



# Wildcard's Wager

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**Category:** Romance, New Adult, Mc

**Description:** In “Wildcard’s Wager” by K.L. Barstow, the thrilling world of motorcycle clubs collides with the unpredictable twists of second-chance romance. Meet Wildcard, a rugged and enigmatic member of the Demon Dawgs Motorcycle Club, whose life takes an unexpected turn when he discovers he has a surprise child with a woman from his past.

As fate rekindles the flame between Wildcard and the captivating Brigit, the stakes skyrocket when Brigit becomes a target for the mob. After witnessing a murder that sends shockwaves through Boston, Brigit is running for her life, seeking refuge in the only person she can trust—Wildcard.

Caught between the allure of rekindled love and the danger closing in, Wildcard makes a daring wager to protect Brigit and their newfound family. The roaring engines of the Demon Dawgs echo the pulse-pounding race against time as they navigate the treacherous roads of love, loyalty, and redemption.

Will Wildcard’s past sins catch up with him, or will he defy the odds and secure a future for his unexpected family? “Wildcard’s Wager” is a heart-pounding tale of passion, danger, and the enduring power of love, where the roaring thunder of motorcycles is only rivaled by the beating of two hearts determined to defy destiny.

**Total Pages (Source):** 59

## CHAPTER ONE: WILDCARD

“That went well,” Alisa says to me as we watch Viper and Max lead Angela and Angelica through the rear doors of 1%.

“Better than we thought. Adding the study room was a brilliant plan,” I complimented Alisa.

She grins at me. “Once I saw she had her teaching license, I thought she might jump at the chance.”

“Now I know where Elina learned how to manipulate others so well.”

Alisa chuckles and shakes her head. “I wish I could take credit. I think I’m the one who’s learning from her. Besides, we really have had parents asking for it. I have plans to ask Angela to move into the clubhouse and homeschool the kids.”

I open my mouth to respond, but spot Reggie rushing out the door. I take off after him. He’s dashing through cars until he drops from view. When I reach him, he’s kneeling next to Max’s body. Blood coats Max’s arm, and he has a bullet hole in his kutte.

“What the fuck happened?” I ask as Reggie presses down on the wound. Pulling out my phone, I call Splint, who is on duty as the hotel medic. “Need you in the parking lot now! Someone shot Max.” I don’t wait for his response, knowing he’s on his way.

“Two men grabbed the women and Angelica. I was watching the four of them leave

the hotel on the security screen. Angelica tripped and fell, which gave the bastards their opportunity. One knocked Viper out while the other shot Max. They shoved the girls into a black van and took off.”

“Did you recognize them? Were they wearing kuttes?” I ask.

Reggie shakes his head. “They had on masks and were wearing black. I didn’t see any kuttes.”

“Okay, I’ll get Spark looking for them,” I say, pulling out my phone just as Splint drops next to Max and gets to work on him. He glances behind him at two security guards who followed him out. “Get him on the stretcher and get him to my office.”

We work together to load Max onto the stretcher before carrying him inside. Once Spark has him in his exam room, I contact Chill and Puma to let them know what’s happened. I then call Rafe. I never thought I’d willingly call a cop about a crime, but since someone took Viper, he needs to know. Besides, maybe he can help find her. When he doesn’t answer his phone, I try again. I try a third time before leaving a message.

Alisa comes into the office and sits next to Reggie. She’s staring at the door with such intensity, I can feel it. She’s willing the door to open and for Max to step through.

“Any word on the girls?” she asks me.

“Spark’s tracking the van and he’ll let us know what he finds. Puma has the guys ready to go. Whoever did this either has balls of steel or they’re desperate.”

“Do you think it’s a rival club?” she asks, then holds up her hand. “Never mind. Club business. I just hate this.”

“I know. As for who did it, I don’t know.”

We wait for close to an hour before we hear anything, and then everything hits at once. Spark calls me while Splint steps back into the room. I tell Spark to hold for a second and wait for Splint to give us his update.

“He’s fine. Lost some blood, so I want to take him to the clubhouse and set him up with an IV. I got the bullet out and stitched him up. He’s conscious. Need someone to drive us to the clubhouse.”

“I’ll drive them,” Reggie offers. I nod. As our newest prospect, I’m glad to see him step up. However, I know part of the reason he wants to go to the clubhouse is so he can be closer to the search for Angela and Angelica. Can’t say I blame him.

“What have you got?” I ask Spark.

“Found the van and trailed it out of town. I lost them around Red Rock Canyon. They got off at one of the park exits. No traffic cams in that area. Puma’s assigning groups to go out and search the area.”

“Fuck, okay. I’m heading back to the clubhouse. Max is on his way back, as is Alisa. Reggie’s driving them. Keep me posted.”

After helping Splint and Reggie load Max into a club SUV, I follow behind on my bike, keeping an eye out for another attack. I don’t expect one, but better to be vigilant. Once behind the gate, I leave Reggie and Gears to help Splint move Max into the infirmary. If I know Max, he won’t be in there long. Not with his sisters and Angela in danger.

“If he doesn’t cooperate, let me know,” I tell Splint, who just smirks.

“I’ll get him patched up, but we both know he won’t stay out of the search. I can’t blame him.”

Nor can I, so I just nod before making my way to Spark’s office. Inside, I find both him and Juliet studying traffic footage.

“We tracked them on 95 all the way to 159, but lost them soon after. I think they got off at Calico Basin Road, but none of the side roads have cameras. Puma took everyone and split up to search. But it’s like looking for a needle.”

“Fuck,” I mutter and he nods.

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“Maybe someone should call Rafe. He can help,” Spark suggests.

“I already tried. Got his voicemail.”

“Let me see if I can track him,” Spark says. “Damn, can’t pinpoint his phone. Either it’s off or he’s out of range. However, it looks like he might have gotten your message. His last location is out near Red Rock Canyon.”

I want to go out and help with the search, but I know with Puma and most of the club out searching, I need to stay here and protect the clubhouse. Turning, I head for the door, only to stop when Spark calls me back.

“You got something?” I ask him.

“Not about Viper. Remember that credit card you told me to track?” I shake my head because I don’t remember asking him to track anything. “This was years ago, back when I first joined. You asked me to let you know if the card showed any activity. I got a notification about three hours ago. Someone used the card in Dallas to purchase airline tickets for three flights out of Dallas. One to Seattle, one to Los Angeles, and a third to here.”

“Here?” I ask, stunned to learn that she finally used the card and might be on her way back home. My heart speeds up at the news. Whether from excitement or fear, I’m uncertain. I haven’t seen Brigit in almost ten years. Why would she be coming back to Vegas now? “Okay, thanks. What time does the plane land?” Once he gives me the flight details, I go into the common room to consider my next steps.

My first step is to check my phone, but I don't see any messages from her. Trying out the last number I have for her, I only get her voice mail. Which would make sense if she's on an airplane. I spot Gears behind the bar and consider asking him to go to the airport to meet Brigit. If she's on her way here. She may not be. She could be on her way to one of the other cities. Or maybe someone found the credit card and is using it. I doubt this is the case, but I can't deny it is a possibility. As much as I want to help her, I don't feel like we can spare a prospect for a potentially wasted trip.

Instead, I take a seat at the bar and accept the beer Gears offers me. All I can do is wait. Which fucking sucks. I'm tense and ready to crawl out of my skin, so when my phone rings, I fumble and almost drop it in my haste to answer it. The display shows it isn't Brigit, but Rafe calling.

"Rafe?"

"Wildcard? It's me," says Viper. The tension whooshes out of my body. I snap my fingers to gain everyone's attention.

"Viper, is that you? Are you okay?" I ask.

"I'm fine. Rafe found us. I'm not sure where we are, but I think we're in Red Rock Canyon."

I hear Rafe speaking on the other end before she's back and giving me her location. Rushing down the hall, I enter Spark's office and give him the details before assuring Viper that Max is fine and at the clubhouse.

"Puma's on his way to her, along with the rest of the club," Spark says.

Relieved, I step back into the common room to update everyone else. I see Reggie clasp his hands together and close his eyes as if in prayer. Reggie is the first man out

the door when Hunter announces everyone is back. I follow to watch the reunion.

We're deep into our celebration when Viper asks Puma about a name I haven't heard in almost a decade. Preacher.

"Wait? He lives here? Fuck, I haven't seen him in years. He got five years in the pen, just before you joined," I say. "I did him a favor after his sentencing, but when I tried to visit him, he wouldn't see me. I wonder if this is a coincidence?"

"What?" Rafe asks.

"Nothing. Fuck, I need to talk to him."

"I can call him. Convince him to come see us," Viper offers. She pats her kutte a few times before cussing. "Fuck, I don't have my phone."

"Use mine," Rafe offers.

I have to wonder if Preacher's return has anything to do with Brigit leaving Boston and possibly heading in this direction. Maybe Preacher is the reason she's coming home. The thought that she might be with him has me out the door as soon as Gears announces that Smooth's let Preacher through the gate. Once outside, I glance at Preacher behind the wheel, but my eyes search for Brigit. I don't see her. I also don't see the anger in Preacher's eyes or the gun in his hand until I feel a flash of pain in my chest. The last thing I remember is Preacher asking me how much I got for Brigit. What the fuck?

## CHAPTER TWO: BRIGIT

Glancing at my watch, I'm happy to see that I'm not as late as I thought. After the morning from hell where nothing was where it was supposed to be, I figured my



chances of getting to work on time were nil. Maybe my luck is changing as I back into a spot only a few steps away from the rear entrance to the hotel where I work. Once inside, I head to my office to prepare for the day. I have a stack of applications to review. As the HR Manager, I always have a stack of applications to sort through. There is a constant stream of applications for every position, from bartenders to valets. My job may not be exciting, but it pays the bills.

As I unlock my office door, I hear raised voices coming from my boss's office. Mike Perry has managed the hotel for ten years. He hired me years ago when I first moved to Boston. We're friendly, but not friends. Concerned, I move closer to his office. His door is open just enough that I can see Mike isn't sitting behind his desk. Someone else is. The sound of flesh hitting flesh followed by a grunt has me shifting to get a different angle of the room.

"You've been ignoring my calls, Mike," says a gravelly voice with a bite of fury in his tone. "That was your second mistake. Want to tell me what your first mistake was?"

"How the hell was I supposed to know he was an undercover cop?" I hear Mike say in a muffled voice.

I push open the door further when I hear another grunt of pain. That's when I see Mike tied to a visitor's chair. Two men in suits stand on either side of him. The man on Mike's right returns to a standing position, his right fist still clenched. The man behind the desk stands and steps around it. I recognize him as a regular visitor to our hotel. Misha Orloff. Rumor is he's head of the Bratva in Boston.

"You're supposed to vet our clientele. You think the cartel or the brotherhood will buy from us after what happened last night?" Misha asks, shaking his head. "How did he slip through?"

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“I’m not the one who vetted him. George did it. He’s the one who screwed us over,” Mike argues.

Misha’s muscle delivers another punch to Mike’s gut.

“I handled it,” Mike whines.

Misha reaches into his coat pocket while Mike struggles against his bindings. “That’s good. Now there is just one more loose end to tie up. I’ll have to hire a new manager. Maybe that delicious HR Manager of yours. Bet she’ll do as she’s told.” The loud bang startles a gasp out of me. Three heads turn in my direction.

Misha, yelling for his men to go after me, catapults me down the hall and through the exit. Grateful for splurging on keyless entry, I’m in my car and driving out of the parking lot just as the two thugs bust through the door. They shoot at me, but I’m down the street and out of sight in seconds.

My mind races as I swerve through traffic. Glancing in my rearview mirror, I don’t see anyone chasing me, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t there. I have to hide, but where? The image of Wildcard flashes in my mind. He’s my best hope. When my father went to prison six years ago, I was alone and vulnerable. Wildcard showed up on my doorstep in his leather kutte and riding his badass bike. Turns out my father sent him to get me out of Vegas and out of reach of Squiggy. The President of their MC. Wildcard smuggled me out of Vegas on the back of his bike. We drove across the country to Boston, where he left me.

As a kid, I spent very little time at the clubhouse, but enough to know that Squiggy

was someone to stay away from. He wasn't a nice man. His eyes on me always made me feel uncomfortable. Those hungry eyes that made my skin crawl. With my dad out of the way, I knew it wouldn't be long before Squiggy showed up. The day I heard the motorcycle rumble to a stop outside my house, I'd never felt more scared. However, instead of Squiggy, Wildcard stood on my porch and offered me hope.

"Your dad sent me," Wildcard said as soon as I opened the door. He pushed inside and turned to me. "He's scared for you and asked me to take you somewhere safe?"

"The clubhouse?"

"No, not the clubhouse. Boston."

"Boston? The city? In Massachusetts?"

He chuckled. "That's the one. We have a chapter there, but I'm not taking you to them. Your dad doesn't want anyone associated with the club to know your location."

"Except you?"

"Except me. Let's get you packed so we can get on the road."

I didn't waste time arguing.

We spent two weeks traveling from Vegas to Boston and then another week looking for a place for me to live that met with Wildcard's approval. The day I moved into my new home was bittersweet. I was safe, but I knew Wildcard would soon leave me. Unfortunately, I'd fallen in love with my protector, even though I knew I shouldn't. He'd be gone soon, and I'd be alone.

When Wildcard left, he told me never to contact him, not unless it was an emergency.

Well, seeing my boss murdered by a mafia boss counts as an emergency. Doesn't it? Instead of pulling into my driveway, I park in front of my neighbor's house. Rushing inside my home, I pack quickly but methodically. I know I won't be coming back here. Shoving everything I can't leave behind into two duffle bags. I toss them into the backseat before rushing to my neighbor's door.

"What are you doing home?" Abby asks when she opens the door.

"Something happened at work. I saw a man murder my boss," I say. Abby gasps, grabbing my arm.

"Go to the cops."

I shake my head. "I can't. This man has connections. I can't risk it."

"What are you going to do?"

"Leave town. I know someone who will protect me. At least I think he will. No, he will. He has to. But you should leave, too. You can come with me."

"No. You go, get out of here and get somewhere safe. I'll pack a few things and head to my cousin's house. Don't worry about me. You go. Do you need any money?"

Abby was the first friend I made after Wildcard returned to Vegas. She's been my rock. As a mother and a best friend, all rolled into one. I reluctantly leave her, but only after she promises that she'd be leaving, too.

Back in the car, I drive straight to the airport. The crowd is both reassuring and terrifying. I hustle to the nearest counter and take the first flight out of Boston. It isn't until I'm on the plane to Dallas that I realize I used my credit card instead of the one Wildcard gave me for emergencies. Stupid. Once I land in Dallas, I rectify my

mistake by purchasing tickets to three different cities using his card. With any luck, I'll be in Vegas and with Wildcard before Misha tracks me down. I'm relieved when we touchdown in Vegas, but then I face a new obstacle. Getting to the clubhouse. I have the address, but I'm not sure I'll find a cabbie willing to take me there. I have to hope they'll at least drop me off close enough that I can walk.

Getting into the first cab, I give him the address and he nods.

We turn onto the road that leads to the clubhouse when a biker on a trike flies past us. He lifts his hand in a wave before speeding off. I watch him drive through the gate up ahead.

"You can pull over here," I tell the cabbie.

"You're going in there?" He asks. "Is that a good idea? This is their clubhouse, not the casino."

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Since my thoughts are already on seeing Wildcard again, I ignore the cabbie and step out onto the shoulder. I approach the glass-enclosed guard house, making eye contact with the prospect standing guard.

“Can I help you?”

“Yes, I hope so. I need to see Wildcard. If he’s here?” My heart drops when I realize he may not be. Hell, he may not still be alive. What will I do then?

“Can I have your name?”

“Brigit, Brigit Jones,” I tell him, just as the front door opens. I spot Wildcard coming down the steps towards an older man who was driving the trike. Wildcard says something to him, but I can’t hear their words. However, I can see the man pull a gun from the waist of his jeans. The echo of the shot ricochets around the space. I watch in horror as Wildcard falls to the ground.

### CHAPTER THREE: WILDCARD

Someone is using the back of my eyeballs for shooting practice. How much did I have to drink last night? Prying my eyes open only makes it worse. I can’t get my arm to move and block the blinding sun.

“Son of a bitch,” I grumble, glancing down to see a bandage near my shoulder. What the hell happened? At least I’m in the club’s infirmary and not the hospital. So, it can’t be too serious. But what the fuck happened?

“You’re awake?” asks Splint as he comes into the room.

“Unfortunately. How much to knock my ass out again?”

He chuckles. “I could do that, but I figured you’d want to be awake so you can take part.”

“Take part in what?”

“Chill has the shooter in The Pit. She hasn’t started on him yet. Thought you’d want to be there to help get some answers. Viper says he’s a former biker. But the guy’s old. Doubt he’ll last.”

“What?” I’m at a loss. Who are we talking about? Then the image of an old man pointing a gun at me comes into focus. Shit! Preacher. He shot me. A man I considered a friend. The man who asked me to take his daughter away from Vegas and hide her in Boston. What had Preacher said about her? Something about how much money I got for her? What the fuck?

In my rush to get out of bed, I find myself almost back on my ass. Grasping the bed, I close my eyes and fight back the pain and dizziness.

“Woah, there,” Splint says, grabbing my shoulder and arm. “Jeez, take it easy or you’ll pop the stitches if you don’t break your neck first.”

“I have to talk to him. Where is he?”

“Who? The guy who shot you? Where do you think? Chill has him in The Pit.”

Shit! I stumble to the door before realizing that I don’t have my kutte or boots.

“Slow down. Your boots are on that chair, so is your kutte. Had to cut your shirt off.”

After jamming my feet into my boots, I yank on my kutte, giving a hiss of pain when I pull at the stitches. Rushing out the door, I run straight into a brick wall. Looking up, I find Puma staring down at me from his lofty height. I’m not a small guy, but standing at seven feet, Puma makes me feel like I could play an extra in the Wizard of Oz.

“Shouldn’t you be resting?” Puma’s booming voice bounces off the walls, reigniting my headache.

“I have to stop Chill before she hurts Preacher,” I tell him.

Puma frowns but turns to walk with me through the clubhouse and out the backdoor.

“Explain.”

“Preacher was a member of the Demon Dawgs when Squiggy was President. He had a young daughter he kept away from the clubhouse, for good reason. Her name was Brigit. Preacher knew about Squiggy’s preference for young girls, so he kept her away. However, he never told Brigit why he didn’t let her near the clubhouse. She stopped by one day to give Preacher his wallet. He’d left it at home and she thought he might need it. She was only seventeen. I was a prospect working the gate when she drove up. Don’t know what happened inside, but Preacher hustled her out and tore into her for coming to the clubhouse. I realized later that Squiggy got an eyeful and wanted her.”

“I bet. That guy was a sick fucker,” Puma grunts. “Glad he’s fucking dead.”

“You and me both.”

“Did Squiggy want Preacher to give her to him?”



“He didn’t come out and ask, but he suggested Preacher bring her around more. How the club was a family. He really put on the pressure.”

Puma snorts.

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“Pissed Preacher off, but he couldn’t openly defy his President. He brought her around, but only when Squiggy wasn’t there. Pissed Squiggy off. Not long after, the cops picked Preacher up and tossed him in jail. He knew he was going to prison, so he asked me for help. I was a patched member by then. He gave me money and told me to get her out of Vegas and put her somewhere safe. I drove her to Boston and helped her find a place to live.”

“You left a seventeen-year-old alone in Boston?”

“She was eighteen by then.”

“So why did he try to kill you?”

“That’s what I need to find out. He asked me how much I got for her. I need to know what the fuck he’s talking about.”

We cross the expanse between the clubhouse and the trapdoor leading to The Pit. Squiggy built The Pit. It was the one thing he got right. The place is well-hidden, roomy, and, most importantly, soundproof. He built several cells and a room that would make those conducting the Spanish Inquisition envious. I’m relieved when I see Preacher sitting in a cell and not strung up in Chill’s torture chamber.

“You should be dead,” Preacher snarls at me.

“Good thing my reflexes are better than yours, old man. Now, do you want to tell me why the fuck you tried to kill me? We used to be friends. I even did a favor for you once, or don’t you remember?”

Preacher stands and stalks toward me until only the bars of his prison cell stand between us. “You son of a bitch! You betrayed me. How much did you get for her, you bastard? Was it worth it? She was just eighteen. I thought you were one of the good guys, but I sure as fuck was wrong about that, wasn’t I? Did you and Squiggy have a good laugh at my expense?” He jolts back when he asks the last question. “Oh god, did you sell her to him?”

“What the fuck are you talking about? I didn’t sell Brigit to anyone. Least of all Squiggy. I smuggled her out of Vegas, just like you asked. I took her all the way to Boston to make sure she was safe. Their President, Havoc, hated Squiggy. He’d never invite him to Boston. So I figured there was no chance he’d ever find her. He wouldn’t have the guts to look for her there and risk Havoc’s wrath.”

Preacher backs up and drops onto the cot behind him. He’s shaking his head in denial, but I see confusion on his face now, rather than anger.

“You didn’t sell her? But he said... Why did he tell me you did?”

“Who?” asks Puma.

“What?” Preacher asks, looking between Puma and me as if he forgot we were there.

“Who told you I sold her?”

“Dale. He told me he was sorry that I got stuck in prison but that they couldn’t have Squiggy in jail. He was too important for the operation. Dale said you were learning the trade. He went on about how you were coming up to speed quickly. Even brought in a gorgeous, young redhead. He said she brought in a pretty penny. I just assumed...”

“Look, I don’t know why Dale said those things to you, but I didn’t hurt Brigit and I

never got involved in their sick operation. I drove Brigit to Boston and got her set up in a house. Gave her all the money you gave me. I also set her up with a credit card that she could use for emergencies... Holy shit, I forgot. Brigit. She used the credit card. She's on her way here."

"What?" Preacher and Puma ask.

"Brigit may be on her way here to Vegas. Spark told me she used the credit card to buy tickets to three different cities. One of them was Vegas. She may be here already. I thought of sending a prospect to meet the plane, but we were short-handed searching for Viper. Spark was going to track her movements. I need to talk to him." I turn to leave, but Preacher reaches through the bars to grab my arm.

"Please, don't kill me until I know she's alright."

"We're not going to kill you," I assure him.

"What the fuck?" Chill asks as she joins us. "I'm all set up. He fucking shot you. No one attacks a member and lives."

"He thought I'd sold his daughter. Granted, I wish he'd talked to me before he shot me, but I get it. Wouldn't you shoot first if you thought someone had hurt Slade? Or Mal? Or Elina?" I ask Chill and Puma.

"I'll take my punishment," Preacher says. "But please, I want to know my daughter is safe. Please."

