’ll eat. Talk... sort this out...”

“Sort this out? You killed my family in cold blood. There’s nothing to sort out except for you to turn yourself in and let me go back to my life.”

“There’s no going back. There’s still a price on your head.” He tugs me forward, but I feel heavy; my heart is full of concrete.

“There’s no way out of this, is there?”

His head turns over his shoulder, “Just take my hand for now. Right now, in this moment... we are okay.”

“I wish I could believe that.”

He doesn’t respond as I despondently follow him down the stairs through stunning rooms decorated in soft grays with touches of pastels and into a large homey kitchen. The kind you immediately feel at home in. He pours me a steaming mug of coffee and puts a homemade roasted turkey sandwich in front of me. I take a whiff. “Fresh baked bread?”

He shrugs. “Uber eats. The woman who runs this place owns a café in town as well.”

“You didn’t kill her?”

He shrugs, “Nah. I just hogtied her and put her in the basement after she handed over the food.”



I push my plate away. “I can’t eat this.”

“Babe. I’m kidding.”

His easy banter and the way he rakes his hand through his hair makes me nostalgic. We used to share so many comfortable small moments like this. “Well in that case...,” I move the plate back in front of me.

“I know I’m no one’s first choice,” he sighs. “Women always came to me to be part of something... a VIP club scene. Or for the thrill of having me as their lover. My power was a turn on. But you—dammit I just wanted you to want me for me. You really fucked me up and now I just don’t know what to do with you.”

He looks so broken and vulnerable it’s hard to hate him. “I can’t get past murder.”

“Is Christine even your real name? I can’t confess to something without knowing all the facts.”

“It is. But my last name is Vitelli.”

He presses a hand to his eyes. “Geno Vitelli’s daughter?”

I nod.

“He wasn’t a good man.”

I get up so fast my stool crashed to the floor. “Is that all you have to say? Are you fucking kidding me? You tore my life apart. Murdered my parents in cold blood all because ‘he wasn’t a good man?’ Fuck off Johnny! You are much worse than he ever was!”

“You don’t know what you are saying—you were a kid.”

“I wasn’t much younger than you were. How old were you when you made your first kill?”

He sighs, then leans his elbows down on the other side of the counter. His meaty biceps pop as he naturally flexes. “Do you want to hear the truth about your parents?”

“Your truth is hardly the real truth...”

“Come on Christine, you are the one woman I gave pieces of myself to that I swore I’d never... Your father was a made man. He was making extra cash on the side selling something my family did not want a piece of. He sold babies. Your mother worked at the clinic. Your father gave the doc a cut. The babies lived... sold to someone else...”

“Stop!” I cover my ears with my hands. “They were good parents... they loved me...”

“Babies weren’t the only thing he traded. He scoured shelters, the slums, looking for the broken souls he could lure with the promise of money and a full belly...”

“You’re sick... Telling me lies! Trying to justify the blood on your hands.”

“I was there, but I didn’t pull the trigger.”

My chest gets tight. My throat constricts. I can’t breathe through the pain choking me. I slept with this man. Let him take me a million times in as many ways and he was present when both my parents were killed in cold blood. I hate myself.

“Don’t do this. Stop picturing it; taking it apart...” he demands, huskily, rounding the counter.

I hold up both hands. “Stay away. Don’t touch me.”

“I can’t stop myself. I’m dying to touch you. Baby,” he breathes, grabbing me tight. I’m in his bear-like embrace. He’s so big. So strong and smells so damn sexy. My nipples ache as I’m pressed against his chest. My palms curl into fists, refusing to hug him back. “Sometimes people aren’t who you think they are...,” he drops off realizing what he’s said. He meant my parents but when spoken aloud applied to me.

I’m tired. Hungry. Confused. Weak. Memories I’ve locked away slowly escape. Memories I purposefully pushed aside. The babies mom brought home from work telling me she was making extra money taking care of the newborns until their mama’s felt better. I was a little girl. I took my mother at her word no matter thinking it a bit strange. What he said makes total fucked up sense. Tears fall like pouring rain. I choke on the flood.

“Baby, I’m so sorry.” His meaty hands stroke the back of my head and I snuggle into his warmth by laying my head against his chest as the sound of his steady, strong heart—the one I broke, comforts me.

“This is so fucked up. We are so fucked up,” I rasp, clinging tighter to him.

“Tell me about it,” he murmurs as he pulls back to cup my chin. My eyes shutter as his lips kiss away my tears. It’s not long before his mouth is on mine and all the hate between us dissipates into pure passion. It’s an explosion of longing after a long separation. I forget he was my mark, my enemy and just remember the lover he was to me. The lover he still could be if I let down the walls erected around my heart.

“Christine, baby. I thought you had gone forever,” he murmurs against my throat as he hoists me up using his large palms on my ass. I wrap my legs around his waist. He turns depositing me on the counter. One large palm moves under my shirt, cupping a breast. He feels so good. Johnny always was the best lover I’d ever had. He’s earthy, bold and gives zero fucks about anything but pleasure. “I need to taste you baby. It’s been so long.” His lips and tongue move across my skin. He moves back, spreading my knees apart. My black yoga pants are peeled down my legs. Seconds later Johnny’s face is buried between my thighs, hungrily feasting on my core like it’s a five-course meal. He’s loud. Brash and when his tongue and lips find my clit, I’m a goner. My hips lift on their own needing to fuck his face. I come, shattering into pieces, still hating myself for how easily I come for this man.

I push off the counter. His face is flushed. He breathes hard with clenched fists as he stares after me. “Go run, little girl. You know this shit between us is inevitable, not over. Do you hate yourself for wanting me? Get over it. I’m not the monster. Your father was. And you almost got us both killed for some fucked-up misguided revenge. When you’re done with your self-pity. We’ll talk. Or fuck. Hell, we’ll do both.”

“I hate you.” I yell, raising clenched fists of my own.

He smirks, with lips still slick with me. “Hate away, baby. You’re stuck with me. Forever. You know that.”

I respond by running away and slamming my door. He can lock me in. I need sleep and a plan on how I’m going to survive my new captor. I fall asleep by sobbing for

all I've lost.

6

Johnny

I crack my knuckles then snap my neck to the right feeling the comforting pop. I'm too worked up to sleep and although I wanna make my princess pay, I won't go up there. Not the way I currently feel. I'd only tear us both apart. I'm a conflicted man. All of me burns for her but part of me burns to make her pay for her lies and the other just wants to brand the fuck out of her and get back to where we were before my world ended.

My phone vibrates in my hand. "How's the reunion going?"

"Fuck off," I sneer. Then I press a hand to my forehead. "It's fucking torture. Wanting the one who betrayed you. How did you do it? How did you forgive Romina?"

"It wasn't a choice. It was a foregone conclusion."

"She's fucking me up." My right hand goes through my hair as I pace around the great room.

Roque sighs heavily. "Maybe it was a mistake to let her live."

"What do I do with her?"

"What I did. Marry her. A ring around her finger is as good as a gag order. She can't

snitch on you and you'll own her forever."

I snort. "She'll never vow to love and cherish my ass."

"You better figure something out. You can't stay at the Inn for long. Work it out or send her back into the basement with Rog. Either way, just get some peace."

"Love is the opposite of peace."

"Depends on where you are on that journey."

"She's a lot like your woman."

"Ah, so my Romina is growing on you then, eh?"

I twist my mouth. "I still think she's too much. But I love her for your sake."

"I wanted to kill Christine. But I didn't for your sake. Go easy. Use your head this time. The one upstairs."

I shrug. "I'm trying. Haven't punished her yet."

"Go workout. Get rid of some tension that way. You have a week to get her right or I'm pulling the plug on this whole reunion of yours."

His words ring in my head as I enter the gym. It's small but state of the art. I get on a row machine and row my fucking boat. Sweat almost blinds me after twenty minutes. I grab a towel and my cell opening the app to the security camera I hid in her bedroom.

She's huddled under the comforter, hiccupping in her sleep. I zoom in on her face,

rubbing my thumb across the screen. “Sleep tight my little damsel in distress. Tomorrow you’re mine and I want you to beg forgiveness for what you broke. My heart. I’ll make you fall in love with me again. Despite what you said, I know we were there, babe.”

I slam my fist into the punching bag over and over. I lose track of time. All I want is to be her number one guy.

\* \* \*

She’s playing possum. I know she’s awake. She’s testing me. Trying to figure out if I have cameras in her room. I do babe. But I’m not letting on. Instead of crawling into bed and pressing my lips to all that sleep-warmed skin, I sigh willing my cock to go down and decide to make breakfast.

The skillet sizzles as I crack an egg into the pan. I lay a pound of bacon down in a frying pan then brew a pot of coffee. My baby girl can eat, and I know she’s starving. I unlocked her room before I came down and sure as shit, it’s been less than five minutes and I hear the tell of the fifth stair creaking. My girl can’t resist the frying bacon. I know her. Despite all her lies. I know her.

I resist the urge to turn around, instead I scramble the eggs then fake a yawn, so I have an excuse to flex my biceps. I’m wearing my loose gray pajama pants and I sleep bare chested. It used to drive her wild. I remember many mornings when she’d sneak up behind me while I was at the stove, just to snake her tiny hands down the waistband and cup me.

I almost cry, I miss those days so much. “Fucking pussy,” I mutter under my breath, pressing a hand to my eye,

“Johnny? Are you?”



“What?” I spin around. “Just some grease splattered in my eye.”

“Uh-huh.”