Chill looks at me, then Puma. When Puma nods, she lets out a string of curse words, but turns on her heel and returns to the torture room. I'm guessing she's putting away all the toys she brought out for Preacher's death.

“You’ll stay here until I decide what to do with you,” Puma tells him. “If you were still an active member, I’d brand you. Since you’re not, I’ll figure something out. In the meantime, you’re staying here.”

“But...” Preacher starts. I interrupt him.

“I’ll find Brigit. Once I do, I’ll come back here and tell you. We won’t stop you from seeing her.” I glance at Puma, who nods in agreement.

Preacher isn’t happy. He glances between Puma and me. When he realizes we won’t budge, he spins around and drops on the cot.

Inside the clubhouse, I turn toward the offices, but Hunter calls out.

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“Wildcard, wait up. There was a woman here looking for you. She was at the gate when you got shot,” Hunter says. “She hightailed it out of here in a cab before I could open the gate to let her in.”

“Did she give you her name?”

“Yeah, Brigit Jones.”

“She was here? Where the fuck did she go?”

### CHAPTER FOUR: BRIGIT

Seeing Wildcard shot down spurs me into action. Shit! Two shootings in one day? What are the odds? Ignoring the calls of the prospect, I speed walk back to the cab and climb into the back seat.

“Was that a gunshot?” he asks when I close the door.

“We should go,” I tell him.

He nods and slams the car into gear. He does a 180 instead of driving past the clubhouse gates. “Where to?”

I have no idea. I’m shaking. All I can see is the image of that man shooting Wildcard. Why?

“Mommy, what’s wrong?” asks my son, Colt, as he puts his hand on my arm.

Fuck. I have to be strong for him. “Nothing, sweetie, just need to find a place to stay.”

“Do you have a place in mind?” the driver asks.

“Any hotel not owned by the mafia?” I ask.

He chuckles like I was making a joke. Granted, I made the statement with a bit of tongue-in-cheek, but my reality right now is that I need to stay away from any place that might make it easier for Misha to find me.

“I know the perfect place,” he assures me. We return to The Strip.

“Look at all the motorcycles, mommy!” Colt calls out, bouncing in his seat as he stares out the window. Rows upon rows of motorcycles fill the parking lot of a sleek hotel and casino. Lights above the entrance flash the words ‘Ride or Die’ above the name; The 1%, Hotel and Casino.’ The hotel looks new and I know it wasn’t here when I lived in Vegas.

“What is this place?” I ask the cabbie.

“It’s owned by the Demon Dawgs. They built it soon after their new President, Puma, took over. He’s a former NBA player, Maklin Brooks. Maybe you’ve heard of him. No? Doesn’t matter. He knows how to draw a crowd. This is the most popular casino in Vegas.”

“It’s a biker casino,” I muse. “Is it dangerous?”

He laughs. “Not more dangerous than going to their clubhouse.” My heart hurts at the memory of seeing Wildcard shot. I can’t break down. Not yet. I need to get Colt and myself somewhere safe. I’m not sure a casino built and run by bikers is safe. “But

seriously, it may look intimidating, but it's safer than any other casino on the strip. The Demon Dawgs have more security and they're fanatic about safety. I promise you that if I were going to bring my family to stay at a hotel, this is the one I'd pick."

I glance at the man to gauge his honesty and I can see that he means what he's saying. I glance back at the hotel and bite my lip as I consider my choice.

"Do they have a pool?" Colt asks the cabbie.

"They do. It's pretty awesome. They have an entire area just for kids to play. They have a team of attendants who have gone through vigorous training and background checks. I know because my sister is one of them."

"Can we stay here, mommy? Can we? Please?" Colt begs, and I smile at his enthusiasm. Two motorcycles pull up near the cab, pulling his attention away. A striking woman with long blonde hair climbs off the back of one. She's laughing as she leans over to kiss the man.

I'm teetering on the edge of saying yes when the cabbie speaks quietly.

"Not sure what you're running from," he says, glancing at Colt to make sure he's paying more attention to the newcomers than us. "But they take care of women here. Trust me. I'll take you to the front desk and help you get settled in. They'll make sure no one can find you."

I glance at him with hope, and he gives me a nod of assurance. "If anyone asks me about you, I won't talk, either. As far as anyone is concerned, I dropped my fare off at the clubhouse. You're safe here."

"Thank you," I whisper as I reach into my wallet to pay the fare.



“You already paid me. Now, let’s get you inside.”

## Page 7

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Taking Colt's hand, I crawl out of the cab and follow my driver inside. We're behind the couple with the motorcycle. He's wearing a kutte that has an image of a shadowy figure resembling the Grim Reaper riding on a motorcycle. The name of the club is 'Shadow Borns' and the rocker under the logo reads Las Vegas. Huh, I don't remember Vegas having another club. Squiggy didn't like competition. But my knowledge of biker clubs is not extensive. Preacher kept me away from the club.

The cabbie leads me to the registration desk while the couple veers towards a man standing off to the side. The man continuously scans the surrounding activity. His mannerisms remind me of Mike Perry, my late boss. He, too, kept his head on a swivel in the hotel. He was always looking for an anomaly that could show a problem.

"Jason, how are you doing?" the woman behind the counter asks my driver with a friendly smile. "I see you brought us another guest. Maybe the casino should put you on retainer."

My heart sinks as I wonder if maybe all that he's said about the casino being safe was just a sales job.

"I'm good, Becky. I brought a guest of Alisa's."

Becky's expression shifts from joking to concerned. She gives me and Colt a bright smile full of compassion. "Don't worry about a thing. We'll take care of you, I promise."

I glance at the cabbie, Jason, and he gives me a nod. "See, you're all set. Becky will

look out for you. If you need anything, just call me.” He hands me a business card before turning away. I spot the man and woman from the motorcycle waylay him. The man glances at me, but his eyes widen when he looks at Colt. I pull my son closer to me just as Becky grabs my attention.

“Here is the key to your room. I put you in a two-bedroom suite. If you need anything like food, clothes, or amenities, just call me. I’ll have someone bring them up to you. Serena will take you to your room. That floor is empty and the only people with access work for the hotel. However, if you need assistance, call security and someone will be at your door in seconds.”

I take out the credit card Wildcard gave me and hope that the credit line is large enough. “I don’t know if this will work, maybe I should take a cheaper room...”

Becky holds her hand up. “No, we don’t need a card. We’ll take care of it later, and I promise, we won’t charge you for the upgrade or for anything you order.”

I feel the emotion building into tears and garble out a thank you before a young woman wearing a kutte grabs my bags and leads us toward the elevators.

“I’m Serena. I’ll take you to your room and get you settled. You are safe here. I promise.”

I follow Serena and notice that her kutte differs from the others. It has the logo for the hotel on it, a giant 1% symbol, with Las Vegas on the bottom rocker. The top rocker has ‘Hotel and Casino’ instead of the club’s name. I spot others with similar kutties and realize that they must be part of the employee uniform. She leads us past the large bank of elevators to a smaller set. “These elevators are reserved for the suites. None of the other elevators can reach these floors. Place your card against the reader there,” she points to it, and I hold the keycard for the room against it. The light flashes just before the doors open.

“You have this floor to yourself right now. The other three suites are empty.” Serena explains as we exit the elevator to a hallway that curves away from us on both sides. We follow the curve until she stops in front of a door and waits for me to hold the card up to the reader. I gasp when I see the room. We’re standing in a curved living area with a massive couch lined up under the windows. There is additional seating and a massive television against the wall. A small kitchenette sits to my left. It has a microwave, a two-burner mini stove, a mid-sized refrigerator, a sink, and lots of counter space. “The bedrooms are down to your right, along with two bathrooms. If you need anything, just use the phone there. Someone will bring up whatever you need. There are several menus for our restaurants.”

“Thank you,” I say, pulling out a few dollars and pressing them into her hand.

“You two have a good evening.”

Once the door closes behind her, I take a deep breath. My mind goes straight to the sight of Wildcard falling backwards.

“Mommy, I’m hungry.” Colt breaks through my thoughts.

Brushing aside the single tear that escaped, I focus on my son. Dinner and then bed. Once he’s asleep, I’ll allow myself the chance to grieve.

“What are you hungry for?” I ask Colt, forcing a brightness into my tone. “They have hamburgers, chicken tenders, spaghetti, Mac and Cheese, pizza...”

“Pizza!” Colt shouts, making me laugh. God, I need his enthusiasm and light today.

I order the pizza, along with soda and a bottle of wine. I debate about getting two bottles, even though I don’t want to get drunk. Well, that’s not true. I want to get drunk, but I can’t. I don’t think Misha will catch up with me tonight, but I can’t take

the chance.

We eat while watching Buzz Lightyear for probably the tenth time. Colt loves the movie, but for me, it's just white noise. I'm not sure of my next steps. Wildcard was my hope. Now I don't know if he's alive or dead. Only that he can't help me. I know it's selfish of me to think that way, but I've got to think of Colt first and foremost. Always.

When all that's left of the pizza is crust and the credits play, I hustle Colt off to get ready for bed. While he takes a shower and brushes his teeth, I pull out my iPad. I know he'll want to read. However, I take a minute to check the news coming out of Boston. I immediately wish I hadn't. The lead story chokes me with fear.

"The police are looking for Brigit Jones, the HR Manager for the Sunset Hotel. Ms. Jones is the primary suspect in the murder of the hotel manager, Michael Perry. She was last seen fleeing the scene..."

## CHAPTER FIVE: WILDCARD

"Hunter said she was at the gate when Preacher shot me," I tell Spark. "Can you track her?"

Child's play," Spark says, turning back to his keyboard.

"This is Preacher's daughter, right?" Spark asks without missing a keystroke. "Damn, she's hot. Must take after her mom."

I growl at Spark, who just laughs. "What? I love redheads. They have all that fire and sass. But don't feel threatened. I already have my hands full with my redhead. Doesn't mean I can't admire a different model."

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:24 pm*

I snort. “Think Juliet will see it that way?”

“Nope, which is why I won’t tell her, and you won’t either, asshole.”

“Okay, she was in a cab. I’m tracking it through the city, but tracking cabs is harder. There are just too damn many of them and they all look alike. But I’ll get the cab’s ID and the company. Juliet can access their records if I can’t follow her through the cams.”

“Where is Juliet? She was here earlier.”

“She had to go back to her apartment. Said she was meeting a client this afternoon.”

“She meets face-to-face with clients? I thought she had a condition that kept her indoors and away from people.”

“She does, but she’s working on overcoming it. Hanging out here in the clubhouse has helped her. She’s attempting to put herself out there more and face her fears.”

“What fears?”

“She’s a former FBI profiler. Although, I think she does freelance jobs for them still. She was profiling a serial killer who targeted female college students. The top performers. The ones who made the Dean’s List or were star athletes, for example. He’d grab them and torture them for weeks before he let them starve to death. Real nasty piece of work. She profiled him. While she worked the case, the guy figured out who she was and sent her videos of him torturing his victims. Told her he was

coming for her. They wanted to take her off the case, but she refused. Her profile, combined with the evidence they pulled from the tapes, led to his capture and conviction. However, it took them close to a year before they found him. She was in isolation for all that time and it did something to her. She found it difficult to return to the world.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah. I think being here with us helps her feel safe without having to be isolated.”

“Is she okay with you telling me this? Seems personal.”

“She’s okay with it. I was with her when she told Puma the story. Dice, Chill, and Viper know, too.”

“So, I’m basically the last to know?”

Spark chuckles. “Probably.”

Leaning against the wall, I impatiently wait for Spark to find something. I need to be moving. Pushing off to pace, I feel the twinge of pain in my shoulder. Fucking Preacher. I guess I should consider myself lucky that he wasn’t a better shot. “You have any pain relievers in here?”

Spark reaches over and pulls out the drawer next to him. He reaches inside and pulls out a bottle, tossing it over to me. I dry swallow three pills and think of Brigit. Why did she choose today to come back to Vegas? After Squiggy’s death, I considered reaching out to her to see if she’d want to come home. I don’t know what stopped me, except maybe the possibility of a refusal. Leaving her in Boston was the hardest thing I’d ever done. Not checking on her or knowing if she was alright, was difficult. I lost count of the number of times I’d pick up the phone to call her or contact Havoc and

ask him to check on her. When I left her, I told her not to contact me or come back here. Until today, she'd followed that edict completely. So what changed?

Taking out my phone, I search for answers. Since I don't know what I'm looking for, I start with the news sites in Boston. I'm not expecting to find anything right away, so when I see Brigit's name listed as a person of interest in a murder case, I clutch my phone so hard it cracks.

What the fuck?

"Find her," I tell Spark, rushing out of the room in search of Puma.

"Yeah," Puma answers as I open the door. "Did you find her?"

"No, but I think I know why she's here." I hand Puma my phone and watch as he reads the article.

"Do you think she killed the guy?" Puma asks.

"No! Well, fuck. I don't know. I don't think she would. But I haven't seen her in six years. Maybe she did. If she did, she had a reason."

"Have you found her?"

"Spark's tracking her through traffic cams. He'll find her. Then I'll have him dig up more about this murder. And Michael Perry."

Puma picks up his phone and makes a call.

"Puma, fuck man, what did I do to earn a call from the great Maklin Brooks?" I hear Havoc, the President of the Boston Chapter, ask.



“Need some information about a murder in your town. Michael Perry.”

“The hotel guy? Yeah, what about him?”

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:24 pm*

“Know anything about it or why someone would want to murder him?”

“The cops think some bitch did it. She worked at the hotel. That’s all I know. However, I know Perry, or at least, I know of him. He’s a bastard with ties to the Bratva.”

“Do you think they might have killed Perry?” I ask.

“Maybe. But Perry was one of theirs. Why? What’s your interest in all this?”

“The woman the cops are looking at for the murder is under our protection.”

I frown at Puma, not liking that he told Havoc about Brigit. But then, Brigit is here in Vegas and once I find her, I’m not letting her go.

“Then what the fuck was she doing living in Boston?”

I share a glance with Puma before confessing. “I stashed her there six years ago.”

“And you didn’t think to do me the courtesy of telling me? What the fuck? Didn’t know you and your men were so disrespectful, Puma.”

“Not his doing,” I defend my President. “Puma wasn’t President back then. I made the call.”

“Fuck, that’s right, Squiggy was the President. That motherfucker.”

“He was. He was also the reason I hid her in Boston. I knew he’d never look for her there. Maybe I should have told you, but her dad didn’t want anyone from the club involved.”

“Who’s her dad?”

“Preacher.”

“Why the fuck would Preacher not want us to know about his daughter? He was just here with the rest of the Nomads. He never mentioned having a daughter in town.”

“Not the same Preacher. This guy rode with Squiggy. Went to jail six years ago. He asked me to protect his daughter because Squiggy showed an interest. He asked me to find her a safe place, and I chose Boston.”

“Doesn’t explain the disrespect. Should have told me.”

“Couldn’t take the chance. Figured she’d be safer if no other bikers knew where she was. Meant no disrespect, but she was my responsibility. Squiggy wanted her. You know what things were like back then. We didn’t know who to trust.”

“Yeah. Guys like Dale and Squiggy really screwed us up,” Havoc admits with a sigh. “Almost lost the brotherhood because of those bastards.”

“Need you to keep your ear to the ground,” Puma says. “See if you can find out who killed Perry. Might be our girl ran here because she saw something she shouldn’t have.”

“That would make sense,” Havoc agrees. “I’ll let you know what I find out.”

“Fuck, I screwed up,” I tell Puma. “Should have told him. I’d be pissed if the roles

were reversed.”

“I’ll invite him out to stay at the hotel on the club. Don’t sweat it. Havoc isn’t stupid, and he knows what Squiggy and Dale were like. Those assholes had spies in all the clubhouses. Another reason Dante asked Preacher, Stone, and Eagle to go nomad and help clean up the mess Dale made. You had to protect Brigit. That’s what you did.”

Puma’s phone rings, so I stand up to leave.

“Hold on, it’s Trouble.”

Since Trouble and his club are covering the casino this week, I sit back down. The conversation is mostly one-sided, with Trouble doing most of the talking.

“You think so? Damn. No, I’ll let it play out. Should be interesting. What room? Okay, thanks, man. Later.”

Puma hangs up the phone and gives me a huge grin. “Trouble found your girl. She’s at 1%, staying in Suite 1202 as a guest of Alisa’s.”

“Is she hurt?” I ask, stunned that the hotel staff would place her under club protection. Puma established a way for the hotel staff to hide abused women seeking refuge from abusive men. He gave it the code word ‘Guest of Alisa’s.’ He named it after his Old Lady, Alisa, who came to us for protection from a stalker who murdered her husband. Or, more accurately, had him murdered. The son of a cartel head rarely does his own dirty work.

“He said nothing about her being hurt, but the cab driver brought her in. He told Trouble that she seemed like she was on the run and scared. The cabbie told Trouble that he brought her here first.”

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:24 pm*

“Okay, I’ll head over there and talk to her. I’m going to convince her to come back here with me. I’ll cover any expenses for the room.”

Puma shrugs and gives me another grin. “Take the SUV. You don’t want to be riding with that shoulder. Besides, you don’t know what she’s brought with her.”

### CHAPTER SIX: BRIGIT

My hands shake as I swipe away from the news to access the Kindle app. I mentally grab hold of the fear and shove it into a box before locking it up. I can’t expose Colt to my despair. He’s much too young. My job as his mother is to make sure he’s happy, not stressed about his mother going to prison. My little guy comes flying out of the bedroom in his Spiderman pajamas and hops on the bed. His exuberance pulls a chuckle out of me as he scrambles to get under the covers.

“I’m ready!” he announces loudly, even though I’m already joining him on the bed.

“What are you ready for?” I ask.

“Dinosaurs!” He announces as we dive back into the story of Jack and Annie as they try to escape the past and find their way home in *Dinosaurs Before Dark*. We’re slogging our way through the book since Colt wants to read it to me instead of the other way around. Not that I’m complaining. Watching him get enjoyment out of reading gives me joy. We’re coming up on chapter seven when his eyes droop and his words slur. Marking our place, I slide the iPad out of his hands. Placing a kiss on his forehead, I tuck him in. My hand hovers over the light switch as I watch my little boy sleep. He’s my entire world, and the thought of not watching him grow up breaks my

heart. With a soft sob, I flick off the light.

Dropping onto the couch, I look out at the bright lights of the Vegas Strip. The curved window gives me a breathtaking view that is uniquely Vegas. I'm holding the iPad against my chest. I don't know whether to read more news reports about Mike's death or just ignore it for the night. Ignoring it seems like the best plan for my sanity, but I can't hide from the reality. If the police track me down, they'll put Colt in the system. The thought of my baby in the hands of someone I don't know terrifies me. I need Wildcard, but there is a real possibility he's dead. I don't realize I'm crying until the tears drop on my arm.

Slamming the iPad down on the couch, I march to the bathroom and rip out several tissues from the box. I wipe my tears as I again fight to control my emotions. I can't keep breaking down. Not now. I need to focus on a solution instead of wallowing in despair. Colt needs me to be strong. I need to protect him in case the worst happens. He needs his father, and if not his father, then who? My father? The last I saw my dad was when the police handcuffed him and led him away. He refused to see me when he was in jail. Instead, he sent Wildcard to take me out of Vegas. The letters I sent to him in prison came back unopened. He completely cut me out of his life. I know my dad loves me, even though he rejected me. I'm not so stupid that I don't know why he did it. He didn't want me to see him in prison. He'd rather I remember him as my father and not a convicted felon. What he doesn't realize is that I will never see him as anything but the father I love with all my heart. I need to find out if he's still in prison or if they released him. He'd be the best choice to care for Colt if I went to prison.

Maybe the cabbie bringing me here was fortuitous. According to him, the Demon Dawgs own the hotel. Surely I can find someone who will help me contact the club President. The hotel created a way to help women in need of protection. That's not something Squiggy would ever have done. He was the person women needed protection from. What was the name of the President? Puma. I remember that, but his

real name? Someone mentioned it. The cabbie? I pull out the card he gave me and dial the number.

“This is Jason. How can I help you?” I feel a sense of relief hearing a familiar voice.

“Jason. This is Brigit. We met today. You took me to the Demon Dawgs clubhouse and then to 1%?”

“Of course, Brigit. Is everything okay?” I’m grateful for the genuine concern in his voice.

“It is. I just had a question. You mentioned the name of the President of the Demon Dawgs, but I forgot.”

“Oh, okay, yeah, no problem. His name is Maklin Brooks.”

“Right, now I remember you saying that. Thank you.” Ending the call, I fire up the iPad again and search for Maklin Brooks. The images that I see are all of him with a basketball in his massive hands. The man is stunningly handsome with an incredible body. Ignoring the stats of his career, I search for more recent information.

I find an article about a charity event at 1%. He’s wearing a tuxedo that barely contains his massive form. He’s bulked up since his playing days, but I’m certain the bulk is muscle rather than fat. Standing next to him is a gorgeous woman with long black hair and tanned skin. He’s looking down into her upturned face. The love bouncing between them is undeniable.

Under the photo is a caption. Maklin Brooks with the event organizer, Alisa Canto.

Alisa. Didn’t Jason and the woman at the reception desk mention the name Alisa? Guest of Alisa’s. That’s what Jason said. His words seemed to flip a switch with

Becky. She knew immediately that I required protection. Why? Hotels often offer a protective service to women needing to escape an abusive relationship or stalkers. Is that what Guest of Alisa's means? The thought that he loved his woman so much that he created a program dedicated to helping women in need makes me feel more confident that he'll help me, too.

I feel better knowing I have a plan. First thing tomorrow morning, I'll call the front desk and ask if they can put me in contact with Puma or someone from the club. Maybe I can find out if Wildcard survived the shooting. I feel the tears start again, and this time I don't stop them. I spent the last six years wishing he'd come back into my life. Seeing him shot feels unreal. As if my worst nightmare has come to life. Taking the wine out of the refrigerator, I pour myself another glass. I can't get drunk, but maybe the alcohol will numb some of the pain. Taking the bottle with me, I head for my bedroom. A hot bath will help me sleep.

Turning on the tap, I'm happy to find a bottle of luxurious bubble bath in the basket of items supplied by the hotel. Emptying the tiny bubble, I breathe in the relaxing scent of lavender. Yes, this is exactly what I need. Stripping off my clothes, I make sure my glass and the bottle of wine are near enough to reach. Sliding into the water, I let out a long sigh as my muscles react to the hot water. I rarely indulge in baths, but each time I have, I have to wonder why I don't do it more often. This is heaven. I left the door to the bathroom and the bedroom open in case Colt needs me. He's usually a heavy sleeper, but I don't know if the chaotic dash across the country or sleeping in a different bed will cause him problems.

After finishing my glass of wine, I refresh the water before pouring the rest of the bottle into my glass. I sip the wine and let myself think about Wildcard and the night we conceived Colt. He was my first, the man who took virginity. It was a hard-fought battle that I finally won.

He resisted me for the entire trip, even though I threw myself at him every night.



Wrapped around his hard body, combined with the bike's vibrations, had me ready to combust. Every time we stopped for the night, I tried to seduce him, with no luck. I tried everything my inexperienced eighteen-year-old mind could come up with, but he held firm. Until the night before he returned to Vegas. After he helped me setup my bed in my new home, he told me he was leaving the next day. That was the first time I cried. The thought of being alone broke me. My tears broke down Wildcard's defenses.

He wrapped his arms around me and begged me to stop crying. The tender way he held me and the whispered assurances I'd be okay eventually stopped the tears. When I raised my eyes to his, he must have seen the naked plea in mine. He groaned and gave in. The taste of his kiss ignited a fire in me I would not let him deny. I needed him. Needed to feel connected to him before he cast me adrift on my own. He answered my need with a night that I still remember. A night that I replay often when I need the release. Like right now.

Sliding my fingers between my folds, I flick my clit as I pinch my nipple with my free hand. I remember his mouth sucking on both as sparks shoot to my core. He showed me how to touch myself. I remember his fingers sliding over the bundle of nerves that shot me through my first orgasm. I barely remember the pain when he first penetrated, but I'll never forget the pleasure when his fat cock slid in and out of my passage. Even though I wanted him bare, he took care of me by wearing a condom. I giggle when I remember the look of horror on his face when the condom broke.

A sound outside my door draws me back into the present. Slipping further under what remains of the bubbles. I wait for Colt to find me. However, it isn't Colt that steps through the door. No, my visitor is tall, dark, and dangerous.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: WILDCARD

Standing in front of Suite 1202, I have to wipe my hands on my jeans before knocking. I'm nervous. Why the fuck am I nervous? Because this is Brigit. She's the only woman I've ever wanted, and she's here. Since leaving her behind in Boston six years ago, I had to fight from going back and bringing her home. Only the fear of what Squiggy would do to her kept me from following through with any form of contact. Then, after Squiggy died, I thought it was too late. I imagined Brigit living her life in Boston. Since she never reached out to me, I pictured her married with a couple of kids. Probably a dog and a cat, too. But now she's back here in Vegas. She's in trouble and I'm going to do everything I can to protect her.

Knocking on the door, I wait, but don't hear movement inside. I knock again, but still nothing. Did she leave? As the hotel manager, I have a master to all the rooms. Pulling it out, I swipe it and open the door. Stepping inside, I listen for any sounds, but hear nothing. I spot an empty pizza box in the garbage can, along with some grease-stained napkins. In the kitchen sink is a dirty glass. An iPad sits on the couch under the window. Stepping closer to the hall, I hear noises coming from the open bedroom door. A moan followed by a surprised gasp has me rushing down the hall and into the bedroom. The sound of skin rubbing against porcelain draws my attention to the bathroom. Pushing the door open, I step inside and almost drop to my knees.

In the bathtub is the woman of my dreams, naked and covered in suds. Fuck me.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:24 pm*

“Wildcard?” Brigit sputters. Before I can respond, she leaps out of the tub and wraps her warm, wet body around me. I’m laughing as she soaks through my t-shirt and jeans. She pulls back and pats my chest with a face filled with concern. “You were shot! I saw him shoot you!”

Grabbing a towel off the warmer, I wrap it around her and grab another for her hair. “I was shot, but I’m fine. A little sore.”

“Oh, no! Did I hurt you?” She asks, patting my chest again. When she hits the wound. I wince. Jumping away from me, she slips and almost falls back into the tub. I grab hold of her with my right arm, pulling at the stitches. I try hard not to grimace and set her off again.

“I have some stitches. The pain is manageable. Now, as much as I hate to say it, you need to get dressed so I can take you back to the clubhouse.”

“Mommy...” says a little voice behind me. I turn to see a little boy who I guess to be around five. He looks to be the same age as Elina and Mal. His flop of brown hair and enormous hazel eyes widen when he sees me. “Leave my mommy alone!” he shouts, rushing forward to punch his little fists against my thighs.

“No, Colt, baby, it’s okay. Wildcard is a friend. He isn’t hurting me.” Brigit reaches into the closet and pulls out a robe. She shoves her arms inside and belts it before removing the towel. Pushing past me, she kneels in front of the little boy. I hear none of her words because I’m frozen. I’ve seen this boy before, but only in photos. Each image flashes through my mind. A little boy holding a pumpkin half his size, riding a bike with a huge smile on his face, opening Christmas presents, and his firstday of

kindergarten. This little boy. Colt? Is the spitting image of me when I was his age.

I must have made a noise because Brigit glances up at me and gulps before turning her attention back to her son. Our son.

“Come on baby, let’s get you back into bed,” Brigit says before leaving me alone to wade through my memories and return to the present.

I follow and catch up to her as she’s closing the door to the second bedroom.

“That’s...?” I start, but she shushes me and pushes me back into the main bedroom.

“That’s my son, isn’t it?” I demand as she closes the door.

“Yes,” she responds simply. One simple word that turns my world inside out and upside down.

“How? Why? When? What?” I stammer.

She smirks at me. “You forgot Who? But as for your other questions. Don’t you remember the condom breaking?”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Her eyes widen in surprise. “How was I supposed to do that? You told me not to call you unless it was an emergency. Not unless my life was in danger and I had no other choice.”

“You didn’t think finding out you were pregnant with my child was an emergency?”

“No. I didn’t. You stressed how important it was for me to stay hidden. How much of

a risk it was to contact you. If calling you put my life in danger, then I sure as hell would not risk my son's life."

Turning away from her, I pace the room and run my fingers through my hair and tugging hard. "You could have called me."

"And you could have called me. The phone works both ways, Wildcard. I planned on telling you when you called. But you never did. Even after Squiggy was no longer an issue. Why didn't you?"

Dropping my head, I stare at the floor and come to terms with how much I screwed up. Time to face up to my cowardice. "I thought you'd moved on. I kept imagining that you found someone, and you'd created a life together. That I was just an itch you wanted to scratch. That I meant nothing to you."

I tense when Brigit chuckles, but then she wraps her arms around my waist and lays her head against my back. "You silly man. There has been no one but you. Even if I didn't have a reminder of you in miniature form, I would still have thought of you every day. You're my knight in leather."

Turning, I wrap my arms around her and do what I've been dreaming of since I learned she was on her way to Vegas. Capturing her lips, I lose myself in Brigit. When my need presses into her hip, she moans. The sound turns my dick to diamond. Tasting her brings back the flood of memories that I locked away. The feel of her behind me on my bike, the number of times I jacked off in the shower when her seductions almost wore me down, and then the best memory of all. The night I succumbed and took her virginity.

Sliding my hand into her robe, I grab both globes of her tight little ass. She wraps her legs around me, pressing her heated core against my shaft. As my erection threatens to burst the seams of my jeans, she adds to the pressure by rubbing herself up and

down. She increases her speed and moans out when she climaxes. Fuck me, my girl is hot and ready. Then I remember the sounds she made when she was in the bath. She already had a head start. Time for me to catch up.

Dropping her on the bed, I kick off my boots as I unbuckle my jeans. She sheds the robe before sliding her hands under my shirt and pushing it up and off. A jolt of electricity shoots through me when she sucks my nipple into her mouth. Holy shit! How have I never realized how fucking erotic that is? I can't move as she licks and flicks the hardened nub before doing the same to the other side. She jolts me into action when she slides her hands around my waist and into my jeans, cupping my ass.

"Too many clothes," she complains as she slides my jeans and boxers down. As soon as my dick pops free, she pounces. Running her tongue around the head, licking up the pre-cum like its ice cream. Entangling my fingers in her hair, I hold on as she takes me to the edge. My legs shake as my balls tighten. I want to tell her to stop because I want to bury myself inside her and pound my orgasm into her, but I'm no longer in control. She is. I succumb when she deep throats me and then swallows around me. Fuck me. I'm a goner. My cum shoots out in long ropes as my body quakes with pleasure. Brigit groans as she swallows every drop. "God, I missed your taste."

She grins up at me as I stroke her cheek and wonder how the fuck I got so lucky to find her again.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: BRIGIT

His familiar scent and the taste of his cum have me dripping with need. The thought of going down on a man always left me feeling a little nauseated, but not Wildcard. If I had to choose a last meal, the taste of him would be what I'd want. He captures my hand when I slide it toward my sex.

“My turn to reacquaint myself with your taste,” he says with a grin as he positions me on the bed. I didn’t know that he took off his kutte and henley, but I notice the bandage on his chest. Shows how oblivious I was before. But before I can say anything, Wildcard flips my legs over his shoulder and kisses the inside of my thigh. That slight gesture zings a jolt straight to my lady bits. “You’re so wet,” he mumbles, just before diving in for his feast.

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Holy shit! That tongue of his could earn him a gold medal. How does he get it to cover so much area? How can he get it so far into my passage? When he brings his teeth into play, I arch off the bed with each nip of pain. This is even better than I remember. The first time, I was nervous. Now? Now, I'm just fucking needy. "More, I need... something... I need more," I beg, not knowing or caring if I'm mumbling like a loon. He must understand the crazy sex drunk speak, because he slides his thick finger into my channel. Then he adds a second, followed by a third. I'm panting as he stretches me open. God, I'm so full. I want his dick. My hips rock as he pumps his fingers in and out. My climax builds and I snap my eyes open so I can see him. I need to know this is real. That he's here, and he's the one touching me.

"Are you close, baby?"

I nod frantically as the pleasure notches up to another level. He sends me a cocky grin as he swipes his finger over a bundle of nerves that sends me flying over the precipice. I smother the keening wail that bursts out of me.

"Holy shit," I grumble as I watch him lick his fingers clean.

"I'll say," he agrees with a grin. "Fuck, I missed you. I never stopped thinking about you and I'm sorry I didn't come get you after Squiggy died. Fucking stupid move on my part."

He gathers me in his arms so I'm laying with my head on his chest. We're both working hard to catch our breaths.

"It's in the past. Let's not let it spoil our future." I sigh when I remember how fucked



up the present is.

He squeezes me. “What was that sigh for?”

“There’s something I need to tell you. I’m in trouble. There is a reason I came to Vegas...”

“I know. Well, I don’t know all of it, but I know enough. We’ll take care of it, together. My club won’t let anything happen to you. We’ll keep you safe. I’ll keep you safe. Now, go to sleep. Tomorrow we’ll face what comes.”

I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep, but the hot bath, multiple orgasms, and feeling safe for the first time in forever sends me into dreamland.

I wake in the position I’ve dreamed about every night since Wildcard left me in Boston. Wrapped in his arms. The feel of his rigid cock pressing between the globes of my ass has my body humming with need.

“Need something?” he growls, as I wiggle closer.

“You, inside me?” I ask hopefully.

He chuckles as he leans away from me. I open my mouth to protest, but hear him ripping open a condom. Goodie, goodie, goodie!

I’m ready for him, so he lifts a leg and slips inside. One hand cups my breast, tweaking my nipple, while his other fingers circle my clit. He keeps a steady pace as my pleasure rolls slowly uphill. I look back at him, wanting to feel his lips on mine. He shifts to accommodate my need to taste him. Our tongues intertwine as his hips snap faster and faster until I scream my release into the kiss. His hips jerk once, twice, before he groans through his.

“Damn, baby,” he whispers as he pulls out. He ties off the condom and rolls out of bed. “I want to keep you in this bed all day. But we need to get to the clubhouse.”

I gape at him. Not just because of how calm he is, but also because the man is insane. “I’m not going to your clubhouse,” I protest, struggling to sit up. “Don’t you remember? I saw someone shoot you! There is no way I’m taking my son anywhere near there.”

I slide off the bed and grab the robe I dropped. No way am I having this conversation naked. “You don’t have to worry about anyone shooting you or Colt. I promise. That was a one-off. A mistake. He won’t shoot anyone again.”

“You killed him?” I ask, unable to keep the shock and horror out of my tone.

“No, of course not. It was a misunderstanding. He thought I’d hurt someone he loved. He got the wrong end of some bad information. I spoke to him before I came here and he apologized. I promise you, on the lives of you and Colt, that this man would rather kill himself than hurt either of you.”

I shake my head. “You can’t know that. Stray bullets kill kids all the time.”

“Before today, the last person who shot a gun at the clubhouse was law enforcement and they killed Squiggy.”

“Maybe that’s true, but I won’t have Colt exposed to what happens in clubhouses.”

“Yet, you brought him to the clubhouse yesterday,” Wildcard reminds me.

“Only because I was desperate. I didn’t know where else to go!”

Wildcard draws me into his arms. “You trusted me enough to come to me when you

needed help. Trust me on this. You and Colt will be safer at the clubhouse than you would be anywhere else. It's nothing like it was under Squiggy. Puma runs a clean club. He loves kids. Hell, he's a big kid himself. We have several Old Ladies now, and Colt won't be the only kid. Puma has a son and a step-daughter who are Colt's age. Our SOA has a stepson who is a year older. And our Enforcer has a half-sister who is a year younger."

"Other kids?" I ask, trying to wrap my head around kids living inside the clubhouse of a motorcycle club. "They live there?"

"Three of them live there full time. The only one who doesn't is Mal, Puma's son. His mom is with the President of another club. He splits his time between the two clubhouses. Elina, Slade, and Angel are all living in the clubhouse for now. Elina is Puma's step-daughter. Her mother is Alisa. Slade lives there with his dad, Hunter, who is a prospect and Chill, our SOA. Angel's mom is dating a prospect, Reggie. Angel is also the half-sister of our Enforcer, Viper, and a prospect."

"You have homosexual men as members of your club?" I ask, stunned that they'd be that progressive.

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Wildcard frowns. “Not that I know of, although no one would care.”

“You said your SOA was in a relationship with a prospect. Didn’t you?”

“Oh! I see. Chill is a woman. A former Marine and one scary ass bitch. I’m just glad she’s on our side.”

I step back from Wildcard and stare at him in shock. “You have a female member?”

He chuckles. “We have two female members. Viper is our Enforcer, and another person I would never want to piss off. Puma isn’t anything like Squiggy. I wanted to kill Squiggy, but I’d die for Puma. Do you know he set up a program here at 1% that helps women who are running from abusive relationships? He named it after his Old Lady, Alisa. She came to our clubhouse as a favor to a member of our San Diego club. She had a stalker. The guy arranged the death of her husband to clear the way for himself. Puma took her in to protect her and her daughter. Then he fell in love with both of them.”

I’m nodding as he explains. “That’s what the cabbie said when he brought me here. He told the woman at the reception desk that I was a guest of Alisa’s. Later I saw a photo of Puma with Alisa and figured he named it after her. He’s quite large, isn’t he?”

Wildcard barks out a laugh. “Wait until you meet him in person. The guy’s a fucking mountain, but he’s one of the best men I’ve ever met. He won’t let anyone hurt you or Colt. Hell, he’d have no problem taking me out if he thought I was a threat to you. That’s who he is.”

His assurances that Colt will not only be safe at the clubhouse, but would have other kids his age to play with calm my nerves. Somewhat. But the sight of Wildcard getting shot following Mike's murder still fills me with concern. "I trust you believe the clubhouse to be safe for kids, but I'm still unsure about the man who shot you. How do you know he isn't a danger?"

Wildcard grins at me. "The man shot me because he thought I had hurt you. He heard from a man he thought he could trust that I sold you into the sex trade instead of taking you to safety. I know he won't hurt Colt, because he'd never hurt his grandson."

## CHAPTER NINE: WILDCARD

I feel a twinge of guilt at the horror on Brigit's face. I probably shouldn't have dropped that bombshell on Brigit the way I did, but I have to get her to stop fighting me about going to the clubhouse.

"He thought you sold me? Why would he think that?"

"Like I said, he was working off some bad information. Someone visited him in prison and told him I was involved in human trafficking."

"But he knew you. He trusted you? Why would he believe such a lie?"

I shrug. "Prison changes people. I can't imagine the toll it takes on those inside. He was alone and probably scared. I know I would be. He knows the truth now, and I know he wants to see you."

"He's okay? He isn't hurt?"

I try hard not to wince. I don't know for certain if he's okay or not. Fuck. I should

have thought this through before I mentioned him. “He’s fine and feels guilty for shooting me. Why don’t you take a shower and get dressed? I can order room service for breakfast. How does that sound?”

Brigit bites her bottom lip, but then nods. “On one condition. If I don’t feel safe at the clubhouse, I’m coming back here.”

“Agreed.”

I use the in-room phone to call in our order. French Toast for Brigit and me. Chocolate chip pancakes for Colt. When I know Brigit is in the shower, I pull out my cell phone. Stepping into the living area, I call Puma.

“I hear congratulations are in order,” Puma says instead of a greeting. “It’s a boy!”

“You fucker, how did you find out?”

“Trouble told me when he called earlier. He was in the hotel when Brigit checked in. Said the little boy with her was the spitting image of you.”

I chuckle. “He’s not wrong. It was like looking at photographs of me at his age.”

“Did she say why she didn’t tell you that you had a kid?” I can hear the concern in Puma’s voice. He’d only recently discovered that he had a son, Mal. Mal’s mother had tried to contact Puma about his impending fatherhood, but Puma’s former agent kept that from happening.

“She did. I’m not happy, but I understand her point of view. When I left her in Boston, I told her not to call me unless it was an emergency. She knew she was in danger from Squiggy and didn’t want to expose our son to danger. I should have reached out to her after Squiggy died. So I’ll take the blame for not making it easy for

her to tell me.”

Puma’s silent for several minutes before he grunts in agreement. “I can understand that. Squiggy was a piece of shit. He ruined fuck too many lives. So, do we get to meet your son? What’s his name?”

“Colt,” I reply with a smile. “I’ve talked Brigit into going back with me to the clubhouse, but she has concerns. Not surprising since she saw Preacher shoot me. Speaking of which, I told her that Preacher was at the clubhouse. He’s still in one piece, right?”

“Yeah. Chill wanted to work him over, but I told her to wait. He’s still in the cell waiting for me to decide what to do with him.”

“Any thoughts?”

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“He’s earned the brand.”

“Would he survive it? He’s kind of old.”

“I could have lost my VP and my best friend. The brand is non-negotiable.”

I swallow at the intensity in Puma’s words. I may have been the one to bring Puma into the clubhouse, but he’s the one who turned the club around. He’s my President, and I’d die for him. So, I won’t question his decision. Somehow, I’ll have to make Brigit understand. “I promised Brigit she’d see him.”

“I can make that happen. He’ll be under house arrest. When are you coming back?”

“We’re having breakfast first. So, probably in an hour.” I end the call and breathe out a sigh of relief.

A sound behind me catches my attention. I turn to see Colt standing behind me. He’s wearing Spiderman pajamas. His intense stare has me worried.

“Good morning, Colt.”

“Good morning. Did you spend the night?”

“I did. Is that a problem?”

“Where did you sleep?”



“Umm...” I say, trying desperately to hide my panic. What the fuck do I tell him? I guess I could lie and tell him I slept on the couch, but do I really want to start our relationship with me lying to him? So instead, I chicken out and avoid the question. “Do you like pancakes?”

He nods enthusiastically. “They’re my favorite. Especially chocolate chip pancakes.”

“Good! Because I ordered you some. How about you get dressed and by the time you finish, they should be here?”

“Okay!” Colt runs back into his room. Now I just have to hope that they deliver breakfast before he returns. I don’t want him to lose trust in my word. Fuck, this parenting thing is hard. I’ve watched Puma take to it like a pro, but I’m definitely out of my depth.

The sound of little feet pounding in my direction makes my heart sink. Luckily, a knock on the door saves me. Opening, I find a server waiting with a cart carrying three covered plates and three carafes. Swinging the door wide, I let her inside and plan out the massive tip I’ll give her.

“Hi, Wildcard, didn’t expect to see you here. Is everything okay?”

I’d been so focused on the delivery that I hadn’t been paying attention to who was behind the cart. “Morgan! Sorry, I have a little boy who is hungry for pancakes.”

“Pancakes!” Colt squeals as he runs into the room, making Morgan and I laugh.

She grins at him, frowns, and then looks at me. “Wildcard...”

“I’ll take it from here,” I say, cutting her off and sending her a meaningful look.

She nods and switches her attention to Colt as she helps him locate the plate with his pancakes. Brigit enters as Colt slides into his chair. “Morning, momma! Look at this! Wildcard got me pancakes. With chocolate chips!”

“I see that. Did you say thank you?” Brigit says, giving me a grin.

“Thank you, Wildcard,” Colt says just before he shoves a huge forkful of pancakes into his mouth.

“Will that be all?” Morgan asks as I pull out a chair for Brigit.

“Yes, thanks Morgan. Morgan, this is Brigit, Colt’s mom.”

The two women smile at each other before Morgan takes the check from me and leaves the suite.

“Can we go swimming after breakfast?” Colt asks.

Although I need to say no, I struggle to do so. I don’t want to disappoint him. Brigit must see me struggle, because she takes control.

“Maybe later. We need to go with Wildcard back to his home and meet with some of his friends.”

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“Okay, but later?”

“You bet,” I chime in. “We could come back here or you could go swimming at a friend’s house with the other kids.”

This catches Colt’s attention. “What other kids?”

“Oh, didn’t I tell you?” I tease him. “I live in a place with four other kids. They’re all about your age. We have a jungle gym outside and a huge entertainment center inside. We’re building a pool, too, but in the meantime, we know someone who loves having all the kids over to swim.”

“Why do you live with kids? Are they yours?”

I chuckle. “No. They aren’t mine. I live in the clubhouse. They live there, too. With their parents.”

“Wildcard is the Vice President of a motorcycle club,” Brigit explains. “Their club owns this hotel.”

“You ride a motorcycle?”

“I do.”

“Could you take me for a ride?”

“That’ll be up to your mom. She’ll want to make sure you’re safe. So we’ll have to

follow her instructions.”

Colt looks at his mom and then back at me. “We’ll need helmets and pads for our knees and elbows. Can’t go too fast. We’ll need to look both ways and be on the lookout for cars.”

“That’s right,” Brigit says. “However, a motorcycle is a little more dangerous than a bicycle. Maybe Wildcard can give you a ride around the clubhouse parking lot at first instead of out in the street?”