Damn she’s beautiful. Her hair is tousled. Her cheeks still pink from sleep. Her eyes are not hard but soft in the early morning light. I’m frozen, staring at her still not quite believing she’s real. That she’s here. That we have another chance at this.

“The eggs are burning.” She smirks, moving to take the spatula from me.

“Don’t. Get away. Get away from me right now or I swear on everything I am I will take you right here, right now.” My nostrils flare, seeing her peaked nipples through her tank. I close my eyes. My body shakes with need, my cock tents in my sleep pants.

“Fuck!” I drop the spatula, turn off the stove, stalking past her.

“I’m lost here, too!” She cries out from behind me. I look over my shoulder. And damn, was that a mistake. Her eyes are wet with unshed tears.

My fists clench..“Can you just forgive me, and I’ll forgive you?”

The cords in my neck are strained. She swallows hard, looking away. “He was kind to me. You killed two men in cold blood yesterday. Sure, maybe Salvatore deserved it but the other was good to me. He used to bring me a homecooked breakfast almost daily. We’d read the paper together and play Sudoku. I-I’m sorry but I’m grieving for him. He was kind.”

“Are you fucking kidding me, Christine?!”

“It was a hoax! Roger is married! He kept you locked down in that cellar for Salvatore for free. Never asked any questions. And you’re pining for that old man? The fuck? I’m right here, baby,” I point my index finger into my own chest. “I’m the man who would go to hell to retrieve you and bring you back. I’m the man who would kill for you. Who cherished you... but you know what? I’m sick of this shit. I’m sick of being second. From now on, I’m the number one guy? You got that? Not number two. You put my needs, my wants first and right now I want you to get that ass over here and take care of my cock!”

I didn’t mean to scream at her but I’m barely holding my shit together. I never thought she’d catch feelings for Rog. I’m gonna go over to Sassy’s and break his damn face later. Or maybe I’ll just fill his wife in on what he hid under her nose for a year. I’m sure Devon will bust his balls better than I could.

“Whatever. I need a good fuck. It’s been a few years.”

My chin lifts. There she is. My girl. My woman full of fire who was never afraid of me but met me head on every damn time.

“Come to me,” I gesture, beckoning with one hand.

“No. You come to me,” she challenges, hoisting herself up on the counter and spreading her legs.

My nostrils flare and my dick jumps at the sight of all that creamy skin opening for me.

But I won’t budge. She needs to understand just who is in control here.

“Come to me, baby.” She teases, running a hand down her thigh while her other cups her own breast.

“Fuck,” I breathe, palming my dick. Unashamed, I take myself out, stroking the long length of my cock as I watch her tease me.

“Make me forget. Johnny. Make me forget everything,” She bites her lip, moaning as she touches herself for me.

The skin over my cheekbones are drawn tight, it takes everything I have not to move. The tip of my dick glistens for her as I continue to stroke my shaft. “Only if you swear to stop the lies. Stop your thoughts of revenge. Surrender yourself to me, baby. Give us one more try.”

She shakes her head. “I need to come. Please Johnny. I can’t think. I just need you to give me what only you could.”

“It’s not enough baby. I need more than a good fuck. I need your soul.”

She shakes her head stubbornly. It only makes me want her more. I grin, stroking myself from root to tip. “I’m gonna make myself come. You’re welcome to watch.” From across the kitchen we stare at one another as we each touch ourselves. We talk dirty. I groan her name; she screams mine. “Pinch your nipple. Use three fingers, that’s it baby. I’m so close,” I groan, beating myself faster. I shout her name loudly as spurts of come tear free from my dick.

“Johnny!” She screams, fingering herself faster.

“That’s right baby, say my name!” I know I’m cheesy as fuck but when it comes to sex no man compares to how I bring it.

My ecstasy covers the floor. I tuck myself back in feeling like a king. “Clean it up. Bring my breakfast on the patio. It’s time you start serving me. I want my coffee hot not lukewarm. But hot.”

She flips me the bird but I'm not budging. I need to control her fire before I get burned by it a second time.

Whistling through my teeth, I wash up and change my pants before strolling to the enclosed patio sunroom. "Babe?! Your wolf is hungry!"

The sound of a revving car has me spinning on my heel. She took the fob key I had left on the counter and made a break for it. "Son of a bitch!"

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

I quickly run to the keypad by the backdoor punching in the code to close the sixteen-foot-high iron gates. She can't get through without killing herself. On bare feet, I run down the drive. The sound of squealing brakes urging me faster. I reach the car, ripping the door open. She fights me. Clawing and scratching my bare skin. I have no choice but to drag her back, restraining her arms like an anaconda.

“Stop.”

“I can't! I hate you! I hate that I want you! That I almost fell in love with you! I hate that Only you make me come so hard!”

Our hearts pound like war drums. So much confusion is between us. “Let's just get this over with.” I drag her face to mine, conquering her mouth. She screams into my kiss, biting my tongue. The taste of my blood flaming the fire. I pull her down in the grass, ripping her shirt apart. I release my cock, nudging it against her soaked fold. “Say it! Say you want me. Need me, like no other,” I rasp. My fingers dig into the wet earth. It's barely forty degrees but we're both burning the fuck up. She spreads her legs, no longer fighting against me but fighting to get me inside her. Her nails bite into my biceps, her mouth is open and parted. Her eyes are glassy with lust for me. I lean down on my elbows, tease her lips with a kiss then move my mouth down her neck. One hand strokes down her body while my lips settle on a nipple. She moans, wriggling under my ministrations. I want her soaked. Begging. Then I'm gonna fuck the shit outta her until there's no doubt left just who her king is.

“Please. I need you deep inside me. Like you used to...,”

I take the meaty head of my cock into one hand, guiding into her slick channel. We

both hiss at how good it feels. Once I'm rooted all the way in, I grunt pausing for a moment. Her legs wrap around my waist. She's so friggin' tight. I was the last man to touch her, to bury his dick in this tight pussy and that knowledge has my dick twitching and ready to release just from the heady thought.

"I've missed you, babe." My teeth sink into the soft skin by her collarbone as I gyrate my hips. One hand moves under her ass moving close to the backdoor. I grin as she gasps just wondering how dirty I'll be on our reunion.

"You wanna come hard, babe? Like the old days."

"Please, John. I need you—need this..."

I growl low against her throat before lifting my head to meet her eyes. "I'd kill for you. I'd die for you. Never betray my love again. You might not love me now, but I swear you will. I'm gonna plant my babies right here," my thumb skims her flat tummy. My words make her wetter and my cock sinks deeper. I'm home and I am never leaving again. Blood roars in my head at the sight of my woman under me. I pound into her over and over until the beast inside me releases. "Mine!" I roar collapsing on top of her.

She convulses in my arms and I kiss the top of her head. No one is taking her from me again. Love is love. And I'll take hers anyway I can get it.

7

Christine

He's sated and limp in my arms. I don't know how or why but being with me always grounded him. It made me feel powerful that I had something no other woman had, the power to tame the beast and make him beg. My heart cracks open wide. I always loved him and hated myself for it. I punished myself by turning him in. I always prided myself on the law. On being the good one but he's made me see I've been stuck on my own sense of righteousness and we both paid for it.

"You're freezing." His warm hands caress me as he moves to stand, cradling me in his arms.

"No. Please. I don't want to go inside yet. It's been so long since I've seen sky. Since I've smelled clean air."

"Roque had you, but I thought you were dead all this time."

She seems startled by my revelation. "Roque let you believe I was dead?"

He nods, looking away as his fingers pick grass. But the tell is his throat working. The damn stubborn pig-headed man really cares for me and I fucked both our lives up with this insane plan to avenge real evil people. My parents. I put my hand over his. "Can you tell me more... about my parents... about what they did. I do remember odd bits of pieces but it's still a lot to take in."



“After. If that’s what you really want. I’ll bring you back outside later, but we need to get warm.”

He hoists me up in his arms, skin to skin, he carries me over the threshold of grass and fallen leaves. I wrap my arms around his neck, “Johnny?”

“Yeah, baby?”

“How is this going to work? I can’t live like this and we can’t go back to the real world...”

“One day at a time. I still don’t trust you yet. That is going to take time. I mean... if you’re done fighting this thing between us...”

I close my eyes, breathing in the scent of him on the fall morning. “I’m trying. I am. I’m only tired of the death... the dying. The violence.”

“Me too. But I don’t know another way to live.”

“I could show you...”

He stops, puts me down in the grass and kisses me with tender passion. “Woman, I’m never letting you go. But I still haven’t forgiven you for breaking this,” he points to the middle of his chest.

“I didn’t want to. When we were together, I didn’t want to believe it. That you were the one who killed my parents, but I knew even if you were innocent of that—you were still guilty of killing someone else.”

“Look, babe. It’s the life I’m in. If you can’t accept that right here, right now. I’ll send you deep into the mountains in Peru. I have a cabin there. I’ll set you up with

everything you need. But if I do that and you come back from the dead to take me or Roque down...”

I shake my head. “One day at a time, like you said. I’m still processing everything. I do have feelings for you, but I’m still trying to sort out what they are. I’m angry that I’ve been kept prisoner. I know you killed Roque to set me free but what happens now? That’s one hell of a power vacuum. How can we ever be safe?”

“We are safe. Look, babe, Roque... I didn’t kill him.”

“I saw your shot. That hit was not survivable.”

“It was faked. I was shooting blanks.”

“What?”

He shrugs, “I wanted you to go with me with less of a fight.”

“That whole shoot-out was a hoax? Where is he? I want to see him. Right now?”

“Roque? No.”