“I think we can arrange that,” I agree, giving Brigit a grin. My heart swells at the thought of taking Colt on a ride on mybike. Being able to share that experience with my son sounds amazing. “You’re a pretty smart kid. How did you get to be so smart? School?”

“Mom says I’m smart like my daddy,” Colt replies.

That statement puts me on my ass. It may have been a simple comment, but the emotions ravaging through me are, in no means, simple. They’re more powerful than a freight train hurtling down the tracks at top speed. I have to blink to keep the tears at bay. When I glance at Brigit, I see that she’s watching me.

“Colt? Remember when I told you that your daddy couldn’t be with us in Boston because he had other commitments?”

“And that we couldn’t live with him because of ‘reasons?’” I chuckle when he includes the air quotes. “Grown-up reasons you would explain to me later. Which is totally unfair, by the way, I’m almost six.”

I chuckle at his indignation while Brigit grins.

“You are almost six, which is why I think it is time you met your father.” She gestures toward me. Colt frowns at her, but I watch as he figures out her meaning. His eyes widen as his bottom lip trembles.

“You’re my dad?”

“I am. Is that okay with you?”

Colt slides out of his chair and rushes to my side. Lifting him up, he wraps his arms around my neck and squeezes tight. The feel of my son in my arms makes it impossible for me to fight back the tears.

## CHAPTER TEN: BRIGIT

Seeing Wildcard tear up as he holds his son has me doing the same. I’ve dreamed of the two of them connecting ever since I held Colt for the first time. I wasn’t completely honest with Wildcard about why I didn’t call him when I discovered I was pregnant. The biggest reason was the potential danger of Squiggy discovering my location, but it wasn’t the only reason. The fear of Wildcard rejecting me and my child kept me from making that call. However, watching them together makes me feel like I failed them both.

Pushing away from the table, I fast walk back to my bedroom and duck into the bathroom. After turning on the sink to cover my sobs, I slide to the floor. All my pent-up emotions burst through. I try to stop when I hear the door open and close. Wildcard slides down next to me and pulls me close. He says nothing until I get my sobs under control.

“What’s wrong?”

“Everything?” I reply, making him chuckle. “I kept you from your son and kept my

son from his father. Seeing Mike murdered and seeing you shot. Knowing my father is the one who shot you, and knowing that he's out of jail, but no one told me. I'm so scared. Scared you and Colt will hate me. Scared that the mob will find me or the cops will arrest me. It's just too much."

He rubs my arm as I list my grievances. "Okay, let's start with the easiest. You explained why you didn't reach out to me about Colt. While I would have loved to have been there for his first five years, we can't change the past. I just want to be part of his life from now on. So, I'm hoping you plan on sticking around Vegas. If not, we'll figure it out. Together."

I open my mouth to speak, but he places his finger over my lips. "We're not talking about it right now. Let's work on the other problems first." When I nod in agreement, he removes his finger. "Don't worry about Colt right now. He's fine. He's happy and seems excited about getting to know me. If he wants to know more when he's older, we'll deal with it then. As for the rest, let's get you and Colt packed so we can head over to the clubhouse. Puma needs to hear what happened in Boston. You have us in your corner and we will make sure no one gets to you. Not even the cops."

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Closing my eyes, I lean against Wildcard and let myself relax. For the first time since Wildcard left me in Boston, I don't feel alone. Wildcard doesn't let me wallow. He stands up and takes me with him. "I'll help Colt pack, You grab your stuff."

Wildcard leaves me to gather my belongings. I smile when I hear him and Colt chattering away. Carrying my bag, I walk into the sitting area to find my two men patiently waiting, although Colt's legs are bouncing with youthful energy.

"Did you get everything?" I asked him. Colt nods.

"I did a quick scan," Wildcard says. "Don't worry. If we left anything, the cleaning staff will put it in my office."

"You work here?" Colt asks.

"I manage the hotel."

"Mommy works in a hotel," Colt informs him.

"I heard," Wildcard says, giving me a sympathetic look when I wince at the reminder.

"You worked in HR, right?"

"I was the HR Manager."

His grin widens. "Really? That might come in handy. Our current HR Manager is not suited for the job. Maybe I can talk your mommy into coming to work for me?"

I smirk at Wildcard when Colt offers his enthusiastic support for the idea with a cheer.

“Then we can stay here with you, right daddy?” Colt asks him.

Seeing the expression on Wildcard’s face confirms I made the right decision coming here. If I was honest with myself, my goal has always been to come back here. Back to Wildcard.

As we get closer to the clubhouse, my nerves grow. By the time we’re standing at the front door, I’m shaking. Wildcard notices and takes my hands in his after tilting my chin up.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. For some reason, I’m freaking out.”

“Because you saw me get ... hurt?” Wildcard says with a glance at Colt.

I close my eyes and shake my head. It isn’t the image of Wildcard that flits behind my eyes. It’s the image of the clubhouse the last time I was here. “I’m thinking of when I was seventeen...” Wildcard squeezes my hands in acknowledgment. No reason for me to continue.

“Then, let’s dispel that image,” Wildcard says, opening the door and pulling me inside. My eyes fly open at the sound of laughter. Squiggy and his men were laughing that day, too, but their laughter was different. Darker. Meaner. This laughter is light and full of joy. I don’t just hear men laughing, but I hear women, too. The scene in front of me could be that of a regular bar. Women and men sit together talking and drinking. Many of the women sit on men’s laps, snuggling into them. They’re obviously comfortable and no one appears forced into their position. There aren’t any



women writhing on the floor or kneeling in front of the men. Everyone is wearing all their clothes.

“Brigit,” calls a voice I haven’t heard in over six years. Turning, I see my dad hurrying towards us. He gives Wildcard an apologetic look before enveloping me in his arms. God, I missed this. Missed hugging my dad and hearing his voice. I revel in the feel of being home before backing away and turning to Colt.

“Dad, there is someone I want you to meet. This is your grandson, Colt. Colt, this is your grandfather.”

My dad kneels in front of my son and places his hand on Colt’s shoulder.

“Are you really my grandpa?” Colt whispers.

“I am. Why don’t you call me Gramps?”

“My friend Jeff has a grandpa. He takes Jeff fishing. Will you take me fishing?”

“I’ve never been fishing. But I’d be willing to learn. Maybe we can learn together?”

“Okay!” Colt says before giving his newfound grandfather a hug. From my position, I can see my father’s face. He has his eyes squeezed shut, but that doesn’t stop the tears from tracing down his grizzled cheeks.

When Colt releases him, my dad rises and stares holes through Wildcard. “She was barely 18,” he growls. “I trusted you and ...”

“Enough!” The shout makes us all jump. I see Colt’s eyes widen in fear as he watches the mountain walk toward us. “Don’t start that sh... feud up again.” My dad nods in apology.

“I’m Puma, President of the club. You’re Brigit and this young man has to be Colt?”  
Puma flattens out his massive paw for Colt to slap. Puma chuckles when Colt slaps it before retreating to Wildcard’s side.

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“Daddy, is he a giant?” Colt loudly whispers to Wildcard, which has Puma belting out a laugh that I swear shakes the walls.

“He looks like one, doesn’t he?” Wildcard says. “He used to be a professional basketball player.”

Colt’s eyes widen. “Really? I love basketball.”

“Me too,” Puma says. “Maybe we can talk your dad into playing with us sometime.”

Colt sends a pleading look up to his father, who nods.

“You owe me five dollars,” says a little girl who stands next to Puma.

He reaches down and scoops her up so they’re eye-to-eye. “Why do I owe you five dollars?”

“You almost said a bad word,” the adorable little girl replies. She has dark brown hair and eyes the color of rich milk chocolate.

“But I didn’t. Almost doesn’t count. That was the deal.”

She sighs. “Might as well pay me now. You know you’ll have to later.”

He chuckles and tickles her. “Who taught you to shake me down?”

She shrugs and looks down at Colt. She shifts in Puma’s arms until he lowers her to

the ground. Elina sticks her hand out to Colt. “I’m Elina. Who are you?”

“I’m Colt.”

Elina studies Colt and then Wildcard. “Mission accomplished,” she says to Wildcard before shifting her attention back to Colt. “Want to go outside and play with us?”

“I’ll go with you,” my dad offers. The objection is on my lips. I don’t want to be a helicopter parent, but I don’t know anyone here or how safe their equipment is.

“They’re safe outside. We have several adults watching them, but I’ll give you a tour,” says a beautiful woman of Mexican descent. Her hair is the same shade as Elina’s, but her eyes are a darker brown. “I’m Elina’s mom and this guy’s woman.” She hip bumps Puma in his thigh. Puma places his arm around the woman’s shoulder and draws her close before leaning to kiss her.

“You must be Alisa,” I blurt out.

Alisa smiles at me. “I am.”

“Sorry, it’s just that I checked into the hotel as a guest of Alisa’s. Wildcard mentioned how it came to be.”

“This club saved my life, and the life of my daughter. They’ll help you, too.”

“We should talk,” Puma says. “Give Brigit the tour and then bring her to my office. I’ll grab Spark.”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: WILDCARD

I take Brigit’s hand as we follow Preacher and Colt outside. Colt’s chattering to his

grandfather about all the things he wants to do with him. Things that his friend back in Boston does with his grandfather. His list has me considering all the things I want to do with my son. My son. I never imagined being a father and yet, here I am. I'd spent the last several months watching Puma and Chill turn into parents. Now, it's my turn. I study Colt, my heart filling with pride and love as I think of all the things we get to do together. As father and son. Brigit squeezes my hand to draw my attention.

"It's amazing, isn't it?" She asks, nodding at Colt. "How quickly a child embeds himself into your heart?"

I nod as I fight to regain control of my emotions. "Thank you for bringing him to me. For trusting me to protect you both."

"You will always be the person I trust most with my life and, more importantly, with Colt's life. I hope you know that? And that you can't get rid of us now that we're here?"

With a whoop, I lift her up and twirl her around. She's laughing when I put her back on her feet so I can capture a kiss. The sound of two distinct voices spluttering 'ew' interrupts our kiss. We turn to look at the culprits. Preacher and my son.

"Ew?" I ask with a smirk at Preacher. He just shrugs.

"She's still my little girl."

"And my mom," Colt chimes in.

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“Would you feel better knowing that my kisses have convinced your mom and daughter to stay here in Vegas?”

“Really?” They both ask. When Brigit nods, Colt runs to her and slams into her legs. “I get a daddy and a grandpa? Thank you, mommy!”

“You’re welcome,” Brigit chuckles. “Now let’s go see what the other kids are doing.”

I watch Brigit’s eyes widen when she gets a look at the playground Puma designed and installed for the next generation. Not only does it have the standard fair, but Puma, being Puma, couldn’t resist adding embellishments. Things rarely found in a kid’s playground. Puma is competitive, so of course, he made sure the playground facilitated competitions between the kids.

The kids have two slides, so they can race each other. Rings hang down so that when the kids swing, they can grasp the rings and declare themselves winners. The kids can race up rock walls or across the monkey bars. But the most impressive feature of the gym is the set of turrets on each end. The kids can wage war using Nerf guns. There’s even a flag for each team so they can play capture the flag. Puma didn’t skimp on fun, but he also took every precaution to ensure their safety while they play.

“Impressive,” Brigit whispers. “I’ve never seen a playground like this before.”

“Puma loves spoiling the kids. Wait until you see the entertainment room.”

With pride, I watch Elina and the others run toward us and grab Colt’s arm to pull him into their chaos. Preacher takes a seat at the covered picnic table where Alisa,

Viper, and Hunter are already sitting. He winces when Viper sends him an angry look. She befriended Preacher and invited him to the clubhouse. I know she feels guilty that he used her friendship to attack me. Brigit and I stand nearby and watch our son race Slade down the slides while Elina and Angel hop on the swings. We're only missing Mal. I wonder how adding a fifth member to their group will change the dynamics. But knowing Elina, she'll have them all organized soon enough.

"Puma's expecting us," I remind Brigit, taking her hand and leading her back inside. I take a detour to show her the entertainment room and laugh as she takes in a room with so many activities for kids that it makes Chuck E. Cheese look bland.

"I can tell Puma is all about the kids, but doesn't having so many underfoot cause problems for the single club members?" Brigit asks. "I mean, don't motorcycle clubs' pride themselves on wild parties with half-naked women on tap? At least that's how the books I've read portrayed them."

I chuckle and give her a hip check. "You've read books on MCs?" She flushes and sends me a cheeky grin.

"Seemed like the natural choice, since I fell for a biker."

"We used to be like that. Not any longer. At least not here. Of course, it's easier for the guys since we're in Vegas. They're just a quick ride away from, well, a quick ride, if that's what they're looking for."

"So, what about other clubs?"

"Not all are as child-friendly as this one. But since Dante took over as the President of the Original Chapter, we've all slowly transitioned into places where none of us would be afraid to take our kids. Believe me, that wasn't the case when Dante's father was the President. Well, you know how Squiggy ran this club. The rest were

just as bad, or worse. Things are changing. The Original Chapter in San Diego has several Old Ladies, so the number of Kutte Bunnies has plummeted. The New Orleans Chapter, which is our newest chapter, has Kutte Bunnies, but they're more like maid service. They clean and cook while fully dressed. Chicago and some of the older clubs are probably more like the books you've read."

When we reach Puma's office, I knock before opening the door. Inside, we find Puma, Chill, and Spark sitting around the conference room table. It's a smaller version of the table we have in Church. But both proudly display our logo etched in the center. I pull a chair out for Brigit and take the seat next to her.

"I'm Chill," our SOA introduces herself to Brigit. Brigit shakes her hand and offers her a smile.

"I was stunned when Wildcard told me his SOA was a woman. Squiggy would never have let a woman become a member, much less hold a title."

"Squiggy's lucky he never met me. Is he the reason you kept Wildcard from his son?"

Brigit sucks in a breath, but puts her hand on my leg when I shift toward Chill. "Yes. He's the reason. I knew if he discovered where I was that he'd come for me. I couldn't risk him finding us."

"So, why didn't you reach out after Squiggy died?" Chill persists.

"Because she didn't know he was dead. I didn't tell her," I explain. "Anything else?"

"No. Just to tell you that you're a dumb fuck for not calling her and bringing her home sooner."

Brigit giggles when I scowl at Chill. "Yeah, I know. Don't need the reminder."



Chill shrugs as Puma takes charge of the meeting. “I want to patch Havoc and Wired into this meeting. Wired has been helping Spark. Havoc has a right to know what his techie is up to. But I also think Havoc might have contacts we can use to help clear Brigit.”

“Clear her of what?” Chill asks.

“We’ll get you caught up.” Puma assures her. “But I don’t want to make Brigit have to repeat her story multiple times.” Chill dips her head in agreement.

Puma dials the number and Havoc answers. “Havoc and Wired, here.”

“I have Chill, Wildcard, Spark, and Brigit in my office.”

“Brigit, I understand you were living in our beautiful city. Wish we had met,” Havoc starts. I stiffen, but keep my mouth shut. I know Havoc is still pissed with me, but I don’t think he’ll take it out on her. At least he better not. I glance at Puma, who is watching me.

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“I’m sorry that we didn’t meet, but I couldn’t risk Squiggy finding out where I was. Could you have guaranteed that no one coming through your clubhouse would have told him?”

The silence on the other end is tangible. But Havoc sighs. “No, I couldn’t have guaranteed it. Still pissed off, but I get it. Squiggy was a piece of shit, but he was a connected piece of shit. He might have had spies at other clubs searching for you. You made the right call, Wildcard.”

I nod, even though he can’t see me.

“So, with that out of the way, Brigit, can you tell us what happened yesterday?”

“I can’t believe it was just yesterday,” Brigit starts before describing how she witnessed her boss’s murder and the man who killed him.

“You’re certain it was Misha Orloff?” Havoc asks.

“Positive. I’ve met him several times at the hotel. He often ate at the restaurant and spent the night. I spoke to him the few times that Mike had me join the poker tournaments he hosted.”

“Why did he want you there?” I ask.

“I’m good. Mike liked it when I won, as long as I didn’t win too much. However, I only attended a few times. The games started out friendly, but eventually the other players made me feel uncomfortable. Especially Misha. He asked me out and when I

said no, he got more aggressive.”

So, Misha has signed his death warrant. Pushing himself on my woman has earned him a painful demise.

## CHAPTER TWELVE: BRIGIT

Wildcard stiffens next to me at the mention of how Misha creeped me out. I lay my hand on his leg to calm him. He slides his fingers between mine and squeezes.

“Misha knows you saw him?” Chill asks.

I nod. “Oh, yeah. I made a noise when he shot Mike. He looked right at me before I took off running. His two thugs chased me outside and shot at me as I drove away.”

“Can you remember anything that they discussed? Like why Misha killed Mike?” Havoc asks. “Might help us if we knew the motive.”

“Yes, Misha was angry at Mike because of an undercover cop. Something about Mike not vetting the customers. Mike blamed George.”

“George who?” Wired asks.

“George Calloway. He’s the night manager.”

“Was he in the room, too?”

I shake my head. “I don’t think so. At least I didn’t see him. He usually leaves before I arrive.”

“What else did they say?”

“Misha said he disposed of the cop. Wait. Maybe Mike was the one who said that. I can’t remember. I just know it sounded like the cop was dead.”

“Did you see anyone besides Misha and his men?”

“No. Why?”

“Because the cops have a witness who says they saw you leaving Mike’s office right before they found the body.”

“I didn’t go into the office. I only stood outside. Who said they saw me?”

“My contact doesn’t have that information. According to him, you’re the only suspect.”

I feel my heart drop, but then I remember something. “What about the security cameras? We have cameras inside the hotel and outside. Not inside the offices, but they cover the hallway.”

“Did you have access to the security cameras?” Spark asks.

Nodding quickly, I give them the name of the network and my login information.

“This should give you access to everything that’s on the server.”

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“Unless they suspended your account,” Chill comments.

I shake my head. “I’m the one that managed employee computer access. Being the head of HR, Mike thought it made sense for me to do it. I doubt anyone there knows how to use the system. Mike was my backup.”

“Excellent,” Spark says. “I’ll work on getting into the server. Once I have something, I’ll let you know.”

“I’m working on gathering traffic cam footage and footage from security cameras in the area,” Wired says. “If we can get footage of Misha’s men chasing you, that might help. Whatever Spark and I find, we can send to the cops anonymously.”

“Will the cops go after Misha?” Puma asks. “I expect someone like him to own a few cops.”

“He does. But I know a few who aren’t on his payroll. I’ll find out which detective caught the case. My contact will get back to me as soon as he knows more.”

“What about the FBI?” Chill says. “We could find an agent who would love a crack at Misha and the Bratva.”

“Might be an option. I’ll see if I can find out if the FBI is looking at Misha,” Havoc offers.

“Okay, so we’ll gather what we can and figure out our next steps,” Puma says, ending the call.

“We have another problem,” Puma says, but he’s addressing Chill. “Rafe.”

“Who’s Rafe?” I ask.

“He’s Viper’s man,” Chill says. “He’s also a cop.”

“He’s crossed into the gray for us, but I don’t think he’ll ignore the fact we’re hiding a fugitive. Even if we can convince him of her innocence.”

“He won’t be a problem. According to Viper, he’s too busy to come to the clubhouse any time soon. Not only is he still working the case against those assholes who targeted college students, but he’s dealing with the fallout of his boss’s arrest. Viper said he’s also hearing rumblings that more women are missing than just the ones found at the dump site.”

I don’t know what they’re talking about, but by the looks the four of them share, I’m not sure I want to know. Besides, a dump site? I’ve had enough experience with death to last me a lifetime. Now, I just want to think of something happy. Like visiting my dad and seeing Colt play with his new friends.

“Is that all you need from me?” I ask. Wildcard looks at me with concern, so I offer him a smile. “I just need a break from murder.”

Wildcard draws me in for a hug and kisses the top of my head. “Why don’t you go find Colt and your dad?”

“That’s the plan,” I say, standing up.

“I doubt I need to tell you this, but I’m doing it, anyway. Don’t leave the clubhouse. You can go out to the backyard, but not out the front. Okay?” Puma asks.

I nod and leave the room. Spark walks out with me. “I’ll help you find them. This place is a maze until you get used to it.”

He leads me back outside, where I find Colt and a pretty little blonde girl standing at the top of a tower. The two are taking turns ducking and shooting their Nerf guns at the other tower, where Elina and another little boy are doing the same. The four are laughing so hard that I doubt any of them are hitting their targets. My heart bursts to see Colt having so much fun. He had a quiet life back in Boston with very few friends.

I sit next to my dad as a prospect comes outside and hands water bottles to the adults. He also has juice boxes, which has the kids rushing out of their fortress to grab them. The kids thank him. Elina introduces the prospect to Colt as Max. The little blonde girl wraps her arms around Max’s leg and tells Colt that he’s her brother.

“They’re going to sleep well tonight,” I say to my dad, who chuckles.

“We were just talking about that. This is a daily occurrence. The kids go full tilt all day and then crash.”

“I’ve met Elina, but I don’t know the others.”

“The other boy is Slade. He belongs to Chill and Hunter. Hunter is a prospect and well Chill...”

“Is the club SOA. I’ve met her. That’s her son?”

“Stepson. Hunter’s wife died a few months back. The other little girl is Angel. Her mom is Angela.” Dad nods at the pretty blonde woman sitting with Elina’s mom, Alisa. She was married to Viper and Max’s father.”

“Is he here?”

“No. Someone murdered him. He wasn’t a nice guy, from what Viper has said.”



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We sit in silence for several minutes before I broach the subject of dad's attack on Wildcard.

"It was a misunderstanding. Mine. Something you need to know about being in prison is that everything you know no longer matters. It doesn't help when you know you're innocent. I didn't commit the crime they accused me of. Everyone says they're innocent, but I was. The gun they found on me wasn't mine. I hadn't been carrying. When the cops pulled us over, Squiggy shoved the gun at me. He said that he'd go to prison if they found it on him, but that I'd be okay since it would be my first offense. He promised that they'd never send me to prison. That he'd take care of it."

"He didn't."

"No, he didn't. Didn't take me long to realize that he set me up and that he wanted me to go to prison. The club lawyer told me to plead guilty, that the judge would commute my sentence since I was a single dad, and it was my first brush with the law. I argued with the lawyer and Squiggy told me to shut up and plead guilty or I'd never make it out of prison. That's when I contacted Wildcard and begged him to take you away from here."

"Okay. But then..."

"I'm getting there," Dad grumbles, making me laugh. As a little girl, I'd always push him to get to the good part in his stories. He side-eyes me, but grins. "I plead guilty, as I was told, and they sent me to prison. The lawyer told me the judge made an example of me. That he was sorry he couldn't get my sentence reduced. Bunch of lies. Squiggy stopped by and asked about you. I told him you left weeks ago. Told

him we had a row, and you took off. I don't think he believed me, but it sure pissed him off. Seeing him rant and rave about you being gone told me I made the right decision, asking Wildcard to get you away when he did."