“Not Roque. The sexy as fuck gentle giant who kept me sane. I have feelings for him, too. It’s fucked up but I do.”

“Roger? The fuck?!” He yells. “Get over them. Now!”

“You can’t just demand feelings to go away.”

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“He’s married. Besides, he’ll never want you. Fuck this.” He drags me into the house, grabs his gun and walks back out. Both of us are still stark naked. “I’m gonna kill him for real this time. I didn’t just get you back to lose you to Roger. Really? The silver fox? You fell for his shit? What does he have that I don’t?”

He paces, butt naked with a Glock in his hand. A giggle escapes me. I can’t help it. As fucked up as my life is after all those days held in a dungeon; my heart feels light.

“You think this is funny? After all I went through—I grieved for you... only to find out you were alive, and he snuck in and stole you? Fuck no. I ain’t having it. Wait...,” his face turns red. “Did he touch you?” The last question was a snarl.

“No. He was a perfect gentle giant.”

“Yeah, that’s Rog. All cuddly as fuck.”

He taps a few times on his cell, holding it up to his ear. I wrap my arms around myself, finally feeling the chill. “Dev? It’s Johnny... where’s that dickwad husband of yours... Yes! I said dickwad. He is one... he made a move on my girl...” I hear the woman shrieking on the other end... not believing Johnny. She’s defending her man but cursing at him at the same time. “You tell him to call me the fuck back or we’re gonna have problems.”

He hangs up, finally staring at me. “You think this is funny? My lips turn up. “That’s it. I’m punishing you the way I’ve dreamed about.” The veins on his neck pop as he stalks toward me with eyes full of fiery passion and lust. I stumble backwards. Shrieking as he gives chase after me and into the house. I’m confused, tripping over

thick oriental rugs as I dart from room to room. But he knows the layout and before I know it, he's in front of me.

"What? How?"

"I took a shortcut. You ready to pay up doll?"

"Johnny!" I scream as he spins me around, pinning me against the wall. His breath is hot on my neck, seconds later the sweet sting from his bite sears through me as his hands move down to my ass. He spreads my hips apart, takes a finger and rubs between my folds.

"You like that, baby?"

"You know I do."

"Too bad." He moves back, removes his hand only to smack my ass hard.

"The fuck?" I try to spin around but he pins both my wrists.

"That was for telling me you caught feelings for Roger. This one is for my blue balls last night." Another smart slap lands.

"Fuck this. I'm not your sub. I'm not some club skank you can torture sexually."

"No. You aren't. You're the woman who ripped my heart out of my chest knowing your endgame would make me a dead man." This time I take the hard slap. But soon the stinging pain mixes with the need for him to fuck me as he alternated between slapping me and rubbing my slick folds. The dueling sensations have me on edge. My hips move back trying to fuck his hand. "No. You don't get to come, until I say you can. Today is about me. Got that?" He spins me around only to land a hard kiss

against my mouth. His cell rings interrupting his next move. “Rog? I’m kind of busy punishing my girl for falling for you. What? No, you can’t fucking talk to her. She’s mine. You wanna talk to someone? Go talk to your wife.”

He hangs up and I’m transfixed. Angry Johnny is hot. Territorial Johnny is a turn on. How could I ever momentarily want someone other than the big, dumb guy standing right in front of me? He’s not my second choice, he’s my first. I’m simply scared shitless to tell him. I’ll make him sweat a bit more. Besides, I’d die before admitting that I actually crave his punishment. I’ll be a bad girl all day long if this is how I’m “rewarded.”

“He’s okay?”

“You dare ask about him? To me? He’s dead when Dev figures out how he hid you for Roque...”

I swallow hard at the gleam in his eyes as they travel down my body. I know what he’s thinking... he’s gonna fuck me hard. Probably all day. A shiver rolls through me.

“Cold?”

I didn’t respond, letting him misread my body signs. He throws me over his broad shoulders resting a meaty palm across my angry ass. I’m taken down halls, out to the back of the building before he finally puts me down. He punches a code into a keypad and a door unlocks.

“Welcome to the spa, babe. You ready for your treatments?”

It’s dim inside the hall. He opens a door and I’m dazed as I scan the Turkish bath. Colorful mosaic tiles cover the ground and pool area. “Get in. If you dare.”

I tip a toe into the water. It's hot. Like, hot tub hot. I keep one eye on Johnny as I sink down into the water. He opens a louvered closet, taking out a floating mat and a bottle of... oil? I shake my head. Johnny is a kinky fuck and being the center of his sexual attention is a reward like no other. He puts the mat down in the pool, dousing it with baby oil. Then he crooks a finger at me. "Get on, ass up."

I shake my head.

"I won't ask again." I shake my head, knowing by refusing him it'll make my punishment that much better. I expect him to grab me. Dominate me. Try to bend me to his will. Instead he squirts oil all over his chest and gets on the mat himself. I bit my lip to stifle my groan at all his hard, bronzed slicked skin waiting for me. His thick cock sticks up, inviting me to give it a ride.

"See anything you like, little FBI?"

"Nope. Not a thing." I smirk back, hiding my clenched fists under the water.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

He responds by giving his cock a long stroke, giving special attention to the bulbous tip. I want to ride that pony so bad. Instead, I float on my back, letting the tips of my breasts skim the waterline. My nipples pebble, Johnny's groan echoes across the tiled walls. This sexual need is going both ways.

"I still hate you. I refuse to live the rest of my life as your captive lover."

"You could've been my wife. I had the diamond ring." His raw confession hurts more than I thought it would.

"Doesn't matter," I shrug. "We can't go back and then... I still would've seen it through and turned you in."

He hisses, as he gets off the float, stalking toward me. "I lost everything because of you. Roque took over the Lamatti Crime Syndicate. My throne is in the ashes. My own family wanted me dead, the only way to stop it was for Roque to step in. Blood was spilled. Some of my cousins were hit in the crossfire. I'm Roque's number two now. I'll never be number one." He reaches me, wraps the ends of my wet hair around his wrist. "See little FBI, how much damage your misguided plot caused? When you were the first domino to fall."

"No," I respond huskily. "You were the first domino to fall, when you fell for me. He curses, yanking my head to his. The bruising kiss hurts. Our teeth scrape and bite. Hands molding skin. Why did it have to be this man? He abruptly hoists me in his arms, backs me up to the ledge.

He takes himself in hand, watching the pulsing tip as he presses it against me. "Say

you want me. Only me.” I shake my head. The tip of him works against my clit in dizzying circles. “Say it, Christine. Now.” He continues his ministrations pressing the head of his cock against my clit. My head falls back as a million darts of pleasure explode. His silky head moves against my breasts. “You torture me, witch. You put the curse of love on me and I can’t break your spell.”

The tip of him enters me. I need more. I need him deep, filling me like only he can. “You bewitched me. Made me crave this... I almost didn’t turn over what I had on you...”

“But you did,” he growls biting a nipple as his huge cock surges all the way in.

“We can’t move forward unless we forget the past,” I pant.

“Later. We’ll talk later...”

Words are lost between us as we climb higher and soon, I’m soaring in my bad angel’s arms again. Just like I used to.



8

Johnny

My arm cradles her head against my chest. In order to get her to stay, I need to convince her I'm not the ruthless killer she thinks I am. "As much as I'd like to stay naked with you all day, we need to get up."

She murmurs something intelligible. I smack her on the ass, rolling out of bed. "We need to talk. We can't stay here much longer and it's time we finally get all this shit between us sorted, babe."

She's sated and languid. I went to town on that ass, fucking her good and hard, letting her know just exactly who owns her. But I don't want her as my prisoner, my stupid-ass heart wants her to be my wife. I want her to pick me. Believe in me. Choose me, to be her number one guy. "Go shower, I have fresh jeans and boots for you. It'll feel good to hike out in the sun."

"My eyes are fine. Thanks to Roger. He made sure I had a UV light."

"Fucking Rog. Playing the caring hero. I have polarized lenses for you either way. We can picnic past the orchard by a creek." I try not to sound eager. I never overtly romanced her in the past, we just kind of fell into bed and stayed there. We had some romantic moments for sure, but I never orchestrated them. Being out here in Springdale, Oregon is a romantic setting all in itself.

After a cool shower and putting on some jeans, I head to the kitchen finding what I

need to pack a picnic. She's not eating enough. Telling me her food in captivity was better than what I'm serving her. Sassy Wench. Women always went nuts for Rog being a former enforcer for an MC, but I never thought Christine would catch feelings for her jailer. I'm hoping our reunion is squashing that shit. If not, I'll have to call his wife and spill the details on just what and who he's been hiding right under her feet. Beneath Rog's bar and tavern is where he kept my girl for a year. Giving her small pleasures, feeding her his coveted recipes... Dev will flip the fuck out for sure.

"Babe? You ready?" I rap my knuckles on the door to her room twice. She answers and I'm almost knocked back on my feet at the sight of her freshly showered with her hair still wet and curling at the ends. I want to take her straight back to bed. Fuck the picnic.

"Don't look at me like that?"

"Like what?"

"You know what?" She smacks a hand into my chest, pushing me back so she can walk by. "Besides, I'm famished. I need food and coffee."

"Bossy, thing." I murmur, swatting her ass as I follow behind. I don't quite trust this easy truce. As much as I want these moments to be real, I know we can't just fall back in time because even when I thought I had her, I didn't.

I grab the basket of goodies and pull her hand, holding it tightly in mine. I might not say it in words, but it's clear I'm not letting go.

"Is there any coffee in there?" Her brow lifts.

"A thermos full."

“Good. Because you have some explaining to do.”

“Me?”

“I was left in the cellar of a pub for a year.”

“Better than where they wanted to put you.”

She shudders and I pull her in close. “Never. I’ll never let that happen.”

“Where do we go from here?”

“I don’t know. Let’s start with a walk. We can do that can’t we?”

She nods, as I lead her to the mudroom where she slips into a pair of new boots. We both breathe in deeply when we step outside. I hand her a pair of tinted shades. “Just in case your eyes are still sensitive.” She nods, putting them on. I still have her hand tucked in mine and together we walk down the lane toward the orchard and pond. The leaves crunch under our feet, the sun shines high and just for a moment I feel peace. The kind you wait your whole life to find.

“This is beautiful. After being locked in the dark for so long, I’d forgotten how vibrant the leaves in fall can be. Everything seems crisper. Even the smells of wet leaves and curling chimney smoke.” A tear slips beneath her sunglasses. The single tear crushing my heart. Shit.

Pausing, I pull her in tight. “I was locked up with you. My heart and soul; caged.”

She sobs into my chest. She’s a strong woman. Not being afraid to be vulnerable with me makes me want her even more. “My brother. He’s all I have left. He must have grieved for me. Held a memorial service...,”

“He never gave up looking for you.”

“You did?” She lifts her head off my chest.

“Babe. You need to understand. I know the mob. The players... the price for betrayal. I believed Roque when he said my family had it done. He hid the truth for me because he knew I wasn’t ready to face you. I went berserk when shit blew up. I lost my title as Don. My own crew turned against me. Roque stepped in and The Lamatti Crime family was folded into his. I’m the second now. I’ll never be at the top; his cousins are blood. I’m not. But I’ll be his second—until the day I die.”

“I-I’m not sure what you want from me. Or what I want for myself. My former life is gone. All my friends and colleagues think I’m dead. I can’t go back and can’t move forward. Not with a price on my head.”

“If I could... if you could change things. Where would you go? Who would you be?”

She shrugs, reaching down to examine a brightly colored maple leaf. “I’ve always been interested in science. But I never pursued it since my brother made me vow to find you and avenge our parent’s murders.”

“You’d be a kick ass forensic expert, I’ll bet. Especially with your FBI background.”

“But I can’t ever be. I’d have to start all over. It’d take too long.”

I feel the smirk on my lips. “Nothing is impossible with us. Don’t you see that yet?” A spark ignites. I’m taking a page straight from Roque’s book. I’ll give her back everything. Her whole life. All she has to do is fork her whole heart over to get it. “We are watching a special movie tonight. Did I tell you I happen to be an international film star?”

She rolls her eyes. “You did porn when I was locked up?”

“Hah! Baby, I saved all this for you...,” I point my assets. “You’ll see. In the meantime, let’s make a picnic here and just take a deep breath. Sound good?”

She nods. “It does. To pretend to be normal for a while... that this is normal... even an hour is just what I need.”

\* \* \*

I laid a blanket down in the grass, hand-fed her grapes, taking a sick amount of pleasure watching the juice from the fruit dribble on her lips. I kept touching her. Tucking a piece of windswept hair off her cheek; pressing a finger to a crumb clinging to her lip... then it was grinding my mouth on hers to taste everything on her tongue. I didn’t mean to take her down by the river but I couldn’t stop myself and when her arms shook as they pressed me closer, I knew in my gut that she was just as a slave to our lust as I was. My eyes rolled back in my head as my hips surged forward and the tip of my cock parted her soaked folds. In seconds, I was buried deep. I grinded down on her in slow, lazy strokes, rotating my shit in circles while my tongue traced her nipples. I put it down on her with all the moves I had until her eyes rolled back with mine. We fucked in the grassy meadow for hours. It was all tantric and shit. I laughed when my girl’s legs wobbled as she tried to stand. I plucked the leaves from her hair, kissed her long and hard until we were both out of breath all over again.

“You look cozy.” Bowl of popcorn in hand, I plop down on the couch where she sits with her feet tucked under her. “Buckle up babe, this movie is gonna blow your mind.” Grinning like the ass I am, I point the remote to Netflix finding “Savage Poet” listed under my favorites.

“What the f...?” Her mouth hangs open as Roque smirks on the cover of his own

blockbuster movie poster. “Don’t worry, I’m in it too... so are you...kind of... I wanted Selena Gomez to play you but instead I got some B list...”

She clamps a hand over my mouth as the opening credits finish rolling. It’s the opening scene. The one where Romina wakes up in the woods and wraps her hands around her own throat while gazing up at the starry sky. A young girl’s voice narrates the scene and then flashes back hours earlier...

I lay my thick arm around her shoulders and much to my delight, she curls into my side as we both watch utterly transfixed as Roque and Romina play themselves, sharing their fucked-up dark love story with the world.

“That was.... Utterly amazing.”

“Do you still hate him. Hate me?”

She shrugs. “It’s a lot to process. I presume it’s more truth than fiction?”

I nod. “He gained his freedom by saying it was all art. Some fucked up penned love story from dueling points of view written across time but yeah, it’s true. And they both got their fairy tale in the end. Do you think we can still get ours?” I whisper with my eyes glued to her mouth. Those lips... she bites the bottom one, eliciting a groan from me. “Baby...” I lower my head, fastening my lips to hers. This kiss is tender. Sweet. A slow burn that will ignite fast.

“Johnny...,” She moans into the kiss.

“Yeah, baby, I’m your man. Now and forever.”

“I want you.”

“Thank fuck. Cause there’s no one else I want. Now or ever.”

Her mouth opens wider and we move, sinking down on the couch. My knees press down into the cushions as my hands stroke down her shoulders, molding her breasts. I flick one hardened bud while rolling the other between my fingers. Her nipples are pert beneath her cotton shirt. “Say it. Say your mine. Give in to me. Don’t run. Don’t leave me for your old life when we could make a new one instead.”

In her eyes I see she’s still torn; still unsure and it fucking breaks me. I want her more than she wants me, and it burns. No, fucking scalds me.

“You know what? Fuck this? It’s time you feel tormented.” I pin her wrists above her head, while digging out the zip tie I keep in my back pocket. I always have one ready because she’s been so fucking hot before running cold. I fasten it around her while she curses and struggles against me. But I won’t be deterred.

I rip her shirt off her body with my bare hands exposing her full C’s. I smack them. “Fuck you, for making me feel. Fuck you for breaking my heart. Fuck you for denying me my fucking happy ending.”

“Well fuck you for taking my life away. Fuck you for making me crave this... and taking so long to come get me.”

I hiss as she lifts her ass up to bump my engorged dick with the sweet heat of her pussy. I roll a nipple between two fingers, pinching hard as my teeth scrape along the column of her throat. “I can smell your arousal, baby. It makes me hard as fuck. You want this?” I lean back, taking myself out and letting her see just how hard and thick she’s made me. I let the heavy head of my cock rest against her lips. “Take me inside your mouth. Now.” I hiss as the head of my cock slides between those lips. Her eyes are shooting daggers at me and I feel the scrape of teeth against me. It’s both pleasure and pain just like what I did to her. The pain only intensifies the pleasure. My balls

seize up wanting to spurt my load down the back of her throat. But I want to come inside that tight pussy. I want to coat her womb with my seed, marking her.

“Easy there. I can make you hurt, too.”

“Just shut up and fuck me already.”

I slide down her body. A light coat of sweat glistens on her flushed skin. My tongue blazes a trail down from her breasts, across her flat stomach until I reach the honey pot between her legs that makes me lose my damn mind every time, I get near it. My hands spread her apart and then I’m there, diving right the fuck in to eat out my girl. My teeth scrape against her clit before my lips seize the tiny bud.

“Johnny!” She screams, but I won’t let up. I fuck her with my tongue, then my fingers all while ravishing her clit with my mouth. Just when I feel her tense, seizing up on the verge of going over the cliff, I abruptly withdraw.

“What?”

“I won’t beat you, deprave you of food or torture you the way other men would. My punishment is denying you the one thing you want from me.”

“You are a fucking dick tease.”

“Well, I’ve never been called that before,” I laugh.

“Finish yourself off.”

“I will. And you’ll watch. Wishing I was deep inside you when I come. Watch, little FBI.” I stroke myself from root to tip. “Beg for me and I’ll change my mind.”



“Never!”

“Wrong answer. And don’t think you’ll get a chance to finish yourself off. Can’t do that with your hands tied, now can you?”

“UGH! I hate you!”

“I know, baby. I know. I love those tits. I dreamed about them for months... fuck, baby, I smell you...”

“Cock tease! You tease me, into thinking I’m getting that dick.”

“You could’ve. All you have to do is fork over your heart.”

“My heart for your dick?”

“Sounds like more than a fair trade to me. I mean look at how glorious it is.”

She snorts. “You know what Johnny? Your humor is one of the things I love about you. Only you could make a dick joke in the middle of something like this.”

My heart hammers hard. She’s a worthy opponent. She didn’t say she loved me but loved something about me. “Close Christine, but not quite the words I need. Admit you love me.”

She shakes her head.

“So be it.”

I let the head of my dick slide between her folds, until it finds her clit. I press hard against it rhythmically, watching until she’s panting and, on the verge, again before

leaving her cold.

Then I wrap my fist around my cock and come all over her.

“Ass.”

“Yep. You can watch it as I walk away, while wishing your hands were on it, driving my hips deeper into that tight, little cunt of yours.”

“So much for a happy ending!” She yells.