"So, why...?"

"Girl," Dad growls out a warning. So I shut my mouth and wait impatiently for him to continue. "I was grateful to Wildcard and trusted him to take care of you at first. When I didn't hear from Wildcard, I started having doubts. That's what prison does to a man. It makes him get lost in his head. They wouldn't let me talk to anyone outside the prison. I wrote letters, but got nothing back. Met with a prisoner liaison and made inquiries about getting an appeal and wanting a new lawyer. That's when I got a visit from Dale Westbrook. He was the President of the Original Chapter in San Diego. Dale told me I needed to keep my mouth shut and do my time. He told me I trusted the wrong guy and that Wildcard sold you to a sick motherfucker. Promised me you'd stay alive as long as did what I was told."

"You believed him?"

"What else was I supposed to believe?"

"But Wildcard said he tried to visit you in prison. You refused to see him," Viper chimes in. I didn't realize she'd moved closer to us and had been listening to our conversation.

"He didn't."

"Could someone have refused his visit on your behalf?" I ask. "Squiggy or Dale, might have had someone on the inside watching you? How else could they have known you were asking for an appeal?"

Dad nods slowly as he considers my questions. “I wouldn’t put it past the bastard. I never considered it. Shit, I’m an idiot.”

“You couldn’t have known,” I assure him.

“But going off half-cocked was stupid. I’m lucky Puma didn’t kill me.”

“You aren’t off the hook yet,” Viper says. “He probably won’t kill you...”

“But he’ll make it hurt. Yeah, I deserve it.”

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: WILDCARD

“We need to decide on Preacher’s punishment,” Puma says after the door closes behind Brigit.

“He should die,” Chill says. “He isn’t a member of the club. No one gets away with trying to kill club members.”

“I’m not convinced he was trying to kill me,” I disagree. “He could have if he wanted to. He was too close to miss if he aimed center mass. Besides, I can’t agree with murdering the man who might one day be my father-in-law. Brigit will never forgive me if the club kills her dad. They just found each other!”

We both turn to Puma. “If he had killed Wildcard, I would have killed Preacher with my bare hands.” Puma says calmly, but both Chill and I can sense the anger simmering under the surface. “He almost cost me my VP and my best friend. We can’t ignore the attack, but being the dad of a little girl, I can sympathize. If I believed someone harmed Elina, I’d burn the world down. I wouldn’t care who they were. I want to hear Preacher’s reasoning before we pass judgement. This is a decision the club needs to make. However, before we take it to Church. I want to

discuss options.”

We spend several minutes discussing several options until we come up with two that we’ll take to Church for a vote. Chill and Puma head into Church, while I gather the members. Most are in the common room, but I have to search for Viper. I find her outside with Brigit, Alisa, and Preacher. He looks concerned, so I figure he knows why Puma is calling Church. I can’t give him any sign of encouragement, because I don’t know how the club will vote.

“We’re discussing Preacher, right?” Viper asks once we’re inside.

“Yeah.”

She’s silent as we walk through the common room and enter the hallway that will take us to our Chapel. “I don’t blame you for bringing him here. You know that, right?”

Viper nods, but bites her lip. “I do. Although, I still feel responsible. I should have done my research on the guy before inviting him here. He seemed harmless.”

“Did he mention his connection to the club?”

“No, he told me he rode with a defunct club out of Arizona. I don’t think he trusted the Demon Dawgs. After hearing his story, I can’t blame him.”

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I want to ask her about her statement, but we've reached our destination. Viper takes her seat next to Dice while I sit next to Puma.

"As you know, a visitor to the clubhouse shot our VP," Puma starts. The members grumble and share comments that follow Chill's original recommendation. It's clear to me they're all wanting to see us end Preacher. I shift in my seat as I fight to keep from begging them to give him another chance. I don't do it, because that would put my needs before the club's. This has to go through the process until everyone knows the facts and we agree on a final action. Not because of a favor to me, but as a club decision. Puma gives them all the facts, including Preacher's belief that I sold his daughter, Brigit.

"I have some new information about that," Viper speaks up once Puma finishes. "First, I want to apologize for not vetting Preacher better before I invited him to the clubhouse. I assumed he was a retired biker without ties to our club. I won't make the mistake again, but I accept whatever punishment you deem correct." She says the last to Puma and Chill.

"Docking your pay for a month and you'll have to manage HR at the hotel until we find a replacement," Chill says with an evil grin as Viper moans. We really need to hire a new HR manager. Having club members do it is not working out.

"What were you saying about learning more from Preacher?" Puma asks.

"I was outside with him and Brigit and he was explaining to her why he thought Wildcard betrayed him. First, I think Squiggy might have framed him for the crime that sent Preacher to jail." She describes how Squiggy talked Preacher into taking the

fall and then threatening him to serve his time.

“I can look into it.” Spark offers.

“Do some digging, see what you can find. It isn’t a priority,” Puma adds, before turning back to Viper. “Go on.”

“When I mentioned Preacher’s name yesterday, you said you did him a favor and then he refused to see you when he was in prison. Right?” I nod. “He told Brigit that the reason he thought you betrayed him was because he never heard from you after he asked you to get her out of town and away from Squiggy.”

I lean forward. “I tried to see him. His lawyer told me he didn’t want to talk to me. That he didn’t want any visitors.”

“The same lawyer who convinced Preacher to plead guilty?” Spock, our secretary, asks.

I shrug, because I don’t know. “Maybe?”

“Preacher said that the only visitor he had besides Squiggy was Dale. Preacher was talking with a prisoner liaison to work out an appeal. Dale told him to keep his mouth shut and serve his sentence. That Wildcard sold Brigit to a sick bastard who would be happy to kill her if Preacher didn’t do as he was told.”

Fuck. No wonder he shot me.

“Most likely,” Puma says, and I realize I spoke my thoughts out loud. “Doesn’t absolve Preacher of his guilt. We still need to decide on a punishment. We’ve come up with some options. I’m bringing them to the table.”

Puma lays out the two options. As he discusses them, I feel a sense of dread rise as I consider Brigit's response to what we decide here. I don't see any outcome that doesn't include her walking away from me and the club. The options may not be fatal for Preacher, but they'll kill my future with Brigit. I can't let that happen.

"Before we vote, I have something I'd like to say," I speak up.

Puma nods for me to continue. "You're the one he shot. Go ahead."

"I know this is a decision that we need to make as a club, but I want to present another option. Not sure how many of you know that I've just discovered I'm a father. Brigit, Preacher's daughter, had my son and kept it from me. But she did it for a good reason," I add quickly as the grumbles start. "Only a few of you knew Squiggy when he was President before Puma. The man was as big an asshole as Dale was. Preacher asked me to take Brigit out of Vegas to protect her from Squiggy. Squiggy wanted her. Bad. If what Viper said is true, and Preacher believed I betrayed him, well, I can't fault him for shooting me. Not saying that I don't think he needs to pay for it, but I don't want to lose Brigit and my son. I don't want to pay that price. So, I'm asking that we let Preacher decide his fate. Give him the two options we've agreed upon and let him select one."

Puma lets the members talk through my request before he calls us back to order.

"Let's take a vote. Our first vote is to decide if we let Preacher choose."

I feel a sense of relief as the vote unanimously supports letting Preacher decide his fate. I don't know if this will keep Brigit from rejecting me and the club, but I've gotta hope that it does.

"Chill, can you bring Preacher in here?"

"I'd like to get him. If that's okay?" I ask.

When Puma gives me the go ahead, I go in search of the man. I find him sitting in the common room drinking a beer.

“Where’s Brigit?” I ask him.

“Alisa is showing her and Colt their room.”

“Need you in Church.”

He nods and takes a final swig of liquid courage before following me.

“Been a long time,” I hear him whisper as we enter the room. He shows respect by not sitting down and waiting for Puma to address him.

“We’ve had a vote about the retribution we’ll hand out for your attack on Wildcard. We came up with two options. Wildcard suggested we give you the opportunity to make the choice between the two.”



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Preacher glances at me in surprise.

“I don’t want to lose Brigit, now that I’ve found her again.”

“You won’t. I’ll make sure of it.”

“Good,” says Puma. “Now for the choices. The first choice is banishment. Leave the clubhouse and never return. But not just banishment from this club, but from all Demon Dawg clubs. You can’t live within the territory of any club. Which means you can go live in your cabin, but you aren’t welcome in Vegas. I’m not saying we’ll kill you if cross into our territory again, but we’ll remind you that you aren’t welcome. You’ll be a pariah.” Puma lets Preacher consider this option and the ramifications.

“Understood. And what’s the second option?” Preacher asks.

“You can rejoin the club as a fully patched member, but you’ll get the brand.”

Preacher sucks in his breath and his hand shakes as he strokes his beard.

“Before I decide, I have one question. A request, really.”

Puma raises his eyebrows, but nods for Preacher to continue.

“If I stay and take the brand, could I have a different road name? I want that part of my life to die before I start a new life here. Preacher was a fool. I’m no longer that fool.”

“That won’t be a problem. So you’re taking the brand?”

Preacher gives a single nod. “Yes, sir, I am.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN: BRIGIT

When Viper leaves for their club meeting, what they call Church, I sit with my dad. Both of us lost in our thoughts. I know enough about club life to be grateful that they didn’t kill my father immediately after he shot Wildcard. However, I know they can’t let him get away with what he’s done without retribution. That’s how MCs work. The thought of them hurting my father makes me physically ill. Makes me wonder if I can live in this world. Possible scenarios flit through my mind, each one darker than the previous. Will they put him in the hospital? Wildcard mentioned they have a medic onsite. So, at least he’ll get immediate care. I want to find Wildcard and beg, no demand, to not let harm come to my father. But I know dad would be furious with me if I interfered.

My father leaves and goes back inside while I stay outside and lose myself in the imagination of children.

Alisa breaks through my musings to ask if I wanted them to take Colt swimming over at Desdemona’s.

“Did you say Desdemona?” I ask. That’s not a name one hears very often. In fact, the only Desdemona I’ve heard of is an artist. Desdemona Konstantin.

“Yes, she’s a good friend, and she’s in a relationship with my father. You might have heard of her. She’s a famous artist.”

“I love her work. I have an original Konstantin in my home. It’s a small piece, but I love it. I hated leaving it behind. Maybe one day I can go back to Boston and get it.

Along with my other things.” Thinking about Boston, I wish I had asked the President of the Boston club, Havoc, if he could check on Abby. The thought of something happening to her because of me makes me ill. I make a note to ask Wildcard to have someone check on Abby and my home as soon as possible. In the meantime, Colt and I follow Alisa through the maze of corridors until she stops outside a door.

“This is a guest room that you can Colt can use. Looks like a prospect already brought in your things. He also brought a swimsuit for Colt.” She points at the boys’ swim trunks. They still have the sales tag. “We have a supply closet full of clothes for women and children,” she explains.

Colt grabs the shorts and rushes into the bathroom. “I won’t be long!” He shouts as he slams the door shut.

Alisa and I chuckle at his enthusiasm.

“I’d invite you to come with us...”

“But I can’t leave the clubhouse. I know. That’s okay. You’re certain that Colt won’t be a problem? There are enough people to watch them?”

“Absolutely. All the Old Ladies are going and some prospects. Desdemona and my father will be there. So will Avery’s grandmother. She’s sharp and keeps her eyes on the kids at all times. Each one will have at least one set of eyes on them, more often, two. Will Colt be okay without you there?”

“He’ll be fine. He’s used to doing things with other kids and their parents.”

Colt comes out of the bathroom, carrying his clothes. “I put on sunscreen and I’m ready to go.”

I stuff his clothes into a bag and hand them to Alisa. Elina and the rest of the kids are waiting for us in the common room. I give Colt the usual spiel about behaving himself and listening to the adults. When I'm done, he gives me his usual response, but pauses before he follows them out. "Tell Dad I'm coming back, okay? I don't want him to think I've left."

His concern gives me a flash of guilt, but I smile and assure him I'll pass along the message. I watch them drive out of the gate before going back inside. I see Wildcard moving toward me with a determined look on his face. "You were outside?"

"Oh, damn, I forgot. I just wanted to see Colt off. He's going swimming with the other kids. He made me swear to tell you he was coming back."

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:25 pm*

Wildcard smiles. “He’s going to have me wrapped around his finger, isn’t he?”

I chuckle. “At first, maybe. But you’ll catch on to being a parent. I’m sorry about going outside. It won’t happen again.”

“Actually, I was looking for you. Wanted to see if you were up for a ride.”

“I thought I wasn’t supposed to leave?”

“You’d be wearing a helmet. No one would see you.”

“Can you ride? With your arm?”

He rolls it and I see him trying to hide his discomfort.

“I’m fine.”

Running my hands up his chest, I look up at him and shake my head. “I’m not risking you. How about we go to your room and we’ll go on a different ride?”

“Oh, yeah?”

“We have a couple of hours before Colt comes back.”

He grabs my hand and pulls me down the hallway and into what I’m assuming is his room. He pulls me through with such force I land on the bed. Slamming the door shut and locking it, he turns to me and stalks forward. I scramble back on the bed as he

removes his kutte and tosses it on the dresser. Saliva pools in my mouth when he whips off his shirt. Even with the ugly bandage, he's a magnificent specimen. A spattering of dark brown hair trails through his abs and disappears into his jeans. I fixate on that spot as his fingers move to unclasp his jeans.

"My eyes are up here," he teases me.

"I know, but I'm more interested in what you have hiding behind that zipper."

"You used to be a shy little girl. What happened?"

I chuckle. "If you recall, I threw myself at you multiple times. You rejected me every time."

He toes off his boots before shoving down his pants, taking his boxers with them. His magnificent cock slaps against his abs, the pre-cum leaving a trail. "I didn't want to take advantage of you. You were young and a virgin. I was trying to be a gentleman."

"You were a gentleman, but you were also driving me crazy. I wanted you so bad, but you kept turning me down."

"I'll never turn you down again, now strip."

Grinning, I rip off my top as he yanks down my jeans. He flips me around like I weigh nothing as he works to get me naked. My laughter turns to a groan when he buries his face between my legs. Holy shit, his tongue is magic. My core is gushing even before he slides his finger inside me and curls it. Stars explode behind my eyes as my hips rocket off the mattress. I swear he had me climaxing in seconds. How is that even possible?

I hear him tearing open a condom and glance down to watch as he positions himself

at my center. His thick shaft slides into my core and fills me up. Seeing us joined fills me emotionally, too. This is the only man who has ever been inside me, and he's the only man I ever want. Finding him again makes everything I've endured worth it. Glancing up, I see him watching me. I see the love in his eyes as he snaps his hips, driving his dick into me as if his life depends upon our joining.

"I'm close," he growls.

"I'm there." Waves of pleasure wash through me as I feel him explode in the condom. He jerks and spasms through his release before he collapses on top of me. I snuggle into him as I float back down.

He leans up to stare into my eyes as he brushes a strand of hair from face. "You know I love you, right? That I've loved you for all these years?"

"From the night I seduced you and you turned me away, or the night I finally succeeded?" I ask with a smile.

He chuckles. "Neither. It was the minute you climbed behind me on my bike. The day we left Vegas. I wasn't expecting it, but the feel of your arms around me and the knowledge that you were mine to protect did something to me. I never thought I'd want a woman on my bike. Saw my life as one of freedom without responsibility. Except to my club. But you changed me." His expression is so serious that I feel compelled to apologize.

"I'm sorry?"

He tickles me until I'm screeching. "You're such a brat. I don't want an apology. I'm glad that Preacher trusted me to protect you."

"I'm glad, too. I'll give him a big hug and kiss to show my gratitude."

Wildcard grimaces.



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“What’s wrong? Your shoulder? Maybe you should roll onto your back?” I try pushing him off me, but he just snuggles me in closer.

“My shoulder is fine. The pain is manageable. There is something I need to tell you. I’m not sure how you’re going to take it. But I need you to know that I love you. That I did what I could.”

### CHAPTER FIFTEEN: WILDCARD

I watch Brigit brace. She’s still looking at me with love and trust in her eyes. I turn away before I see doubt and anger cloud her feelings.

“We had a club meeting. I can’t give you the specifics, but we decided about your father’s punishment. Puma and Chill executed it. He’s alive, but he’ll be hurting for a few days.”

“They beat him up?” Brigit asks in a choked whisper. “He’s an old man... He can’t take a beating. My god...” she starts to rise, but I place a hand on her arm to still her.

“They didn’t beat him. That was never on the table. You’re right, he’s an old man. Puma would never have agreed to that. He wouldn’t risk killing him. You’ve seen Puma. A single hit with his massive paws could kill a man. It was never our plan to kill Preacher. I promise.”

“So, what did they do to him?”

“The club has a long-standing tradition of how we punish club members who have

broken trust with the club. It's a way of delivering a reminder that leaves a lasting impression. A deterrent to keep the member from screwing up again."

"Okay, I can see that. Will you just tell me and stop trying to soften the news? My imagination is coming up with scenarios that include everything from cutting off a finger to removing an eye."

"Okay, nothing that bad. Puma branded him."

"Branded him?" Brigit shrieks, jumping to her feet. "Like he's cattle? That's barbaric!" Grabbing her jeans, she shoves her legs inside and glares at me. "I can't believe this. He's an old man! He could have had a heart attack. Take me to him right now!"

I stand and get dressed, shook, because I hadn't considered the possibility of a heart attack. I've never been on the receiving end of the brand, but I've seen Chill use heated metal during her torture sessions. The screams ripped from her victims chills the blood. Unlike Chill, Puma didn't let the brand linger on Preacher's skin. The application was quick.

I lead her down the hall to the infirmary. She walks stiffly next to me. Her arms wrapped tightly around her middle. When I hear her snuffle, I want to stop and take her into my arms to comfort her. But I know she won't let me. Maybe telling her wasn't the best idea. I may be male of the species and less inclined to talk, but even I know the fallout would be astronomical if I didn't tell her, and she learned of it on her own. Because, really, this is a secret that wouldn't remain a secret.

When we reach the infirmary, she lets out a sob and rushes inside. Her dad's laying in a hospital bed with a bandage on his chest. He's pale, but I don't think he's in much pain. An IV hangs from a hook, feeding into him. Knowing Splint, he added some powerful pain relief to the mix. Likely on Puma's orders. Extending the suffering

isn't necessary.

"What did they do to you?" Brigit cries, placing her hand on her father, careful to avoid the bandage. "We need to get you to a hospital."

"No," Splint, Preacher, and I say in unison.

Brigit glares at me. "He needs a doctor."

"I'm a medic. I've dealt with worse wounds. He's fine. He just needs to keep the wound clean and air it out for a few hours each day. I've placed an antibacterial gel on it with a numbing agent. He's also getting small doses of morphine to help him cope with the pain."

"You think I trust you? You did this to him!"

"Brigit, enough," Preacher grunts. "Go. Let me talk to her." He dismisses Splint and me. Splint nods and ducks into his office. I linger long enough to get a glare from Brigit. Preacher waves me off. "I'll take care of it."

I don't want to leave, but I know staying won't make the situation better. It will probably only make it worse. I make my way to Puma's office and knock on his door. Once he calls for me to come in, I open it and step inside to find him alone behind his desk. Papers cover his desk and I realize he's looking at floor plans.

"For your house?"

"Yeah, the final set. I'm looking through them before I show them to Alisa. She and the kids should be back from Desdemona's soon." He rolls them up and slides a rubber band around the roll.

“You can keep looking. I can wait.”

“I’m done. They look good. Can’t wait to see them start on the construction. Have you considered building a home, now that Colt and Brigit are in your life?”

“Maybe. That depends on whether she forgives me after we branded her dad.”

“You didn’t do it, I did it.”

“You think that matters? She’s pissed off. She’s with Preacher now. He said he’ll talk her down. So we’ll see if he can do it.”

“He will. He took the brand like a champ. Granted, I took it easy on him. Didn’t want him to stroke out on me. It’s enough. The others will accept him back into the club with no hard feelings. Right?”

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I nod. “I don’t hold a grudge against him. Probably would have made the same mistake if I was in his shoes. I mean, I’d hope I would be smart enough to discover the truth before I started shooting, but prison fucks with you.”

“It does.”

“Have you ordered his kutte?”

“Yep, placed the order right after Splint took him to the infirmary. We talked for a few minutes while the brand heated. Talked about his future with the club. We discussed a few jobs he could do. Nothing too taxing. But he mentioned cooking for us. Turns out he learned how to cook inside. Served with a former chef who took a cleaver to his sous chef when he screwed up an order. Viper said she ate beef stew at his cabin. She thinks he’ll do a good job. So I’m putting him in charge of the kitchen. Need to come up with a new road name. If he can cook, we can call him Chef or Cook.”

I chuckle. “That works. I’m glad he’s staying. He was a great brother. I think he needs the family.”

“I think so, too. Plus, we owe him. You and I didn’t put him in prison, but Squiggy did.”

“Speaking of prison. Hear anything from Havoc yet?”

“He has some men going into her house tonight. They wanted to wait until dark. They’ll check to see if the cops searched the place. I’m guessing they did. Havoc’s

men probably won't find anything, but it's worth a look. He met with his contact and confirmed that Brigit is their only suspect. However, Wired has access to the hotel's server. He's looking through the footage. Might get something to give to the cops."

"That's good. Could you ask Havoc to check on Brigit's neighbor? I think her name is Abby. Brigit mentioned stopping to see her before leaving town. She was babysitting Colt. Abby lives next door. I know she's worried about her place, but she's probably worried about her friend, too."

"They'll get the details." Puma picks up the phone and calls Havoc. Once he's on the line, Puma puts it on speaker.

I explain about Abby and ask them to check into her, see if she's okay.

"We went through Brigit's house already. My contact got us in. Someone searched the place before the cops. Left a mess. I've seen it. They ripped up cushions and destroyed her clothes. They even trashed the kid's room. Fucking assholes. I don't know if they found anything to lead them to you. However, my guys found something of interest."

"What?" Puma and I ask.

"Hidden cameras. Four of them. One in the kitchen, one in the living room, one in her bedroom, and the last in her bathroom. Someone was watching her."

"Fuck!" I spin and pace away, working to control my temper. The thought of someone spying on her, seeing her naked in the shower or sleeping, makes me want to puke. Or kill someone. Yeah, killing someone would make me feel better.

"Are you going to tell her?" Puma asks me.

“Fuck, man, I don’t know. I guess I should, but that’s going to fuck with her head. She’s already been through too much.”