“Did you think I was referring to sex?” I pivot, “when I was referring to the keys to a castle? Girl, I had a dream and a ring waiting to wrap around your finger.”

From the stunned look in her eyes, I realize she never really knew just how far gone I was for her. I’m a potty-mouthed, trash talking kind of sexual guy. “You’re just gonna leave me here like this? With my hands tied, in ripped clothes with your come all over me?”

I sigh, “It’s a vision actually. I find it artistically quite beautiful really. I’m going to shower; you can wait for yours a bit longer.”

Her scream of rage only makes my steps lighter. I denied her two orgasms, and she’s unable to take care of it herself. I’m going to drive her mentally mad until she begs me for what only I can give her.

“WAIT!” My hands pause on the railing... “PLEASE JOHNNY! You want me to beg, I’ll beg, okay? My body craves yours. I need that big, fat dick of yours inside me right motherfucking now!”

“Well, I already knew that.” I reply flatly without turning around. “That’s not what I

needed to hear.” I ascend two steps when I hear the broken words spoken as if it was ripped from a piece of her soul.

“I’m sorry.”

Her two words hang heavy in the air between us. Hanging my head, my heart full of the weight of all the heartbreak between us, I turn.

“Me, too.” Our eyes meet across the distance between us. She chokes on a sob and in seconds I’m at her side, with a knife out cutting the bonds at her wrists. I sweep her into my arms, soothing her soft cries and carry her up to my room. I take us both straight into a hot shower, just holding her as I gently wash her body. I’m a tender warrior now, not the mad man who feasted on her flesh.

She holds me tight, laying her wet head against my pecs. “Can you forgive me? For lying? For ruining both our lives?” Her eyes are sincere as I cradle her cheek.

“I’ve already made my peace with you when I thought you were dead. I’m a simple man, Christine. You know that. I’m just as happy eating beef stew as I am dining at a five-star restaurant. I don’t need anything else but this...,” I rest my hand on her beating heart.

“It was always yours. I just deluded myself into thinking otherwise.”

“What about your crush on Rog?” I growl low in my throat, feeling my fists clench.

“He was... just hope. Hope that someone alive cared for me. He was the only human being on Earth who I had contact with for a year. But in the dark, it was always you, Johnny.”

My throat tightens. Finally. Finally, I’m somebody’s number one guy. Before I cry

like an absolute puss and ruin my street cred with her, I turn off the taps. Tonight, will be different. Finally, I'll have her heart when we soar to the sky and come back down.

I cradle her in my arms to bed, giving zero fucks we're both wet. Pushing the hair from her eyes, I make a promise, "I'll never leave you in the dark alone again. From this moment forward it's just the two of us." I finish my promise with a tender kiss before my hands gently roam down her arm. Very lightly, using only two fingers I skim back up before lowering my head to suckle her breasts one at a time. Her hands cradle my head against her, and I feel the heat and slickness from her core on my bare thigh. This woman was fucking made for me. I threw my empire away for her and I'd do it all over again. This time when I touch her, there's no torment. It's almost lazy in its intensity. Slowly, with just the right amount of pressure, my fingers pump in and out before rolling her clit between. Her hips arch up, bumping into mine. Her body is an instrument and I'm the maestro playing all her chords.

"I-I love you..."

Finally.

"It's always been you...", I hiss as the tip of my dick nudges its way through her tight entrance on his way home. She wraps her legs around the small of my back, while lifting her hips to meet my thrusts. I want it to last but we never can. It always feels so damn good. Sweat beads across my brow as I fight my own climax, needing my girl to come first. I reach between us, finding her nub and roll it with the pad of my index finger.

"That feels so good, Johnny. Touch me just like that... don't stop."

"Not this time. Daddy is gonna make you come real good."

“Yes...,” she pants as the firm breasts bounce to the rhythm, I fuck her to. I pull out to rub her pearl with the head of my cock before riding back in.

“I’m so close...”

Getting back to work, I lift one of her legs, hooking it over my shoulder while I lift that ass up. The new angle enables me to pound deeper against her G-spot while my free hand plays with her clit. “John!” She cries, coming off the bed.

“Baby!” I moan, as my eyes roll back, my balls tighten and spurt after spurt of hot come finally releases into that tight little cunt that’s my own personal sweet spot.

I tuck her under the crook of my arm, she lays her head across my chest as we both listen to the sounds of our hearts racing together. My lips find the top of her head. I finally feel content after years of turmoil. My hands stroke lazy circles across her back. Soon her breathing slows, her limbs relax, and my woman lets herself sleep in my arms. Not much later, I nod off too.

The buzzing of my phone startles me from a deep sleep. Blinking in the dark, I’m confused when I find myself wrapped around two large pillows instead of my woman’s naked body. Rog’s name is flashing across the screen but ignore his call. “Baby?” But the rooms are silent. “What is she up to?” I pull on my track pants, silently padding barefoot down the stairs.

“What the fuck?”

My heart shatters into a million pieces at her feet. I’ve been here before but the sucker punch to my gut still hurts just as much. She found one of the burner phones and got around the passcode system in one of the inn’s laptops. She senses my presence, turning with wide eyes, the burner glued to her ear.

I cross my arms over my chest, feeling the bulging veins pop in my neck. My eye twitches.

Twice.

“I-I have to go,” she stammers. I can hear the person on the other end shouting for her not to hang up.

“How much time do we have before the rescue calvary comes?”

She shrugs.

Rog lights up my damn phone again. “What?” I bark.

“I need you. Now. Sassy’s. We’ve been ambushed. I’m under siege. Creed is in Canada. I don’t have enough men.”

“I’ll be there. I’m in the mood to kill tonight, anyway.”

“Johnny! Please! It’s not what you think. I-I couldn’t sleep. It’s not right to let my brother think I’m dead... that’s he’s been tormented all this time.”

“And you couldn’t wait until morning to call? For me to check it was safe?”

“We are safe. I won’t let anyone lock you up.”

“Yeah right,” I snort. “I don’t have time to deal with this right now. Someone who always has my back actually needs me. I don’t have time to deal with you. You betraying bitch!”

“No! It wasn’t like that. Please listen—”

I wave my hand. “Fooled me twice.... never again.” I rip the phone from her hand, pulling out the sim card smashing both with my fist. I yank her forward, finding something to tie her up with until I can come back. I riffle through a few draws. Lips twisting as I find a pair of handcuffs. “This will do.”

“Please, Johnny. I love you. You have me—all of me... I swear it.”

I close my eyes for a split second. “It’s too late. My humpty-dumpty heart’s too broken for those words to put back together again. Instead of my love, you’re gonna get nothing but all my hate. Buckle up Christine, this trip to lover’s paradise is over.”

Yanking her out of the room, and with little time to spare as Rog sends another SOS text, I click her wrist in one cuff, fastening the other around a pole in the utility room. I stuff my feet into boots. Then open a locker taking out a long gun and two semis. Picking up a reusable grocery bag off a hook I dump three boxes of ammo in. I don’t even bother with a coat.

“Johnny! Where are you going. You can’t just leave me like this.”

“The hell, I can’t.”

“Rog is under an ambush. If I don’t come back... well then I guess you’ll be rescued after all... probably by Roque and when he learns you betrayed me twice, nothing will save you from a watery grave in the Hudson. The one he originally had planned for you.”

I slam the door to the garage, grabbing the fob key to the Suburban. There’s a fleet of fucking cars in here. If anyone looked closely it’d be easy to tell this place is much more than just an Inn and Spa. It’s a safehouse where we launder cash and keep supplies.

I push the gas, letting the rage of her latest betrayal fuel me. Fuck love. Fuck heartbreak. Fuck how good she feels in my arms, it's not worth it. I can't kill the girl. But I never want to see her face again. Her kiss is sugar laced with venom and the hit to my system a second time is fatal. I'll never love again. Fuck it. I'd rather live in isolation surrounded by cats.

I navigate the streets through the dark. I need to focus. Somehow breathe. If I don't, I'll get myself and Rog killed tonight. I'll deal with Christine later. I'm gonna make her watch me bed dozens of women. Make her wish it were her. That'll burn. I slow the SUV and cut down a dirt road that's parallel to the restaurant and tavern Roger owns. "Fuck," I mutter. Whoever ambushed Rog knew about this dirt lane. They're vans and bikes are here, and the stupid fools didn't leave anyone to watch their backs. I pull a gym shirt off the floor of the SUV roll it between my hands and open the gas tank to one of the vans. I stuff it down then take it out. I flick my lighter to the end, stuffing it back inside then run through the woods.

The explosion rings in my ears. With any luck, the boom will be enough of a distraction to buy Rog some time.

Branches covered in frozen frost swipe my bare torso as I maneuver through the trees while trying to assess the situation. From my vantage point, hidden in the trees the flash of gunfire is visible inside the bar. It's surrounded. I'll have to use the tunnel. Moving left, I lift a dead tree stump attached to a trapdoor. Moving as fast as I can I descend the steps, sprinting through the tunnel that leads to the cellar where Christine lived for so long. The smell of her still lingers in the damp air. Floral shampoo and just... her. Rog is trying to prevent them from descending the basement stairs as he fires in rapid succession.

"About time you got here. I'm almost out." I drop the shopping bag I had at my wrist. Rog doesn't waste any time reloading.



“Who are they?”

“Chinese mob from Cali. I guess they figured it was Creed and Roque moving in on their business not the Cartel from Tijuana.”

“How many?”

“Twenty.”

“Fuck. Anyone else here?”

“No. I was just locking up. I had sent my bouncer home.”