“It can wait for a few days,” Puma suggests, and I nod. Yeah, it can wait.

“Anything else?” I ask.

“Not on my end. Hopefully, we’ll have more tomorrow. I have a couple of guys checking out the hotel. Doubt they’ll find anything, but thought we’d see if Misha shows up. One’s chatting up a bartender while the other is working a maid. Figured they might get some dirt on Mike or George. I’ll send someone to check on the neighbor tomorrow.”

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN: BRIGIT

I glare at my father, silently daring him to convince me I’m being unreasonable. The brand under the bandage is all the evidence needed.

“You gave me that look when I explained why we couldn’t have pizza for dinner every night.” He chuckles. My lips twitch at the memory. At seven, I was certain pizza was the perfect food and couldn’t understand why my father wouldn’t agree.

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

“I know this seems like overkill to you. That they didn’t need to take such a drastic measure, but I’m telling you they did. I could have killed Wildcard. I meant to. Not when I pulled the trigger, but when I pulled out my gun and took aim. At the last minute, I saw the man I trusted seven years ago, and the doubt came flooding in. That’s the only reason he isn’t dead. Knowing how close I came to killing him makes me ill.”

“I get that, Dad, I do. But you didn’t kill him.”

“I shot him. His wound is much worse than this one,” he says, gesturing toward the bandage. “This is superficial. I’ll live and it will be a constant reminder to think before I act.”

“I still don’t like it,” I grumble.

He chuckles.

“It’s not funny. I think I made a mistake coming to the club for help. Have I put Colt in danger by bringing him here?”



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My question has Preacher sitting up straighter. His mood darkening. “Come here.” He reaches his hand out to me. I take it and sit in the chair next to his bed. “I never told you why I joined the club. You know I grew up in the system, right?”

I nod. He had told me about my grandparents dying in a car accident when he was young. How he grew up bouncing from one foster home to another before he joined the Demon Dawgs.

“My parents didn’t die in a car accident,” he says. “They died in prison.”

“What? But you said...”

“I did. You were too young to hear the truth. So, I told you a lie that wouldn’t give you nightmares. They hurt us. Me, my brother, and my sister. I was the youngest. They were our pimps. They’d rent us out to sick fucks who got a kick out of abusing kids. The cops arrested them in a sting operation and rescued us. We were all sent into the system. I lost track of my siblings, but I checked on my parents once I turned eighteen. They died when I was twelve. I tried searching for my siblings, but they both disappeared after they aged out. So, I don’t know if they’re alive or not.”

“Oh Dad, I’m so sorry.”

“Thanks, sweet girl. I survived. I had some good foster homes and not so good ones. At eighteen, my last home handed me my stuff in a trash bag and gave me twenty bucks. That’s the day I met Squiggy. I stopped at a diner and bought myself breakfast. The club showed up riding their motorcycles. I still remember the deafening noise of their bikes shaking the windows. The people already eating ate

faster or just left their uneaten food as they rushed to leave. I stayed where I was and finished my breakfast. No way was I going to waste the food. Squiggy came over to talk to me. I told him about my situation, and he offered me a place to stay. I became a prospect and thought my life was finally turning around. Being a prospect sucked, but I got my patch a year later and built a life. I had brothers. Then I met your mom, and we had you. Thought my life was perfect.”

“Until Mom left.” He tries to hide the flinch, but I see it. “You still miss her?”

He shrugs, but gives me a small smile. “I do. She was the love of my life. I just wasn’t hers. We shouldn’t have gotten married, but we did. She hated the club life. Wanted me to quit. I couldn’t do it, not even for her. So maybe she wasn’t the love of my life after all. I couldn’t risk losing the club. But I also knew if I left, Squiggy would hunt me down and kill me. Back then, you made a life commitment to the club. When I explained this to your mother, she thought I was choosing the club over here. She took off with some guy she met while dealing blackjack.”

“Her loss,” I tell him, squeezing his hand.

He shrugs. “It no longer matters. I couldn’t leave the club while Squiggy was President. But prison changed everything. I got out and never planned on coming back.”

“Is that what happened here? Puma won’t let you leave? He branded you because he sees you as his property? I thought he was a good guy. I need to take Colt and leave. Come with us. We’ll go somewhere where they can’t find us.” I stand, intending to pack and be ready to leave, when Alisa brings Colt back.

“Shit, I’m not explaining this right. I joined the club because I wanted a family. Losing your mom made me need the club more than ever. I was loyal to the club until Squiggy turned on me. That’s why I didn’t come back here after my release. When I

met Viper, I discovered how much the club changed. Being back here, even under the circumstances, I realize how much I've missed it. I wanted back in. I thought I'd blown it by shooting Wildcard. But they gave me a chance to get back what I'd lost. The brotherhood. However, I had to pay the price. This was the price."

"How can you think it's worth it?"

"Because I found my family. This is what I always wanted. A club just like this one. I'm not an idiot. I know the club under Squiggy wasn't ideal. But we had some good men joining. Like Wildcard. I thought maybe one day, this would be the club I always thought it could be. And it is. Under Puma."

"If you say so." I step over to the window and look out at the backyard where the play area sits empty. I can't deny that the place has changed from what I remember. Squiggy wouldn't have built a play area for kids. I shudder as I consider Squiggy around a child. The child would not be safe.

"He gave me a choice."

I turn to look at him. "What?"

"Puma gave me a choice. He said I could take the brand and regain my spot with the club. Or I could leave. If I left, I'd have to stay away from the club's territory. That wouldn't have been hard. I have a cabin in Red Rock Canyon. I could have returned there."

"Why didn't you? Because of Colt and me? We could have gone with you."

He chuckles. "I wouldn't have lost you. Puma assured me you and Colt could visit any time you wanted. My life would have been exactly as it was before I shot Wildcard."

“Then why didn’t you take that deal?”

“Because I wanted to belong to the club. I missed it. I missed the life. This is exactly the type of club I always hoped it would become.”

“Why did Puma make the offer?”

“Because Wildcard asked him to give me the choice. He wanted it to be my decision. He didn’t want to lose you. So, he asked the club to let me choose.”

I roll around what my father has said as I make my way back to the common room. Colt and the others should be returning soon. Hopefully, he will have worn himself out and be ready to sleep. I don’t want him to see his grandfather suffering. Dad assured me he’ll be up and around tomorrow.

The cacophony of children’s voices precedes their arrival. Colt spots me and runs over. “We had the best time. Desdemona let us swim in her pool. It was huge! They had a slide and a diving board plus a big bouncy thing that we could lie on. It had a table in the middle, so we got to eat snacks on it. They even had this toy that sprayed us. I can’t wait to go back. Desdemona said we could come back any time.”

“Sounds like you had fun. Did you thank her?”

“We did. Alisa’s dad had a barbecue. We had hotdogs and potato salad. It was so good.”

“Thank you for taking him,” I say to Alisa.

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“My pleasure. Every pool party has more adults than kids, so adding one more to the mix isn’t a hardship. Besides, he’s officially part of the NextGen Club.”

“The NextGen Club?” I ask with a smirk, watching the kids rush over to Max. “As in the Next Generation?”

“You got it,” Alisa says with a chuckle. “Elina has plans. She’s already instructed all the couples that they need to have kids.”

I laugh, because I can see the confident little girl doing just that. “She’s amazing.”

“She’s a brat,” Alisa corrects me, but with a smile. “I wouldn’t change her for the world. Before we came here, she was timid. We lost her father when she was a baby. The man who took him from us tried to ingratiate himself into our lives. I didn’t know what he’d done, or I’d never have let him near us. He never hurt Elina, but he didn’t warm to her either. I didn’t think about how that could affect her until we came here. Until Puma. His affection for her helped her blossom. She gained confidence, and she knows he’ll always have her back.”

“Are the kids back yet? I want ice cream!” Puma’s booming voice announces his entrance. The kids squeal and race toward the mountain of a man. He lifts Elina up and places her on his shoulders before reaching down to pick up Angel and Slade in each of his humongous arms. Colt runs forward, too, but instead of going to Puma, he rushes toward Wildcard and slams into his legs. Wildcard lifts him up and glances around the room until his eyes meet mine. I can see the question in them. I make my way towards him to give him the answer.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: WILDCARD

I hear snippets of Colt's exciting tale about his visit to Desdemona's with the other kids, but my focus is solely on Brigit as she makes her way towards me. I can't tell her thoughts by her expression. Easy to picture her raking in the chips with a poker face like that.

When she reaches us, she wraps her arms around Colt and me, leaning up to whisper in my ear. "I'm sorry. Thank you for looking out for my dad. I didn't understand, but I think I do now."

Shock and hope race through my system as I search her pretty green eyes for doubt. Seeing none, I release the stress that I've carried since leaving her with Preacher. I'm not sure how he convinced her that Puma branding him was forgivable, but I owe the man everything because Brigit is staying. Colt wiggles free when Hunter and the other prospects carry in gallons of ice cream and bowls. He rushes to take his seat between Elina and Angel.

"Are you sure?" I whisper back, circling her waist.

"I am. Won't lie. I'm still not pleased about what he went through, and I doubt I ever will be. But I won't hold it against you or the club. He said you gave him a choice. He explained to me why he made the choice he did. Once he heals, he'll have the family he always wanted."

"He has us now. The club voted and gave him the choice. He made the choice and followed through. All is forgiven and forgotten. He's one of us now. Puma's getting him a new kutte, and he wants a new road name."

"He does?" Brigit asks in surprise. "Why? I thought those were lifelong tags?"

“Usually, yes. But I think he sees this as a new start and wants a different name. Squiggy gave him the name Preacher as an insult. Implied that he was a choirboy and not cut out for club life.”

Brigit shakes her head. “I’m glad that guy’s dead. Dad said he joined the club because he was looking for a family. Seems like that family was pretty dysfunctional. Although his parents were dysfunctional, too. They went to prison, and he grew up in the system. He was desperate for stability and settled for dysfunction.”

“The club is a family,” I tell her. “Puma is the best President, even if I do say so myself. Speaking of family, how about some ice cream?”

“I’d love some. Then later, I’m hoping we can make each other scream?”

I groan at her horrible pun. “That was terrible, but I’m game.”

The day’s activities have the kids nodding off in their empty bowls. While the prospects clear the tables, I pick up Colt and carry him to his room. Brigit changes him into his pajamas while I lean against the doorjamb and watch. Seeing her care for our son has me dreaming about putting another baby in her belly. We need to clear her of the murder charge so we can build our life together.

“He wants to say goodnight to you,” Brigit says, moving so I can take her place.

“You had a big day today, huh?” I ask him.

“I love it here. Can we stay?”

“I’m trying to convince your mom. You’ll have to help me. Okay?”

“Okay. We’ll make it happen, Dad.”

Damn, if that one word doesn't make my heart expand. "Did you have fun with the other kids?"

He nods. "Elina explained about how she and the others will take over the club once you guys are too old. She said that I can't be the VP like you because Mal's going to be VP. I haven't met him yet. But she said I could be the tech guy. She suggested I hang out with Spark. Can you make that happen? I have lots to learn."

I want to laugh, but the seriousness of Colt's expression tells me that I shouldn't. I knew from the others that Elina had worked out a succession plan for the club, but I guess I hadn't realized how serious she was.

"I'll make sure you meet Spark and the rest of the club members. But I wouldn't worry about learning everything right away. You have time."

He nods as his eyes droop. I lean over and kiss his forehead before tucking him in. My son. How crazy is that? Watching him sleep, I realize that there isn't anything that I wouldn't do to make him happy. There is no one that I wouldn't kill to keep him safe. The club is my family, and I always thought it would take precedence over anything. But I know that if I had to hand over my kutte to keep Colt and Brigit safe and happy, I would. I don't think the scenario will come to fruition, but the realization that I wouldn't think twice about such a decision shocks me to my core.



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Brigit slides her hands around my waist as we walk out of his room. I sling my arm over her shoulder and tug her close.

“What was he talking about? I heard something about spending time with someone named Spark?”

“Elina has a plan to take over the club once Puma and the rest of us are too old.”

Brigit laughs. “I heard about that. What does she have planned for Colt?”

“She thinks he’ll make a good tech guy. So Colt wants me to introduce him to Spark so he can learn from him.”

“She’s a character. Alisa told me how much Elina’s blossomed since being here thanks to Puma. He’s so good with kids. I’m grateful she and the others have accepted Colt. He didn’t have very many friends back in Boston. I worked too much. He spent two days a week in childcare and he’d stay with my next-door neighbor, Abby, the other three. I wanted to ask if you’d have Havoc check on her.”

“I talked to him earlier, and I asked him to check on her. They’re going over there tomorrow.” I consider telling her about what they found in her home, but decide the bad news can wait. She’s dealt with enough today.

“I heard what you said to Colt about convincing me to stay. You won’t have to work hard. I have no intention of leaving.”

Grinning, I lean over and kiss her. “Good girl. Because I can’t let you go.”

“I’ll need to find a job, eventually. There are so many hotels here in Vegas. Somebody should hire me.”

“You don’t have to work if you don’t want to. I have plenty of money. But if you wanted a job, you could take the HR Manager’s position at 1%. Our previous manager went on maternity leave and Chill fired the temp. It’s why she’s been doing the job and believe me she sucks at it.”

Brigit chuckles. “I can imagine. A good HR Manager needs to have empathy and compassion. Two traits not usually found in a SOA.”

“You got that right. She fired the temp a week ago and we’ve already lost fifteen employees that I know of. Not sure what’s she’s doing to scare them off.”

“So, you need a temp HR Manager until the permanent one returns from maternity leave?”

“She’s not coming back. Gave her notice just before Chill fired the temp. She wants to stay home with the baby. Her husband works for us, so he makes good money. We’re looking for a replacement. As the hotel manager, I can’t imagine anyone else taking the job. Plus, you don’t have to worry about daycare. The prospects take turns watching the kids here or we could take Colt with us. The casino offers childcare. Alisa organized it for the employees. They love it.”

“I can imagine. I’d like to check it out. We offered nothing like that at the hotel. Speaking as a former HR Manager, having childcare is a game changer. Do the employees pay for it?”

“Nope. It’s free for every employee. Even part-time staff. We offer several perks to our employees, which is why we have a constant stream of applications coming in. Which is why we need a qualified HR Manager. Have I convinced you yet?”

“I’ll be happy to help you out. I need to earn my keep.”

Pulling her into my room, I capture her mouth in a deep kiss. I don’t let her up for air until I’ve had my fill of her taste. “You don’t have to do anything of the sort. The club covers our expenses, and I have plenty of money.”

“Don’t take it the wrong way, but I don’t want to live in the clubhouse. I don’t mind spending time here, but I want a home.”

“You’ll have one,” I promise. “Puma purchased several acres of land across the street. Spock, our secretary, has broken it up into plots. Puma and Alisa are building a home. So are Chill and Dice. Not sure if Viper has selected a plot yet. She and Rafe split their time between here and his condo. I was thinking you and I could go over and select a plot. We could find a plan that we both agree on and build a home just for us. We’ll have to decide on the number of bedrooms. I’m thinking seven or eight.”

“Why so many?”

“Because I want a big family.”

“I’m not having seven more kids.”

“Okay, six kids. One room can be an office. Or maybe your dad will want a room. Dice and Avery are building a separate home on their property for her grandmother. We could do that for your dad.”

Brigit beams at me as she pulls me down for another kiss. “I think I remember something about making you scream.” She slithers out of my arms and slides to her knees. Unfastening my belt and then my jeans, she releases my cock. She spits in both hands before grasping my cock. Sliding my shaft between her slick hands has

me tossing my head back. Fuck, that feels good. When I feel her tongue swipe underneath, I look down into her eyes. Fuck me if that isn't the most beautiful sight.

I release a loud groan when she deep throats my shaft. Her tongue is magic. It caresses my shaft as she takes me deep. The sensation has my legs quaking and my hips jerking. Shit, I'm close. I reach out to stop her, but then she swallows. With a shout, I empty my load down her throat.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: BRIGIT

I swallow and release Wildcard's shaft with a pop. "I kind of made you scream."

"That wasn't a scream. It was a manly shout. I'll show you the difference."

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I scream when he lifts me up and tosses me onto the bed.

I scream when he uses his mouth and fingers to send me over the edge.

I scream when he buries himself deep and pounds me into another orgasm.

“See the difference?” He asks as he pulls me into his arms.

An exhausted hum is all I can manage. So much screaming. I may not be able to talk in the morning.

“How are your pancakes?” I ask Colt, my voice still a little hoarse from the previous night.

“They’re the best!” Colt proclaims.

“Thank you,” says my dad, as he takes a seat at our table. “They are my secret recipe.”

“I thought they tasted like the ones you used to make,” I say. “You’re feeling better? You look good.”

“I feel great! Puma has handed the kitchen over to me, so I can earn my keep. Why is your voice all scratchy?” He gives a smug-looking Wildcard the side-eye.

“I heard some screaming coming from your room,” Viper says, sitting next to my dad. “I wonder why. Did you see a mouse or something?”

“Did one of your snakes get out?” Elina asks Viper from the table next to ours.

“Snakes?” I ask, with my fork halfway to my mouth.

“Max and I keep snakes as pets. The habitats are all in a locked room. The kids can’t get to them. And no, none of them have escaped.”

I glance at Wildcard, who shrugs.

I shudder at the thought of being under the roof with several snakes and make a note to push Wildcard to build us our house as quickly as possible.

“Spock, I need to talk to you about picking out a lot across the street. Want to build a house for Brigit and Colt.”

“The lot next to Puma is still available. Want it?”

“After breakfast, let’s go over there later and look? See if you like it?” Wildcard asks me. “We can go after breakfast. Why don’t you tag along?” He says to my dad.

Wildcard carries Colt across the highway, while my dad and I follow them.

“I don’t want you trying to cross without an adult,” Wildcard explains to Colt.

“This is dangerous,” I speak up. “Won’t the kids want to have access to the clubhouse? Or are they no longer hanging out there after the homes are built?”

“Puma’s putting in a tunnel under the highway. He won’t risk the kids getting hurt. He’d block off the highway if he thought he could get away with it. We’ll have a gated fence surrounding the property. Like we have around the clubhouse. We aren’t advertising that we own the homes, so the fencing will be different. More upscale.

He's planning on having trees and shrubs planted around the perimeter to keep people from seeing inside."

They've graded several acres of the land. Sticks with colored flags attached dot the landscape. Wildcard leads us toward the center and points out a series of purple flags. "This is where he's building a park for the kids. They'll have a jungle gym similar to the one behind the club, only larger."

"Larger?" I sputter. "The one you have now is huge."

"With Puma, bigger is better. Besides, he thinks the club will have more children and we'll need the space. He isn't wrong. After he found Alisa, the rest of us are doing the same." Wildcard tugs me to his side. "He and Alisa are expecting. Chill and Hunter are trying. As are Dice and Avery. You know I want us to have more."

I glance at Colt, who is watching us and listening to his father. When he mentions us having more children, his eyes widen. I want to shush Wildcard, but I'm also curious to know Colt's thoughts about having a sibling or two. Or if Wildcard had his way, several.

"You're going to have another kid?" He asks.

"We're thinking about it," Wildcard says. "Would you be against the idea?"

"That would be awesome!"

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“Any preference?” I ask.

He shakes his head. “Nope. Girls are cool, too. Look at Angel and Elina.”

My dad chuckles. “Things have changed since I was a kid. None of the boys wanted a sister, and none of the girls wanted a brother. Of course, before meeting Viper, I’d never thought I’d see a chick as a patched member.”

“Girls can do everything a guy can do, right, Mom?”

“Right.”

Wildcard ruffles Colt’s hair before describing Puma’s plans for the common area. His plan is a child’s paradise. Basketball courts, soccer fields, baseball fields, and a pool. “He’s thinking of adding in a water park, too.”

“He’s creating a paradise for the kids,” I comment.

Wildcard nods. “Puma is all about the club and the kids. He has the money to make it happen. Plus, the casino brings in major bucks.”

Wildcard leads us away from the common area and across to an area with more colored flags. “This is Puma’s house, and the lot next to it could be ours. The lot’s large enough for the size of house I want and we’d still have room for a small cottage. In case you wanted a place to live.” He’s looking at my dad, who looks back in surprise.



“Me?”

Wildcard shrugs. “I know you have your cabin out in Red Rock Canyon, and you have a room in the clubhouse. But I thought you might want your own space, but still be close to Brigit. You’re used to living on your own. However, you could take a room in our house if you preferred.”

My dad swallows hard and gives Wildcard a nod. “Appreciate it. I’d like to be close to my family. I’ll stay out of your way, but I’ll be close enough to babysit if you need me.”

I step over to my father and hug him. Stepping back, I watch the three most important men in my life explore the location of our future home. I feel like the luckiest person in the world. A few days ago, it was just Colt and me. Now we’re a family with plans to expand. This is what I’ve always wanted.

Wildcard pulls out his phone and reads the display. He glances at me with a frown, zapping my happiness.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong. But we do have to get back. Puma needs to see us. He’s heard from Havoc.”

We make our way back across the highway. My dad takes Colt while Wildcard and I go directly to Puma’s office. Inside, we find him along with Chill and Spark.

“Wildcard and Brigit are here,” Puma says.

“How are you doing, Brigit?” Havoc asks.

His question surprises me, but I respond. "I'm fine."

"That's good, because what I'm about to tell you isn't good news."

Wildcard squeezes my hand while I take a deep breath. "Go ahead. I need to know what I'm up against." I glance at Wildcard and smile. "What we're up against."

"We searched your house last night. Not sure if Wildcard or Puma told you what we found?"

I glance at Wildcard, who gives me an apologetic look. "Shit, no. I meant to, but we got to talking about something else."

He tells me about how someone searched my house and destroyed everything inside. Knowing someone was in my home was bad. The thought of them touching Colt and my things has my stomach roiling. But hearing about the hidden cameras has me bolting into Puma's private bathroom. Wildcard follows me inside and holds up my hair, while I empty my stomach. When I'm done, he flushes the toilet, wipes my face off with a damp cloth, and then hands me a brand-new toothbrush before leaving me to brush. Once I do, I step into his arms and let him hold me as I come to grips with the violation.

"I'm sorry," Puma says when I return to the table. "Do you want to stop here?"

"Is there more?" I ask incredulously.

"Unfortunately, yes," Havoc says. "And I'm afraid it's much worse."

"Maybe we should stop..." Wildcard starts, but I shake my head.

"No. I need to hear it. Go ahead. I'm ready." Wildcard pulls me onto his lap, so I can

snuggle into him. He's my rock and I know I can face anything as long as I have him.