“We can use the tunnel.”

“Get back!” Rog yells as our eyes watch in disbelief as a tossed grenade teeters down the stairs. Everything seems to move in slow motion as Rog and I try to get inside the tunnel.

But there’s no time. Boom! We’re both blasted back as they throw a damn grenade down the stairs.

Dust fills the dark, chokes my lungs. I can’t breathe. My ears are ringing. I have no fucking clue where Rog is. It’s over. In seconds, the enemy’s boots will descend down the stairs. It’ll either be a beating or a bullet. My only regret is that I’m outta time to make Christine pay for breaking me twice.

Christine

I need to make him believe me. If the thick-headed stubborn sexy fool would just listen for a second, I could've explained that I told my brother I had run off with Johnny and that we were in love. I told him to stop looking and he had admitted he suspected he thought that our parents were in over their heads at the time when they were killed. Johnny was so right while we were so totally wrong and now my stupid man went off in the middle of the night half-naked, loaded up with guns to save the man who held me and yet also gave me hope.

"I need to save them both," I mutter to a fat, tabby cat who just appeared for the first time. The cat stares at me with wise eyes as if saying, "Go get your man."

"I will." I move to scratch her head and get a hiss in return. "That's fair. I guess, I deserved that. Don't worry. This fucked-up fairytale will have a reverse happy ending... as the once captured damsel is off to rescue her big man. But first I need to get free of these handcuffs." I suck in a deep breath. I'll have to dislocate my wrist there's no other way. I've lost weight but I never had fat wrists. During one of my "field trips" in the FBI a Navy Seal once taught me this trick. "It's gonna hurt like a bitch," he had said but if it's a matter of survival you'll do it.

"Fuck, here goes nothing..." I blow out a breath, then pull forward using all my weight against the metal link then I quickly twist my wrist to the side and using all my weight to drop. There's a sickening crunch. I broke my damn wrist, but I'm free. Tears burn but I can't stop. I need to save Johnny so I can lay my heart at his feet

right before I crack his skull for doubting me after what we shared tonight. No one could fake what happened in the bed upstairs. I quickly find a scarf, making a quick sling then grab the cache of weapons he left behind with ammo, shoving it all into a bag. I find a silencer, attaching it to the barrel. Then I push my feet into boots, grab his coat, and open the door to the garage. I grab the first fob off the rack, clicking it to see what car matches. A big ass Ford truck, perfect for snow. I know where we are now. When I broke into the office computer I just wanted to know where we are because it's so beautiful. Oregon. Who knew? But I need him to share it with—all the perfect starry nights and morning smelling of fresh dew. I especially need him during the night, to hold me tight through the darkness. Fuck. I love him so much. Need him even more. No man can compare to him in my book. Not even Romeo Roque.

From our conversations over the past few days, I've been able to gather that Rog or Roger runs with an MC and kept me hidden in rooms under his bar. When Johnny and I fled, I remember reading a sign that read "Sassy's." I turn the car on and open the GPS, typing it in. Bingo. I'm 3.2 miles away. I hit the gas as the garage door opens, flying down the drive past the car I tried to escape in only a few days ago. The gate was left open and I waste no time racing through. I have no idea what I'm racing toward besides him. All I know is I'm finally running to the one man who's always run to me. It's my turn to do the rescuing. After that, I'll keep him captive if I must. Tie his ass up until he believes me when I tell him it's us. The two of us now and forever.

My destination is just ahead on the left. My hand is screaming... but I can push down the pain. I rely on my training and the grit that saw me through the last couple of years. My hands gently pull the wheel to the left, then shut off the car. I check my guns and get out.

I'm light on my feet as I dodge behind the trees, zig zagging forward until I'm at the edge of a parking lot. It's quiet. Too quiet. Vans and motorcycles are parked out front. The lights are off, but the front door hangs on its hinges, clearly being blasted

open. But there's no police. The establishment is by itself down a thickly forested road and behind it is nothing but trees. It's literally popped down in the woods. There's no one to hear gunfire or screams. It's no wonder they kept me here.

I won't lie. Part of me wants to cut and run. I just escaped this place and now I'm running headfirst back.

Ducking low, I sprint to the corner of the building, lifting a head to peak through a window where bullets broke all the glass. I hear the shout of voices but see no one. They must be in the basement. A place I know well. I know every crack in the foundation, every corner and dark shadow. I quickly round and enter through the door, raising my gun to take down threats. But no one's here. They don't expect back up. Well, I'm about to surprise the fuck out of all of them.

Carefully, I make my way over broken glass and turned over tables. The smell of gunfire burns my nostrils. But I don't turn back. My man needs me.

Shouting followed by the hard hits from fists come from the dark pit I lived in. Beads of sweat dot my brow. My wrist is on fire. But I hold the gun steady in my hand as I descend.

No one sees or hears me. I become one with the shadows. The smell and cracks are familiar. Like a blind woman running a hand over a beloved's face, my hand travels over the wall. I know exactly where I am and where I'm going. The power's been cut. A few men have cell phones out, using it for light. I creep closer.

My man is on his knees with his hands tied in front of him. Blood trickles from his nose. One eye is swollen shut. His bottom lip will need stitches. The man who refused me his name, kneels next to Johnny, Roger. His hair hangs over his forehead, shielding his face, hiding whatever damage they've done to him.

“Where are they?”

Johnny refuses to talk, smirking instead. A thug lifts the tip of his boot, kicking my man in the ribs. Oh, hell no.

I refuse to have a conscience. I refuse the notion of right and wrong, because in this moment I’m living in the gray. Power comes over me. I get to choose. I get to choose who is right and wrong. There’s no thought of justice my only thought is saving my man. I only have a clip with sixteen rounds. There’s 12 men. I can’t miss. I need to take them all out while trying to avoid return fire. The silencer will buy me the precious seconds I need. Crouching low, I raise my right hand, while my left is still cradled in my makeshift sling. It takes every ounce of willpower not to give into the pain as I hold the gun steady with my good hand.

“Fine. You fucks won’t tell us where you stashed our merc, then this will send a message.” A gun is raised to my man’s temple. I don’t think. Just act.

Blood sprays across the floor, just as the other thugs are processing that he’s been hit, I fire in rapid succession taking them out one by one in seconds.

Slowly, I stand, stepping over their bodies until I’m kneeling right in front of the captor of my heart. I wipe the blood and sweat from his eyes.

“Put one through my heart and end my misery.”

“Shut-up you thick-headed, ass.” My fingers gingerly inspect his temple.

It’s then he notices my wrist. “What did you do?” He hisses.

“What I had to.”

I move over to Rog. “Hey, there sugar.”

“I’m not your sugar and I’m pissed as fuck at you.” My fingers probe the cut on his forehead a bit rougher than I intended.

“Cut me loose and I’ll help you finish him off,” he gestures over to Johnny. “There’s a knife in my boot.”

“What in the hell happened here?” I take the knife from his boot but don’t cut him loose. Instead I take his cell from his pocket.

“A difference of opinion.” Johnny, spits blood from his mouth as he speaks.

## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“What’s the passcode?” I ask Rog. He shrugs.

“It’s going be like this then?”

I turn to Johnny. “Beg.”

“Excuse me?”

“Beg me to forgive you for being pigheaded and refusing to listen to me.”

“Never.”

He’s beautiful. Bloodied. Bruised and broken. But his eyes are all defiant fire as he refuses me.

“Fine.” I move past him over to the part of the basement where coils of rope lay. Roger never tied me up with them because their presence was threat enough. I grab one, attaching it to the ties at my love’s wrist. “Get up. You’re my captive now.” I tug my end of the rope, but he refuses to budge. My eyes flit over to Roger. “Help me get him home and I won’t tell your wife how you kept me prisoner right under her nose.” His nostrils flair.

“Don’t you fucking dare, Rog.” Johnny warns.

“Fine. I figure I owe ya’. I do what I do. Chose the life I live but keeping you down here never did sit right with me.”

I cut Roger loose. He forces John on his feet, back up the stairs and into the truck I parked down the road. “I’ll handle everything here. Don’t ever come back.” Rog stares at me intently, I nod, swallowing hard, still in denial at just how far I went tonight.

“I don’t plan on it.”

“You can’t go back to the Inn. It’ll be crawling with Feds if your brother got a lock on the call. Yeah, Johnny told me how you ratted on him again. I want no part of this mess. I’m out. But I will give you a safe place to hole out since you saved my ass back there.”

He opens the passenger door, taking paper and pen out of the glove box to scribble something down before handing it to me. “Go there. It’s a small cabin in the middle of the woods. Off the-grid.”

I nod, feeling numb. “Thanks.”

He grunts a response.

“Get in the back.” I order Johnny.

“No fucking way.”

“If you don’t. You’ll get caught.”

“Because of you.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m cold, tired. My wrist hurts like a bitch and I just killed for you. Can we call it even?”



“Not even close.”

“Help me turn him around.”

“Hands off,” Johnny growls, turning to get into the back of the truck himself.

10

Johnny

She's sexy as fuck. Killed for me. I can't believe she broke her wrist to chase me down. A growl erupts from my chest as she hisses in pain. We drive further into the woods, away from all eyes. It's just gonna be her and me and as soon as she cuts me free. Then it's fair game how I decide to punish the little minx.

"Whoa," she breathes, taking in the A-frame cabin nestled under the pines. A creek winds through the woods behind the house.

She opens my door and I let her think she has the upper hand. Let her think she's in control even though I'm the one bound and roped. Despite a few broken ribs and probably a mild concussion, I could easily overpower her.