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“Wildcard asked us to check on your neighbor, Abby Carmichael. He said you were concerned about her.”

“Yes, is she okay?”

“We don’t know. She wasn’t home. Someone ransacked her place. Probably the same guys who hit yours. We found some blood, but it wasn’t much. Her car was still in the garage. If someone got to her, would she have information that would lead anyone to you?”

“Yes. She knew about Wildcard. I gave her his information when I went into labor. Just in case something happened to me. I told her I was coming here. What if they hurt her? This is all my fault.” Picturing Abby hurting because of me breaks me.

### CHAPTER NINETEEN: WILDCARD

Watching Brigit fall apart is more painful than getting shot. Hell, if it would save her pain, I’d have Preacher shoot me again. But I can’t take her pain. All I can do is give her my strength. My brothers and sister give her the time she needs to pull herself back together. I can feel their compassion like a physical force. I hope Brigit can feel it, too.

Chill hops up and returns with a box of tissues. I take two and press them into Brigit’s hand. She hiccups a few times before wiping her cheeks and her nose. Standing, she walks over to Puma’s desk and throws the tissues into the wastebasket. Turning, she straightens her shoulders and takes a deep breath. A warrior preparing for battle. I’ve never been prouder.

“Can I get you anything? Water?” Spark asks.

“A shot of tequila?” Chill offers.

“Brandy?” Brigit asks.

Spark jumps up. “I’ll go get it.”

“Bring some pretzels,” I shout at his back. He lifts his hand to let me know he’s heard me.

He comes back with a snifter of Brandy, a bag of pretzels, and four beers. It’s coming up on lunch time, so a bit early. But I take the beer and crack it open. This has already been a fucking long day. So, why not?

Brigit takes a few sips of her brandy and I’m happy to see the color returning to her pale skin. Brigit has the pale skin of her Irish heritage, but the blows she’s dealt with today made her appear ghost-like.

“Okay, sorry about that. Abby is like a mother to me. Knowing someone may have hurt her because of me is hard. Abby was the first person I met when Wildcard left me in Boston. She saw Wildcard and his motorcycle. Knew he was a member of a motorcycle club, but she didn’t know which one. I didn’t tell her until later. At first, I only told her I was in hiding, but not who from. When I discovered I was pregnant, she was my rock. She went with me to all my doctor appointments and she helped me prepare for Colt’s arrival. When I went into labor, I panicked. I kept imagining worse-case scenarios. I told Abby about Wildcard. Asked her to reach out to you if something happened to me. She knew your real name, your road name, and the club’s name.”

“So, if they questioned her, they likely know you came here?” Chill asks.

Brigit nods. "I'm sorry. She was watching Colt the morning of Mike's murder. I told her to leave because I was afraid Misha and his men would come looking for me. She must not have left soon enough."

"Or she didn't plan on leaving. She might have thought you overreacted," Havoc says. "You can't blame yourself."

Brigit sighs and leans into me. "Easier said than done."

A knock on the door keeps anyone from responding.

"Enter!" Bellows Puma. We chuckle as Havoc curses about warning a guy before trying to blow out his eardrums.

Viper opens the door and steps in. The look on her face has us all tensing.

"What's wrong?" Puma asks.

"Rafe just called and is on his way here. He's not alone. He's got a detective from the Boston PD with him. The detective claims that we're hiding a fugitive wanted for murder in Boston."

"Shit," I mutter.

"Panic room. Get Brigit and Colt in there. Hell, put all the kids in there. We don't want them exposed," Puma orders. "Get Hunter to go in with them." Chill nods and rushes out.

I help Brigit stand and take her hand. "Let's go find Colt and get you somewhere safe. No one can get you in the panic room. Even if they have a warrant. Rafe doesn't know where it is. He doesn't want to know, for situations like this one," I explain as I

lead her through the common room and down the hallway to the entertainment center. As I hoped, Colt and the rest of the kids are already there. Hunter opens the panic room and ushers everyone inside. I kiss Brigit before letting her go.

“My stuff!” Brigit says, before Hunter can close the door. “My driver’s license and wallet are in your room.”

“Shit, you’re right. Hold on.” I rush into my room and grab Brigit’s purse and duffle bag. After making a second stop to grab Colt’s things, I rush back into the entertainment room and toss Hunter the bags. After he closes the door, Chill and I toss a few floor pillows against the wall. Chill turns off the light as we leave the room. We take seats at the table with Puma and Dice. They have a deck of cards on the table and piles of chips in front of each of chair. I sit across from Puma, facing the door.

“Where’s Preacher?”

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“He’s in the kitchen getting lunch ready. I want to keep him out of sight, in case this asshole knows about him. He’ll want to talk to you. Know what you’re going to say?”

I shrug. “Depends on what he wants to know.”

“They’re through the gate,” Spark announces. He’s sitting at the bar with his iPad in front of him. He is watching all the cameras. When he snorts, I glance over at him. “Rafe stopped him from opening the door. They’re knocking.”

As he says it, we hear it. Puma smirks, but nods at Viper to open the door. When she does, a man pushes his way inside. He’s wearing a cheap suit the color of dust and a blue shirt. He’s sweating and his face is as red as his tie. I get all this without looking directly at him. Chill, Puma, Dice, and I are playing poker. We’re focused on the cards in our hands.

“Look here, you reprobates. I’m Detective Scott Sully. I’m here to get answers and you’re going to give them to me. Or we’re going to have a problem.”

No one pays him the slightest attention. Puma casually selects two chips from the pile in front of him and tosses them into the kitty. “I call. What have you got?”

Dice lays down his cards. He has two aces. Chill has two pairs. I drop my cards in disgust. Puma lays down a flush and chuckles as he claims his winnings. While Chill deals the next hand, I casually scan the room. Rafe winks at me while the other detective fumes. Viper has taken a seat against the wall, her eyes on the detective with her man.



The detective tries another tactic. “Who’s in charge here?” When he doesn’t get a response, he glares at Rafe. “Do something.”

“Puma, can we have a word? I promise we won’t take up too much of your time,” Rafe asks. His polite tone makes me want to snicker. His deference is a direct contrast to the other man’s rudeness.

Puma stays in his seat, but turns slightly to face Rafe. “What can I do for you, Detective Sterling?”

“It’s Acting Lieutenant Sterling,” Rafe corrects him. We all know that he’s getting a promotion. Puma knows his boss. We already have a party planned for him. But we don’t want to let the other man know how close Rafe is with the club.

“Congratulations,” Puma says. “Now, what can I do for you, Acting Lieutenant Sterling? Is this a friend of yours? Thought you had better taste.”

Puma’s words piss the detective off. He kicks Puma’s chair. “Get up, you piece of shit. We’re fucking cops. Show some respect.”

Puma slowly unfolds his 7’0” frame until he’s towering over the two men. I can’t see his expression, but it must be formidable. Even Rafe takes a step a back.

“You come into my home and insult my brothers and sisters, and you dare order me to show you respect? I don’t know who you think you are or where you’re from. But I suggest you go back.”

The man gains enough confidence to glare at Puma, but he doesn’t move closer. “Are you threatening me?”

“If that’s how you want to take it. Now, I’ll ask you again. What the fuck do you

want?"

"We're looking for a woman. We think she came here from Boston to find Wildcard. Her name is Brigit Jones."

I snort. "Is she looking for her diary?" I ask, getting a snort of laughter from the others.

"She's supposedly the mother of your child. Does that ring a bell? Or are there too many whores out there who can say the same?" The detective asks.

I ignore him and keep my attention on Rafe. "How am I supposed to know this woman?"

"Her father is a member of the club. He goes by the road name Preacher."

"No Preacher here," Puma says. "We have a Nomad that goes by that name, but he's out of the San Diego Chapter and doesn't have a daughter. Not sure where you're getting your info, but you've got it wrong. Afraid you made the trip out here for nothing."

"You think we'll take your word for it? We'll look for him ourselves," Detective Sully proclaims. Rafe rolls his eyes.

"You can search if you have a warrant. Do you have a warrant?" Puma asks. When Sully just glares at him, Puma chuckles. "Didn't think so. Now, I've been more than patient. Time to take your East Coast rudeness and get the fuck out of my clubhouse."

"I told you this was a waste of time," Rafe says to Sully. "You don't have evidence putting your suspect here. Do you?"

“We have a statement from her neighbor. She said Brigit Jones was heading here, because that man is the father of her son.” He points at me while I glare back.

## CHAPTER TWENTY: BRIGIT

I gasp when I hear the Detective mention Abby. Is he admitting that he was involved in her disappearance? Did he torture her for information? I’m watching and listening to the events unfolding outside the panic room via a series of monitors. Hunter is splitting his time between watching them with me and watching the kids. Luckily, they’re all focused on the video game they’re playing. The casual acceptance by Elina and the others of being trapped inside the panic room has kept Colt calm, too. When I asked Hunter about it, he explained the kids know being inside here is precautionary. That they often bring the kids in here for an hour or two once a month so they don’t get frightened when they have to come in here for real. Puma’s idea.

My estimation of Puma rises every time I learn something new about him. He is truly kid-focused. Squiggy taught me to fear motorcycle clubs. Puma makes me realize the club is only as good as their President.

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When Detective Sully and Rafe leave, I shift my attention to a second monitor. I can't hear them speaking as well as I did when they were inside, so I turn up the volume.

"Does your captain know you're in their pocket?" Sully asks Rafe.

Rafe shakes his head. "He knows I'm on good terms with Puma and the club. They own a successful casino downtown and they sponsor several charities. You'll find Puma is well-liked in this state. Many are fans of his when he played ball."

Sully's head snaps toward Rafe. "What?"

Rafe laughs as he opens the car door. "You just met the great Maklin Brooks. Not a Celtics fan? Is that allowed?" Rafe slides behind the wheel and shuts his door. Sully stands outside and stares back at the clubhouse doors. The stunned look on his face would be comical if I didn't believe he hurt Abby.

Wildcard opens the panic room twenty minutes after the cops leave. Colt races out to greet his father.

"Dad! We were in the panic room. Elina said we have to go in there when the bad guys show up. Were there bad guys? Did you scare them away?"

Wildcard chuckles. "Weren't any bad guys this time. Just had a visitor we weren't expecting. Better to keep you guys safe."

"That's what Elina said. That we have to do what you say because you'll keep us safe."

Wildcard grins at me. “Exactly right. That’s our job.”

“My stomach is trying to eat my backbone,” Hunter says. “Let’s go see what’s for lunch.”

The kids cheer at this suggestion and follow Hunter to the common room.

“Do you think we’ll get cookies?” Colt asks Wildcard.

“I think I smelled cookies baking. Maybe you’ll get some after you eat your lunch. Deal?”

Colt nods his head. “Deal.”

I smile as I follow them, my heart full, knowing that Colt has his father in his life. Speaking of fathers, I see mine placing plates down in front of the kids as they take their seats.

“Gramps, Dad said you might have cookies for us later.”

My dad grins at Colt. “You know what? Ms. Claudia has a batch of cookies baking in the oven. They’ll be ready by the time you’re done eating.”

“Cookies!” the children all shout as they dig into their lunch.

“What do you say to your grandpa?” I ask. Even though the question was directed at my son. All the kids answer.

“Thanks, Gramps!”

Dad chuckles as he returns to the kitchen.

Wildcard leads me to Puma's table and we take our seats. A few minutes later, two prospects bring out bowls of chili and fresh bread. Puma takes a bite and groans.

"Your dad is a phenomenal cook. I'm glad he chose to stay. We just need to figure out his new road name. I was thinking Cook or Chef."

"Agreed," Wildcard moans as he plops a piece of bread covered in chili into his mouth.

"It's nice not having to cook," Alisa says. "I can focus on other things."

"Like growing my baby," Puma says, reaching over to rub his massive paw over her still flat stomach.

"Luckily, that doesn't take much effort on my part. At least not yet. I'm sure I'll be a walking house by the time your baby is ready to come out and play." She glances at me. "I'm not looking forward to giving birth."

"I don't blame you," I laugh as Wildcard shudders.

Puma gives Alisa a pout, so she reaches over and pats his arm. "Everything will be fine. We just need to get the house finished, so he or she has somewhere to sleep. I'm not caring for a baby in the clubhouse."

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“We went and looked at the properties across the street,” I tell Alisa. “We’re taking the plot next to yours. Colt was excited to know he’d be living next door to Elina. I can’t believe how quickly he’s melded with them.”

“They’re good kids. He hasn’t met Mal yet, but they should get along, too. Mal’s the calmest of the bunch. Well, he and Slade. We’re pretty lucky that they get along so well and rarely cause any trouble. But part of that may be because there are so many adults watching. It will be different when we move into our homes.”

“It won’t be that different,” Puma argues as the prospects pick up the empty plates from the kid’s tables. “I still want them to spend time in the clubhouse. They’re our future.”

My dad comes out of the kitchen carrying a plate of cookies. He places it in the center of the kids’ table. As they each take a cookie, they grin at my dad. “Thanks, Gramps!” They all shout.

Wildcard chuckles. “I think your dad has his new road name.”

Puma pounds on the table, which gains everyone’s attention. “Perfect. Spock! Need you to place an order for a rocker. Have to give our oldest and newest member his road name. Gramps!”

The chagrin on my father’s face tells me he isn’t thrilled with the name, but when the kids’ pound on the table and echo the name, his expression changes to one of pride. He glances at me and I can see his eyes mist up. He has his family and I couldn’t be happier for him.

Max is clearing off our table when Viper approaches Puma. “I just got off the phone with Rafe. He wants to come talk to you.”

“Yeah, I figured. He can come by, but he comes alone.”

Viper nods. “That’s what he said. He dropped Sully off at his hotel. Said Sully was planning on calling judges to get a search warrant. Idiot. Rafe told him he was wasting his time. He doesn’t have jurisdiction. But Sully thinks he’ll find a judge who’d like to see the cops harass our club.”

Puma shakes his head. “He might find someone, but I doubt it. However, we better prepare. Tell Rafe to call before he leaves for here. We’re going on lockdown.”

Viper pulls out her phone as she walks away.

Puma turns to me. “I trust Rafe, but he’s a cop. He’s proven himself to be an ally in the past. He helped clear Viper of a murder charge. I want to lay everything out for him about the charges against you. He’s never played us wrong. He’s more concerned with justice than following procedure. However, this is your life we’re talking about. You need to be included in the decision.”

I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. I’m in this mess because the cops see me as an easy scapegoat. Is trusting a cop the right move? Even though they’re vouching for him, it isn’t their future at stake. But, what’s my option? Stay inside the clubhouse for the rest of my life? Maybe this cop isn’t like Sully? Maybe he’ll help clear my name? I glance at Wildcard, whose expression gives nothing away.

“I’m scared,” I admit. “What if he arrests me?”

“Then we’ll get you the best lawyer money can buy,” Puma says with a shrug. “But I don’t think it will come to that. Rafe worked with us to prove Viper’s innocence. He



worked with us to clear her. Your dad gave her an alibi. You're family. So is Rafe. We don't betray family. We protect family."

Closing my eyes, I send out a prayer that I'm making the right decision. "Okay, I'll trust him."

"Good, because he'll be here in ten minutes," says Viper from behind me.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: WILDCARD

I can see the worry in Brigit's eyes, but she agrees to meet with Rafe. Her trust in Puma and the club fills me with pride. Rafe is trustworthy, for a cop. There is little risk that he'll betray us by taking her in. But there is still a risk. She's putting her faith in us. In me. We won't let her down.

"Puma, can we talk?" When he nods, I turn to Brigit. "Stay here. I'll come and get you in a minute. I just need to talk to Puma first." Leaning over, I kiss her forehead before following Puma to his office.

"You want an escape plan, just in case?" Puma asks after I shut the door to his office.

"Yeah. I trust Rafe, but..."

"He's a cop. I get it. Hold on." Puma picks up his phone and makes a call.

"Puma," Dante says when he answers.

"I have a situation." Puma lays out the problem. "We might need help getting Brigit, Wildcard, and their son out of the country. Maybe her father, too."

"Mexico?" Dante asks.

“I could make that work,” I reply, even though moving to Mexico isn’t ideal. Escaping to Mexico doesn’t mean we have to stay there.

“If you have to go on the run, come to the clubhouse here. We’ll get you to Ranch’s place. He has easy access to the border. It’s right on the other side of the fence. We have contacts in Mexico who can get you to my mom’s place. You’ll be safe there.”

“That works. Thanks Dante.”

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“No problem. Also, if you need a lawyer, Evie can get to you quickly. She’s licensed to practice in Vegas.”

“What about Boston?” I ask.

“No, but I’ll ask her to find you someone you can use. I’ll check with Havoc, too. We’ll make sure you and your family are safe.” He ends the call.

“Thanks, Puma.”

He nods. “It’s what family does. Now let’s go grab your girl. Rafe should be here soon. We’ll take him to Spark’s room. That will make it easier to show him the evidence that proves Brigit’s innocence.”

We return to the common room just as Viper brings Rafe inside. His eyes scan the room and land on Brigit. My stress spikes when he narrows his eyes and shakes his head. “Shit, Puma, what did I ever do to you?”

Puma chuckles as he steps forward to pound Rafe on his back. Rafe stumbles forward with a few curses before he offers his hand to Brigit. “You must be Brigit Jones. I was here earlier, but I guess we missed each other.”

Brigit blushes as she shakes Rafe’s hand. “It wasn’t you, but the company you were keeping.”

I chuckle as Rafe nods in agreement. “Let’s talk,” Puma says, gesturing toward the hallway that leads to Spark’s office.

We find the man waiting in front of his bank of monitors.

“Not sure how much you know about what happened in Boston. But I’m guessing your visitor told you that Brigit here murdered her boss, Mike Perry?” Puma starts. Rafe gives him a nod. “Brigit saw the murder, but she didn’t pull the trigger.”

Rafe turns to Brigit. “I’d like to hear it from you. I hate to make you go through it again, but I need to treat you like I would any witness.”

Brigit nods. She walks through her arrival at the hotel and hearing her boss arguing with someone in his office.

“Did you recognize him?” Rafe asks.

“Yes. He’s a frequent visitor at the hotel. Misha Orloff.”

“He’s a member of the Bratva,” Rafe says. Brigit nods. “I know. Which is why I’ve always tried to avoid him.”

“But you’re saying he’s a regular at the hotel?” Brigit nods. “Conducting business?”

“I think so. The hotel has several conference rooms. I spotted a pattern where Misha would always show up when Mike reserved a conference room. I know sometimes they would have illegal poker games, because I attended a few. Misha was also there. But I don’t think that’s all that happened in those rooms.”

Rafe nods. “The Bratva have their hands in several illegal activities. A hotel would be a brilliant way to bring buyers and sellers together.”

“Tell him about what Misha said about the undercover cop,” I tell Brigit.

She repeats the words she heard about Mike letting an undercover cop get too close and how they had to take care of him. Including how the undercover gained access.

“Who is George? Is he the same man Sully claims saw you commit the murder?”

“He’s the witness? George is the assistant manager. But he shouldn’t have been at the hotel at the time of Mike’s murder. He works nights and leaves when Mike shows up. I don’t remember seeing him there that morning.”

“We think whoever claimed to have seen Brigit lied. Watch this.” Spark hits a few keys and a grainy image pops up on the monitor. It’s a hallway with a man rushing down it while he wipes his hands with a cloth.

“That’s Mike,” Brigit says. “About half an hour before I arrived.”

“How did you get this?” Rafe asks, then raises his hand up in the air to stop Spark from answering. “Never mind. I probably don’t want to know.”

The video continues to play and less than ten minutes later, three men walk down the hall, following the first. The scene shifts to show them entering an office and disappearing from view.

“Misha is the one in the middle. The other two are his henchmen. That’s Mike’s office that they enter.” Brigit provides the commentary.

Twenty minutes later, I see Brigit. She walks to her office door, stops, and then continues down the hallway to the door where the previous four men disappeared. The camera gives us a clear view of her standing outside the door. I know when Misha shoots Mike, because my girl stumbles back a step. Then she’s running. The two goons follow her. When they disappear, Spark shifts to a different camera angle. I watch helplessly as they chase her out into the parking lot and shoot at her retreating

car. Wrapping my arm around her waist, I pull her close. Needing to feel her.

“Has Sully seen this?” Rafe asks. “I imagine he’d get access to the hotel servers.”

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“Havoc, the President of the Boston Chapter, said someone destroyed the servers. We had access to the servers prior to that, thanks to Brigit. We think the Bratva destroyed the servers. Havoc’s man, Wired, sent copies of everything to Sully. However, Sully still seems fixated on Brigit.”

Rafe nods. “My opinion is that Sully’s dirty. Likely working for the Bratva. He reeks of desperation. I left him calling every judge in the county to see if he could get a search warrant. He won’t get one and I think he knows it. He threatened to go to my captain if I didn’t help him out. I told him that my captain already knew about my ties to the club. Hell, he’s on Team Puma.”

Puma smirks.

“So, what are my options?” Brigit asks.

“I think we need to call in the FBI,” Rafe says. “Or, more specifically, you need to contact the FBI.”

Brigit visibly recoils from this suggestion. “Me?”

“Yes. We need to find someone who will listen to your story. Someone in Organized Crime. I can call around. See if there is someone who might be interested in going up against the Bratva.”

“What about that DEA agent?” Puma asks. “The one who assisted with the drug bust at 1%.”

“Reed Pence. He’s not with the DEA any longer. He moved over to Internal Affairs. I met up with him again when they were looking at my former lieutenant. Before he kidnapped Viper.”

“Do you think Pence has contacts?”

“He might. I’ll call him and ask. In the meantime, Brigit, let’s get a witness statement from you for the murder. I’ll need copies of the video.”

Spark nods.

“You can use my office,” Puma offers Rafe.

I watch Brigit leave with Rafe and want to follow. But I trust Rafe to take care of my woman. Puma and I return to the common room, where I find Gramps waiting.

“Is Brigit safe?” he asks, keeping his voice low.

“Yeah. She’s with Rafe. You know him, right?”

“He’s a cop. So, I’ll ask again. Is she okay?”

I chuckle. “Rafe’s a good guy. He’s Viper’s man. He won’t hurt Brigit. She told him what happened, and he’s seen the video of her standing outside the office when Misha killed Mike. He’s helping us figure out how to get the FBI to look into the case, since we believe the detective is on the take.”

“Okay. Because if she needs to leave the country...”

“Already planned,” I assure him. “If we think they’re going to arrest her, we’ll head to San Diego. Dante has a clear path into Mexico.”



Gramps nods. “Good. Good. I don’t want to leave, but if she goes, I go.”

“We all go,” I correct him. “Brigit, Colt, you, and me. We’re family.”