If things weren't so fucked up between us, maybe this would actually be kind of hot. Who knew I'd think so? Usually I'm the one collaring girls and leading them around on strings.

The front door is unlocked. The inside is cozy as fuck. Romantic even, in a rustic lodge kind of way. She shivers as I kick the door shut behind us with my boot. "Cut me free. It's cold as fuck. I'll build a fire."

She ignores me, tugging me forward to the couch. "Sit."

"I'm not a dog." Her good hand shoves against my chest. I plop on the couch, curious

to see what kind of game she's running now.

"I'll go look for a medical kit." She comes back a few minutes later cradling a kit with supplies. She opens it up, generously applying antiseptic to some cotton. "This is gonna hurt like a bitch."

"Nothing could hurt more than you." My words hang in the silence between us. Her eyes cloud over but she doesn't hesitate to press the gauze to my temple. I don't move. Not even flinch as I hold her captive with my eyes. I might be tied up but she's still the one caught and we both know it. My eyes smolder with all the love laced with hate. All the bitterness of her betrayal burns just as much as her touch.

Her hands shake but she doesn't stop inspecting all my wounds. "I'll need to wrap your ribs. You also have a concussion."

I don't respond. She whimpers, biting her lip in pain as her broken wrist bumps against my chest. I suck in a breath. "You need to have that looked at."

"Suddenly, you care?" Her eyebrow lifts.

"I never stopped. You did."

She throws the supplies back into the case. "I'm sick of going round and round with you."

"Trust me. If I could've gotten off the ride two years ago, I would have."

Her eyes shoot fire back. "We're stuck together for now let's make the best of it."

"Only because you're a lying, scheming little bitch," I mutter as she steps back.

She throws the kit down, coming at me hard with an open palm across my cheek. The smack stings but I crave the pain. “Truth hurts?”

“Fuck you.” She spits.

“I would if you’d untie my hands.”

“Ugh, you’re so annoying!”

“So, shoot me then and put me out of my misery.”

“I’ve thought about it.”

“Liar.” The word rolls off my tongue as smooth as a fine whiskey. “I bet your drenched. Soaked for me as we speak. All that adrenalin made you horny as all fuck and you want nothing more than my cock pounding into that sweet little pussy of yours.”

The second smack across my right cheek has me seeing stars, but it was worth it as my eyes soak in the blush on her heated cheeks and her eyes bright with desire.

“I’m done being the helpless captive. I’m taking what I want.” Her good hand spreads my legs for her to stand between. Then she kneels between them, rolling down my lounge pants. My cock springs out proud and thick, right into her greedy hands. She strokes me, once. Twice. Then her eyes never break with mine as her tongue swirls around my engorged tip. Her tongue rolls around before finding the sensitive spot under my tip. I exhale hard, let my head fall back against the couch, nostrils flaring as she deep throats me. She’s still a heartbreaking liar but she gives good head. Angry at how easily she manipulates my body, I struggle, muscles popping trying to free myself. She chuckles low in her throat. The vibrations moving through my cock, making my spine tingle as my balls ache, dying to unload down her throat, instead

she releases me with a pop.

“I didn’t betray you this time. It was unfair to let my brother grieve.”

“I grieved. Every damn day for you. Longer then he ever did!” I roar. “I know what I saw. What you did. As soon as I fell asleep you crept out.”

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“It wasn’t like that.”

“The hell it wasn’t.”

“Shut up! Just shut up you fucking hot as fuck Neanderthal! I did this for you!” she points her cradled arm. “Killed about a dozen men... FOR YOU!”

“It’s not enough compared to what I did for you! What I’ll need to do to keep you alive!” I roar, coming off the couch with my dick still at full mast.

She pushes back and in one quick motion, I lift my fastened arms, trapping her between my body. I hiss through my teeth as my bare dick meets the cold fabric of her shirt.

She uses her leg to sweep my ankle and we tumble back on the couch with her on top. Her fist beats against my chest. “I hate you. Fucking hate that I love you!”

“Finally, we’re getting somewhere. Let it go. Say everything... everything you’ve been keeping locked away.”

“I HATE THAT I LOST TWO YEARS OF MY LIFE! I hate my parents.... Hate that my body wants yours... I hate that I’ve become a killer.” Tears of pain; both emotional and physical rain down her face. I hiss as she rips her own clothes off, pushes me back until I’m laying down and spreads her legs kneeling on either side of my hips. The sweet heat of her rests on my cock. She moves, spreading her juices on me.

“Fuck me or kill me. You choose.”

“I’ve killed enough for one day.”

With that she rises, take the head of my cock and I stare mesmerized at the sight of myself disappearing into her as she sits down.

“Fuck you feel so good.” She closes her eyes.

“I hate you.”

She opens her eyes seeing all the bitter pain she caused me reflected back like a mirror. “I know. And I’m sorry. Because you’re my prisoner now and I’m never letting you go, John.”

She rotates her hips, as she lifts them up and down, gliding down my cock like a goddess.

“I don’t want this anymore.” I rasp, feeling my balls tighten and my spine tingle.

“You’ll never stop wanting this, John. I’m in your blood and you’re in mine.” She goes faster and faster. I can’t stop the heady rush of my come as I shout, lifting my hips up to thrust into her as wave after wave of my orgasm spurts into her cunt.

She collapses against my chest, drawing hearts with her index finger on my pecs.

“My whole body hurts.”

She moves getting off me. I’m cold without her warmth. She comes back with a knife, cutting me loose. I don’t move at first. I’m tired. Confused. Bitter and angry because underneath all my layers of pain; there’s still the love.

Ignoring her, I find a bathroom, turn on the shower as hot as my skin can stand and just stand under the water with a bowed head.

I hear her come in, but I don't turn around.

"John," her arms wrap around me, her head rests against my back. "You're my world. I only fly with you. Please, don't shut me out now."

"I can't stop loving you, but I can't turn off the hurt, babe."

"Then let me. Let me take it away. I'll prove myself to you every day." She comes around in front of me, still cradling her injured hand. Her wrist is triple in size. She kneels on the tiled shower floor, taking my hand. "Marry me, Johnny? Be my husband, my protector, my best friend? In return, I'll be your Christine, the one you loved, grieved for, and thought you lost. I'll be your everything if you just give me one more chance."

I can't help it. The corners of my mouth turn up. "I didn't see that coming."

She shrugs. "Our story deserves a unique ending. The princess saved her dark prince and proposed."

I lift her in my arms, then sit on the shower bench with her cradled against my chest. "But do they still get to live happily ever after?"

"That depends..."

"On what?" My eyes are glued to her pouty lips.



*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“If the prince truly forgives his princess.”

“I forgave you before you were even born.”

“John.”

“Baby...”

“Love me, but more importantly, trust me.”

My heart is at the edge of the abyss again. I lean my forehead against hers. “I can’t survive another crash and burn. And I’m still mad as hell at you.”

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking. I was just on cloud nine... laying in your arms while thinking about a future we could have—the guilt that my brother thought I was dead... I just thought it was one thing I could fix. Immediately. Are you going to answer me or leave your princess hanging?”

“I’ll marry you. Right after I spank this ass raw, put a baby in you and mark you with my teeth.”

Her lips part. Her lashes blink nervously. The pupils of her eyes dilate. That’s right baby. I might have forgiven you but that doesn’t mean I won’t punish you for all the heartaches I’ve endured. Despite my raw words, I gingerly kiss her injured wrist. “I love you for doing this for me. When I saw you like some kind of badass avenging angel, I knew what I felt last night was real. I’m yours to have and to hold forever, baby. But first, I’m gonna blow your mind, taking it off the pain.”

After I gingerly towel dry her, I take her to bed. “Johnny..., how do you have so much stamina?”

“I laid it down good on you. Didn’t I?” I smirk against her neck. “I’ve been in a dry spell, wishing for you...”

“Even though—?”

“Yes.” I confess, “My ‘Big John’ was lonely and only wanted one woman.”

She smiles, snuggling against me. “We can’t sleep. You can’t with your concussion.”

“That’s okay. We’ll make a fire, down all of Rog’s stash of Wild Turkey and talk like we used to... plan our future.”

“I’ll grab the booze, you make the fire.”

“Rog texted, by the way. He’s blindfolding a doctor and bringing him by in a bit to look at your wrist and bring us some drugs.”

“You’re my drug.”

“And you’re mine, baby.” I swat her rump as I help her into a pair of lounge pants I found in one of the drawers. “It was hot as fuck watching you take out that crew.”

“My field training was tight.”

“Yeah, I get that.”

“Actually, I’ve been thinking... what was all that about anyway.”

“The Chinese mob was hunting on our turf.”

“Hunting what?”

“People to traffic.”

“Roque and I partnered with Creed MC a while back. We shut that shit down. But they tried again. We set two hundred women and children free from a wharf in Cali. They wanted payback. Rog is retired Creed. They came after him thinking we had stashed some of their merc in his basement.”

She shudders. “It could have been me. If Johnny hadn’t come, they would have taken me. I want in. I have skills... you can shut it down with my help.”

“No. I won’t have you near danger. You’re my woman to protect not put in the crossfire.”

“I have connections...”

“Old ones. Besides, if the Feds could shut it down, they would’ve by now.”

“You’re probably right.”

“I know I am. Come on, I’m starving. Rog must have food somewhere.”

“I love you John.”

“I love you too, my resurrected princess.”

“Forever?”

“And one day.”

11

Christine

We stayed up all night. I was too nervous to let him close his eyes. We laughed, kissed, cuddled by the fire, and drank until dawn. I finally let him sleep but I check on him every ten minutes. I stroked locks of his hair from his forehead, kept pulling the blanket over his bulky muscles. He said he forgives me, but doubt is an ugly thing. Johnny has no one but Roque and he's moved on. I need a grand gesture. Something that will leave not a crumb of doubt in his mind about what he means to me. Maybe I'm a sneaky bitch but I grab his cell, unlocking it. I watched him tap in the six-digit code when he thought I had fallen asleep against his chest.

Biting my lip, I scroll until I find her name. Before I can think twice, I hit call.

“Uncle Johnny? I want to know everything. Spill.”

“Hi Chloe. You're just like the actress who played you.”

“Christine?”

“The very one.”

“If you hurt him again, I'll kill you.”

“You really are Roque Salvatore's daughter.”

“I am. So, don’t fuck with him.”

“I asked him to marry me.”

“What???” I need to pull the phone away from my ear when she starts shrieking. I hear a deep male voice in the background asking her if she’s okay. She mumbles something then she’s back.

“I need your help. Johnny and I are trapped in a cabin in the woods, laying low for a while... but we need to get married fast. I’m taking a page out of your father’s book. I can’t testify against Johnny if he’s my husband.”

“Is that the only reason why you want to marry him.”

“No. He owns my heart.”

“Is the sex still off the charts?”

“How old are you again?”

“Old enough.”

“Not going to answer that. I need a Justice of the Peace, a wedding dress, a tux and two rings.”

“I’m on it.”

“I-I want this to be a surprise. I don’t want him to know.”

“A shotgun, mob, surprise wedding?” She shrieks. “This is going to be epic. Might even be a better ending than Savage Poet.”

“Yeah, we watched that by the way...”

“My parents melted the screens.”

“They sure did, Chloe. But Johnny and I are going to steal their spotlight with our own happy ending.”

“I know some people...”

“I think John is a bit jealous of Romeo Roque. He’s always been the guy behind him. It’s his turn to be number one.”

“Long overdue. I agree. Ok. Start jotting down some notes.”

“For what?”

## Page 26

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“The screenplay. We’ll need a title though... Roque and Romina can write the rest.”

“I’ll think of something. In the meantime, I’m a size six. I want something simple, classic. Sexy.”

“Valentino. I’m on it. Do you have a phone?”

“No. Just his.”

“We’ll need a secret code. I’ll text Uncle Johnny something and you’ll know it means the wedding is on.... Something like... oh I know. I’ll text that Ro’s pregnant again.”

“Is she?”

“Who knows? They’re always doing it.”

“I gotta go, check on John.”

“Christine?”

“Yeah?”

“Fucking betray him again and it won’t be pretty,” she warns. “Don’t pull any runaway bride crap.”

“The only place I’m running is to his arms.”



“Good. I’ll be in touch.”

I carefully put Johnny’s phone back where he left it then curl up next to him. This man is going to be my husband and I’m going to cherish his stubborn ass every day our of lives.

\* \* \*

“Roger? You didn’t tell me you were stopping by.”

“Yeah, well I figured you needed some supplies. And Roque’s in town. He wants to meet.”

“Where is she?”

Oh shit. I peer around the corner where I was towel drying my hair. The stunning brunette is shooting sparks. She’s petite next to Roger. Must be his wife.

“Right here.” I step out, squaring back my shoulders, meeting her gaze dead on. I need to show her I’m not afraid.

She puts her hands on her hips. “Now, Dev... I told ya’ babe to chill out.” Rog tries to stop his woman, but she won’t be stopped.

“He is hot, and I was alone for a while with him.” I shrug.

“Oh fuck,” Rog mutters.

“I’m going to rip your hair out.”

“Bring it.”

“She has a broken wrist.” Johnny tries to get to me, but Rog holds him back.

“We’ll work this out,” I wink. “I take it your Devon?”

“That’s right bitch. I am.”

“Don’t hate me, I was just your husband’s dirty little secret. The hostage he kept in the cellar.”

“Oh, believe me. I already gave him hell about that.” She finally reaches me and for some stupid reason I smirk. Baiting her. She leans in close.

“Did you bring my dress?” I whisper.

She shakes her head. “You’ll fit in fine. If you weren’t tough, this life would trample you. You’ll fit right in with me, Shanna, and Luce. Romina... I’m not so sure. She’s scared the shit out of me.”

“I saw the movie.”

“You did?”

“What did you think?”

“That closet scene was hot as fuck.”

“It was. Gave me baby number three. I’m named him Romeo. Romina and I caught because we both names our baby boys the same.”

“Seriously?”

“Yep. It’s the number one baby trending baby name this year.”

“This is too much. All of them,” I giggle.

“You ladies good? We are stepping out for a bit.”

“Yep, we’re good!” Dev calls out.

“Babe?”

“I’m fine, John.” He looks worried but I shoot him a wink. Dev leads me into the bedroom.

“We only have an hour to do something with your hair and get some makeup on.”

“What’s in an hour?”

“Your wedding.” My heart pounds. “Chloe wanted to surprise you, too.” Just then the cabin door slams open.

“We’re here!” The cutest pixie teen girl with bright eyes and rosy cheeks storms in carrying a gown. My heart melts. I can understand in seconds why she melted the hardest heart on the planet in Roque. And why Johnny would kill for her.

“Oh shit.” Romina isn’t far behind. It feels weird. Like Seeing a celebrity for the first time in the flesh. I feel awkward as hell, half in awe while the other part of me is terrorized. She truly is a woman on fire with her deep red hair and emerald eyes.

“So, you’re the one.”

“Guilty.”

“You almost cost me everything.”

“Almost but didn’t.”

She points a finger at me. “If you hurt John...”

“I know, I know.” I raise my palm. “Your daughter already warned me. But I thought

you two kind of hated each other?”

“He’s stubborn as fuck, annoying and has a juvenile sense of humor but he kind of grew on me.”

“He is a bit immature. But that’s just part of his charm.”

She eyes me coolly then snaps her fingers at the guards standing behind her. A man is escorted inside. His hands are tied behind his back and a hood is over his head. What the fuck?

She pulls the hood off. “JACK?!” I scream rushing forward.

“Agent Jackass to me. Figured you couldn’t get hitched without any family present. Consider him my wedding gift.”

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

I remove the gag from his mouth. “I knew they were mob.”

“For life,” Chloe and Romina fist bump.

My throat is thick with tears. “Jack. I can’t believe it.”

“I’m going to kill them all. Fuck jail.” He fights his restraints.

“No, Jack. They’re my family now. Your’s, too.”

His eyes bulge. “Never.”

I sigh. “I want this, Jack. Want John. Forever.”

“Oh fuck, no.”

“You aren’t going to protest when it’s time to say my vows are you?”

“Don’t worry, we’ll gag him again,” Chloe singsongs.

“Don’t push these people, Jack. But I’m so glad you’re here. Come, I’ll get you some water and food.”

Chloe puts the guards to work. String lights are hung from the rafters. Dozens of wildflowers and roses are brought in and put on the mantle and tables. Someone makes a fire.

“Come on! We don’t have much time!” I swallow thickly as Devon and Romina usher me into the bedroom and carefully help me into the gown, gingerly moving my arm. The doctor Rog had sent put a cast on my arm for my wrist. They fuss over me, curling my hair and applying make-up. A knock on the door interrupts them.

It’s him. My eyes widen. Heart pounds. Lips part.

“Fuck no. You eye fucking my man now, too?” Romina growls.

“Easy there, love. I kind of have that effect on women. It’s my Romeo Roque status.”

I roll my eyes. “You aren’t as hot as John.”

He shrugs. “Snitches aren’t my type.” He straightens his cufflinks coming in. He walks over to me, pulling out a scrap of lace from his pocket and wraps it around my cast.

“What’s this?”

“Something old.”

“God, I’m such a bitch. And you’re being so nice to me. You could have had me killed...”

He shrugs. “I love Johnny. Afterall he’s my number 2.”

“He’s my number one,” I whisper, trying not to cry.

“I’d have Jack escort you out but he’s kind of being a bit of a bitch. Allow me?”

I swallow hard. “Thank you. It’s not everyday a girl gets walked down the aisle by

the Savage Poet.”

“You ready?”

I nod. “But will it be legal? I mean everyone thinks I’m dead.”

“I handled it. Forging paperwork is what I used to do. Rog is a Justice of the Peace....,” Romina smiles.

I smirk. “I did watch the movie. Twice.”

“It’s all good. We have a few federal judges whose wives are major fans. I hinted there would be another book and movie featuring you. We got the license and your legal documents back online You’re no longer presumed dead.”



*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 10:11 am*

“That was weird seeing me portrayed in the movie how you saw me. The world must hate me.”

“Now, you’ll get your turn to share your side.”

“I will. Won’t I?”

With tears in my eyes and the Savage Poet on my arm, I walk behind Chloe, Ro, and Devon. The cabin’s been transformed into a fairy land. They added more twinkle lights, white and pink roses, and thick, white candles. The stray cat that became my pet, Scruffy is curled up at John’s feet.

Roger stands next to John in front of the hearth holding a Bible. Jack is seated, bound, and gagged, but he’s here.

“It’s perfect. The most beautiful wedding ever.” I murmur.

John’s eyes are all fire as he looks at me like I’m the only woman in his world. When we reach him, he lifts my hand to his lips.

Before God, family and friends, Johnny Lamatii becomes my husband, my number one, to have and to hold... forever. And I become his.