“Family. Speaking of family, I need to start on dinner.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: BRIGIT

Rafe takes his time and walks me through that morning. He pulls out details I had forgotten. Like the mention of an incident the previous night.

“Any idea what he was talking about?”

I shake my head no. “I don’t. But...”

“But what?”

“Hold on. I’ll be right back.”

I dash through the common room to Wildcard’s room and retrieve my phone. As I run back out of the room, I smack into a brick wall, also known as Wildcard.

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“What are you doing?”

“Rafe’s questions reminded me of something I forgot. I received several voicemails while I was sleeping. More than usual. Since I don’t work nights and weekends, staff members who do will leave me messages. I listen to them first thing when I arrive at work. But well...”

“Got it.”

“I turned the phone off when I left Boston so they couldn’t trace me, so I think it has power. But I should grab the charger, just in case.”

“Wait. Don’t turn it on yet. Go back to Puma’s office. I’m going to grab Spark.”

Nodding, I re-enter Puma’s office.

“I brought my phone. There might be voicemails on it from the staff who worked that night. Wildcard went to get Spark. He doesn’t want me to turn on the phone in case someone tries to track my location.”

“Good thinking,” Rafe says. “I finished typing up your statement and printed it out. Can you review it and sign it?”

I take it from him and read through it before taking the pen and signing at the bottom. As I finish, Spark and Wildcard join us and take seats at the table. I slide the paper back to Rafe.

“This is just for my records. I won’t officially submit it. But I might refer to it when I speak with the FBI.”

“Do you have a contact?” Wildcard asks as Spark whispers a request for me to unlock my phone.

“I called Pence and gave him a broad overview of what we’re up against and asked if he knew anyone in the Organized Crime Division of the FBI. He’s making some calls.”

“Good,” Wildcard says.

“Okay, we’re set.” Spark slides the phone back to me. “Go ahead.”

I take the phone and scan the voicemails from that night. Most nights, I don’t get any calls. However, on that night, I received six.

“Six messages,” I tell them. “That’s unusual.”

“Play them,” Rafe suggests.

“Ms. Jones, this is Marcia Green, the night receptionist. A police officer stopped by at the desk, asking to speak with the manager. I tried calling Mr. Calloway, but he isn’t answering his phone. Neither is Mr. Perry. I’m not sure what to do. The cop is insisting on seeing Mr. Calloway immediately.”

“Ms. Jones, this is Mark Granville, head of night security. We have a situation. There is a cop asking to speak with the manager, but we can’t locate Mr. Calloway. The cop’s name is Detective Mark Harding. He says he has a search warrant but won’t show it to me. I’ve tried calling Mr. Perry... Wait, I see Mr. Perry now. Never mind, Ms. Jones. You have a nice evening.”

“Ms. Jones, this is Maria Alcazar. I’m in housekeeping. I’m assigned to the conference rooms, but Mr. Perry told me not to clean Conference Room 210. He has the door barricaded and a security guard in front. I’m afraid he’ll forget to tell my manager, so I left her a message. But, I want to make sure someone else knows, too. I can’t lose my job.”

The other three messages are from employees also looking for George.

“I don’t understand,” I say to Rafe. “Mike didn’t work at night. That’s George’s shift. Why would he be there? Where was George?”

“All good questions. George is George Calloway. Correct?”

I nod. “He’s the night manager.”

“Could he have gotten sick and Perry came in to cover for him?”

I consider the suggestion and nod. “That’s possible. What about the cop and the search warrant? Could this have been the cop Misha mentioned?”

“Maybe. I’ll do some digging and see what I can learn,” Rafe says.

“What about my employees? My former employees. Should I call them?”

Rafe and Wildcard share a look before Rafe says no. “Not a good idea to reach out to them right now. Not with Detective Sully in town and searching for you. I’ll make some inquiries about the cop, Detective Harding and George Calloway.”

“I could have Puma call Havoc. Havoc could figure out a reason to call this in. We have names to give him. He can reach out to them and find out more information. Maybe get them to call the cops. He can also follow up on this detective. Mark

Harding? Havoc couldn't search for the cop Misha mentioned without a name. Especially if he was undercover. But now we have more information."

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“Okay, that’s a plan. Keep me posted if either of you finds anything. I’m going back to monitor Sully. Hopefully, I’ll hear from Pence soon. Once I do, I’ll contact Puma.”

We stand to leave, but Rafe stops me. “Thank you for trusting me. I know you don’t know me, but I won’t betray you or the club. If I thought you were guilty, I’d still treat you with respect and work with you to turn yourself in. However, I know you’re innocent. I’ll do what I can to help you, which includes not tampering with the case. The BPD needs to find the actual killer. If they are unwilling, then I’m willing to do whatever it takes to force the FBI’s hand.”

“Thank you,” I tell him and shake his hand.

Wildcard walks him out while I go in search of my father. I haven’t spoken with him today and I’m curious to hear his take on his new road name. I chuckle when I think about the look on his face when Puma called it out. He always hated the name Preacher, but I’m certain he feels much too young to have everyone calling him Gramps. Even if he is technically a grandfather.

When I don’t see him in the common room, I consider going to his bedroom and then realize I don’t know which room is his. Before I ask, I push the door open to the kitchen and freeze.

My dad is standing at the counter chopping vegetables. Next to him is an older woman close to his age. I haven’t met her yet, but I’ve seen her with Avery and Dice. I think she’s her grandmother. Claudia. She’s standing elbow-to-elbow with my father as she rolls out dough. He says something to her that makes her hip-check him. Then she reaches to a small bowl near her right hand and flicks flour at my dad. When he

splutters in indignation, she breaks into giggles. He joins in before leaning over to kiss her cheek. That's when he sees me.

He turns and grins at me. "There's my little girl. How are you doing? Have you met Claudia?"

"I haven't, but I've heard great things about you," I say, offering my hand. She bypasses it and draws me in for a hug.

"You're Colt's momma, aren't you? He told me all about you. That little boy loves his momma, and he's so happy to have found his daddy."

I nod as I wipe away a stray tear. "Knowing he's happy means everything to me. I missed Wildcard and always wanted him to know his son. Plus, I get the bonus of finding my dad." Smiling at my father as he squeezes my arm. "I hope I didn't interrupt anything?" I tease them.

"We're just getting to know each other," Claudia says. "The kids all call me Gramma. Now that they're calling him Gramps, we have to make sure we're a team or they'll play us off each other. Those kids are a force."

The look of affection my father gives Claudia settles another piece of my heart. He'd been alone for so long. First my mother left him, then I left him. Even if it hadn't been my choice. He spent years alone in prison. But now we're all together again. I just hope Puma and the others can fulfill their promise and clear me of the charges so we can stay together.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: WILDCARD

"Do you think we have a chance to keep Brigit out of jail?" I ask Rafe as we walk outside.

“I think so. Sully is basing his investigation on an eyewitness who claims they saw Brigit enter Mike’s office just before they found the body. That video tells a different story.”

“Who found the body?”

“Another question I don’t have the answer to,” Rafe grumbles. “I know it isn’t my case, so I’m not privy to everything, but I can’t help but feel Sully’s obsession with finding Brigit is personal. We need the FBI to take this case. That’s my focus.”

“Thanks for not arresting her,” I say, offering my hand.

He laughs and shakes it. “Not my jurisdiction. Something I didn’t mention earlier and should have. Sully doesn’t have an arrest warrant for Ms. Jones. He’s only submitted a request for aid in locating her for questioning. So, there was never a risk of me arresting her. My personal opinion?” I nod for him to continue. “He doesn’t have enough evidence for an arrest warrant. He’s on a fishing expedition. Maybe he’s hoping to scare Ms. Jones into a confession.”

“Or he wants to make her disappear,” I add.

Rafe nods. “Or, that. Keep her hidden. Keep her safe. I don’t trust Sully. If he’s persistent enough, he may find a judge to sign off on a search warrant. Not all the judges in this city are Maklin Brook fans.”

I slap the hood of his car before he backs up and drives through the gates. I follow on foot to talk to Gears who is manning the gate.

“We may get visitors of the official type. No one gets through the gate without a warrant. If you see anyone coming down the road, contact Puma or me right away.”



Gears frowns. "I know the drill."

"I know you do, but wanted to give you a heads up. Rafe said that the asshole who came by this morning is hunting for a search warrant."

"I'll be on alert," Gears assures me.

I return to the clubhouse. My first stop is Spark's office. I fill him in on Rafe's parting words.

"I'll reach out to Juliet. She has a contact in the courthouse who can let us know if a judge signs off on a warrant. I need to contact her about running a search for George Calloway. I've tried looking for him and I'm not finding him. He could be in hiding."

"Or dead."

Spark nods as I leave him and go in search of Puma. He needs to know about Rafe's concerns. I find him outside with Alisa and the kids.

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“Rafe leave?” I nod. “Can he help?”

I fill him in on our discussion and what we learned from the voicemails on Brigit’s phone before warning him about the search warrant. “Spark thinks Juliet can get us an advanced warning on the search warrant. I told Gears to contact you if he sees anyone coming our way.”

Puma nods. “Wish we could do more. Have you updated Havoc?”

“Not yet.”

“Let’s go to my office.” Alisa slides off Puma’s lap before he stands and gives her a deep kiss.

The kids make gagging noises, which has Alisa giggling. Puma growls and chases after the kids, making them scream and race around the playground to escape his tickles.

“He’s so good with them,” Brigit says, coming to stand next to me.

Alisa grins back at her. “He’s just a big kid himself.”

We watch as Puma stomps around with Angel and Elina hang over his shoulders as he drags Colt and Slade who have hold of his legs. After a few turns, he pries the kids off and promises he’ll play with them later.

“I’ll send Max and Viper out,” Puma tells Alisa, giving her another kiss.

“Sounds good. I thought Claudia might come out, but I haven’t seen her.”

“She’s in the kitchen with my dad,” Brigit says. “I just left them. They’re getting to know each other.” The smile on her face suggests they’re doing more than that.

“Claudia and Gramps? Well, I’ll be damned. Good for them.” Puma grins.

I take Brigit’s hand and lead her to Puma’s office. We take the seats in front of his desk while he calls Havoc.

“I was just about to call you. The police found two bodies. One of them was their own.”

“Detective Mark Harding?” I ask.

“How did you know?”

I tell Havoc about the voicemail messages.

“That fits with what I know. The other body was George Calloway. The medical examiner puts their deaths prior to MikePerry’s murder. Trash collectors found their bodies when they picked up the dumpsters outside the hotel. Whoever hid them there didn’t put in much of an effort.”

“The cops may want to talk to three people on the night shift,” Brigit says and gives Havoc the name of the three who called her. “Two talked with the cop. The security guard saw Mike there. Maybe Mike knew more about the cop than he let on. The housekeeper mentioned Mike not wanting her to go inside a specific conference room. Maybe that’s where the bodies were before someone dumped them?”

“We can check on them. See if they remember anything. I almost have my contact

ready to go to his superiors about Sully. Shit, I'll be glad to get back to being on the opposite side of the law, instead of helping the fucking cops do their job."

Puma and I laugh as Havoc ends the call.

"He isn't wrong. First, we were helping them solve the murder of Viper's dad and now this. Once we've cleared Brigit, I say we retire from the detective business and get back to causing trouble," Puma says.

Brigit and I leave Puma's office and return to the common room. "Want a drink?" I ask her, but she shakes her head. Instead, she leans up against me and kisses my chin.

"I want you."

Grinning, I grab her hand and yank her down the hall to my bedroom. I close the door and remove my kutte, while Brigit's fingers unfasten my belt. My dick lengthens in anticipation as I stare down into her pretty green eyes.

"Shouldn't you be getting undressed?" I ask her.

"I want to taste you first," she replies and oh boy, am I onboard.

She slides my boxers and jeans down, releasing my cock. He bobs in her face as she grins up at me. "Shirt off, cowboy. I want to see all of you." As I follow her orders, she takes me in her mouth and moans. Fuck me, that's a beautiful sound.

She rolls her tongue around the tip and down my length before using that gorgeous mouth on my balls. When she sucks in one and then the other, I press my nails into my palms to keep from shooting my load. She turns her full attention to my staff, licking up the vein until she wraps her hot little mouth around my dick. She takes me all the way, burying her nose in my pubes. How the hell she can take all of me? I'm

not small.

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“Fuck woman, where did you learn that?”

How did I live without her in my life? She’s better than I remember and believe me, my memories of her played over and over in my head since the day I left her behind. Hers was the face I saw whenever I jacked off in the shower. Hers was the face I saw whenever I was with another woman. This memory zaps some of the pleasure.

Brigit releases me with a pop. “Hey, where did you go? Was I not doing it right?”

I run my hand over my face and shake my head. Laughing at what an idiot I am. “You were doing it perfectly. I’m sorry. I just realized how much I’ve used you over the years and I feel like a fucking pervert.”

She stands up and places her hands on my chest. “I don’t understand. How could you have used me when I was in Boston and you were here?”

I shake my head and pull her against me, unable to face the judgement that’s coming. “I remembered how many times I jacked off to memories of you. But I also remembered how many times I fucked a woman but thought of you. I just feel like a perverted asshole.”

She stiffens, then pulls away. I look at her, expecting to see disgust. But do I see a smirk? “First, you’re my perverted asshole. I expect you to make it up to me by giving me a gazillionorgasms. Second, why would you feel bad about thinking of me? Makes me want to preen, knowing that my image has been stuck in your head all this time. After you left me in Boston, I thought you came back here and forgot about me. Knowing you didn’t? Well, can’t say that doesn’t make me feel a little smug.”

“Smug?”

“Smug,” she says with a nod. “Now, where was I?” She moves to slide back to her knees, but I stop her. Slamming my mouth against hers, I devour her. My dick’s harder than diamonds and wants release, but I don’t care. I need the intimacy of this kiss. When I come close to exploding between us, I end the kiss so we can both breathe. It takes several breaths before I can speak.

“If I’m supposed to give you a gazillion orgasms. I better get started.” I lift off her shirt and unbuckle her jeans as I toe off my boots. We undress and fall on the bed. I grab her and position her so she can still suck my cock, but this way, I get to taste her, too. Then it becomes a race to see who can get the other to cum first. I’m not too upset when we tie.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: BRIGIT

Damn the man. I’m trying to focus here. His magnificent dick almost slips out of my mouth when he sucks on my nub. In retaliation, I take him deep and hollow out my cheeks, causing his hips to jerk. Score one for me. But then he plays dirty by sliding his finger into my passage. I swallow around him just as he finds that perfect spot. Our bodies shimmy and shake in an orgasmic dance.

I giggle as I release his cock with a loud pop.

“You’re giggling?” He roars as he snags me around the waist and tickles me.

“Stop!” I screech, laughing harder.

“Don’t you know guys get a complex if their woman laughs while looking at his dick?”

I break free and straddle him. “I would never laugh at your magnificent dick.”

“Too right.” He grins at me while kneading my breasts.

“I was laughing because I’m happy.”

His grin widens. “Yeah? I’m happy, too.”

I lean down and kiss him.

His phone buzzes, which draws a snarl out of him.

“What?”

Feeling bratty, I shift so I can rub my pussy up and down his cock. He narrows his eyes at me as I feel him harden beneath me. Grinning, I speed up and watch his eyes roll.

“Is he okay?” The seriousness of his question stills me. I try to slide off, but he stops me. “Okay, I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

“Is everything okay?” I ask him when he ends the call.

He lifts me up before sliding me down his hardened shaft. “Now, it is.”

I open my mouth to ask him about the phone call, but a low moan escapes instead. Fuck, the man’s dick is a marvel. He uses his strength to lift and lower me as he powers his hips to slam himself deep into my core. In seconds, I reach the peak again and let myself fall.

He pats me on the butt as he shifts to move us off the bed. “Shower, and then I have



to go.”

“Where are you going?” I ask as I follow him into the bathroom. He turns on the water and waits for it to warm up before drawing me inside.

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“1%. My assistant manager cut his hand and is heading to the hospital. I need to fill in until Trouble can get one of his men to take over.”

“Trouble? Is he a member of the club? I haven’t met him.”

“No, he’s not. He’s the President of the Shadow Borns. They’re part owners of 1%. His guys and ours take turns covering the hotel.”

He fills the palm of his hand with shampoo before sliding his fingers through my hair. I melt when he massages my scalp. So good. He rinses out the shampoo before grabbing the conditioner. He glides his fingers gently through, detangling any knots with great care. I collapse into goo when he switches to soap and caresses my body with his powerful hands.

Once I’m clean, I return the favor. I think washing Wildcard is now my favorite activity, next to fucking him, that is. His muscles jump under my administrations and I feel all-powerful when I stroke his dick until he explodes.

“Oops, made a mess. Guess I’ll have to start over,” I purr.

He takes the soap from me. “You do that again and you’ll have to carry me out of the shower. I’ll finish cleaning myself. You can’t be trusted.”

I pout until he gives me a kiss before ducking under the spray to rinse off.

We dry off and return to the bedroom to dress.

“How long will you be gone?”

Wildcard pulls on his shirt and watches me. “You could come with me? I could give you a tour of the hotel.”

“Is it safe?”

“My shoulder’s healed enough,” he says, rotating his shoulder. “We could take the bike. No one can see you under the helmet. We have a private underground parking garage we don’t use very often. There’s an elevator that will take us up to the executive floor. What do you say?”

“Where you go, I go,” I reply.

We check on Colt and then tell Puma where we’re headed. Wildcard makes a detour downstairs into the basement. He’s back up in minutes, holding the helmet he bought me for our escape to Boston.

“You still have it?” I ask. My eyes mist as I take it from him.

“I hoped that one day you would need it again.”

I hug my helmet with one hand as he takes the other. He leads me outside and stops next to a bike I’ve never seen before. “This isn’t your bike.”

“It is. I still have the one you rode to Boston. Couldn’t part with it. I bought this one five years ago. Bought it the day I met Puma. He was in the store buying a bike and we got to talking.” He gestures toward the largest motorcycle I’ve ever seen sitting next to his.

“He’d need a bike that big, wouldn’t he?” I ask. It’s almost twice the size of

Wildcard's bike.

"Custom order. Well, it would have to be. They weren't expecting a giant to be shopping for a bike."

I laugh as he helps me put my helmet on. Flashes of the times he did this on our trip pass through my thoughts. I sigh when he finishes.

"What was that sigh for?"

"Memories."

He grins and swings his leg over the bike. I take his offered hand and brace my free hand on his shoulder to slide in behind him. Snuggling up close, I wrap my arms around his waist and hold on tight. This is my happy place. Memories slide in and out as he revs the bike and flies through the gate. The Strip looks entirely different when you're on the back of a motorcycle. The buildings feel closer and taller somehow. Even the lights seem brighter. Cool air passes over my exposed skin, making me grateful for my jeans, boots, and jacket. Too soon, we're pulling into a familiar parking lot. But instead of driving to the entrance like my cabbie Jason had done, Wildcard drives around to the side and down a small ramp. He slows to a stop in front of a gate and leans over to key in a series of numbers into a keypad. The gate opens, and he drives through. The parking garage isn't large. There are only a dozen parking spots.

He parks near the elevator and waits for me to climb off. I remove the helmet. My face hurts from smiling. I'm bouncing as he takes my helmet and hangs it on the handlebars.

"You enjoyed that, didn't you?"

I bob my head up and down. “I missed riding. Didn’t realize how much until now. That was the best trip yet.”

“Why?” He asks as he takes my hand and pulls me toward the elevator.

“Because you’re mine and I’m yours,” I reply.

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He stops and turns to face me. “You’re right. Shit. I knew I was enjoying the ride, but I thought it was just because you were back on my bike. But it wasn’t just that. It was because you will always be on the back of my bike. Damn woman. I love you.” He kisses me as the elevator doors close and doesn’t release me until they open again.

“Welcome to the Executive Floor of 1%.”

We’re in a utilitarian hallway with several doors baring silver plaques. This hallway lacks the luxury of the hotel, but it’s still nice. He stops in front of the door with his name on it and opens it. Inside is where they hid the luxury. A chrome u-shaped desk with a black smokey glass top sits to the left, so the occupant has a view of the city skyline. To my right is a table with six matching chairs in black leather and chrome. Along the glass windows is a black leather couch.

“Take a seat. There’s a bar inside the cupboard if you want to get anything to drink or eat. I’ll just be a few minutes.” Wildcard sits behind his desk and pulls a laptop out of a locked drawer. He powers it up and gives me a nod when I hold up a bottle of water. Handing it to him, I take a seat on the couch and stare at the city that is now my home.

In Boston, my office was on the first floor and I didn’t have a window. Mike’s office did, but it only looked out into the parking lot. I shudder when I realize that Misha’s goons could have shot me from that window if they hadn’t chosen to chase me down instead. I got lucky. Shaking off that thought, I try to determine what floor we’re on. I hadn’t been paying attention in the elevator. Was busy getting kissed. We’re not at the top of the building, but I conclude that we’re at least ten floors up.

My mind drifts as I watch the cars drive up and down the popular road. I can just make out forms as people walk past. Many stop and make the trek to 1%. This hotel is impressive, much grander than where I worked before. Funny that Wildcard and I both ended up working at hotels. The biggest difference being that he owns a stake in this one. I hear Wildcard talking on the phone, but it's just background noise. However, the knock on the door draws my attention. Turning, I see a man enter. He's wearing a kutte like Wildcard. He looks familiar, but I can't place him.

"Hey, man, what are you doing here?" Wildcard asks as they share a bro hug.

"Came to fill in for Speedster."

"How's he doing?"

"Five stitches. Fucking idiot. Not sure what he was doing, but I think we need to have another class on safety in the workplace."

Wildcard chuckles and beacons me to come over.

"Trouble, this is my woman, Brigit. Brigit, this is Trouble. He's the President of the Shadow Borns. I told you about him earlier."

"Hello," I say, offering him my hand.

"You were here the other night," Trouble says. "With a little boy. Your son." He turns to Wildcard.

That's when I realize where I've seen him before. He was standing at the front desk when I checked in. Along with a gorgeous woman. He'd been watching us.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: WILDCARD

“You saw Colt?” I ask Trouble, who grins at me.

“Cute little boy, you have there. He looks just like you. At least that’s what I told Puma when I called him. Sent him a photo.” Wildcard glances at Brigit. “Sorry about that. I did it without thinking. Colt looked so much like Wildcard that I just reacted.”

I remember the smug look on Puma’s face when I told him I was coming to 1% to get Brigit. The fucker knew about Colt and didn’t warn me. “Fuck.”

“What?” Brigit asks.

“Puma. The night I came to get you. He knew about Colt and didn’t tell me.”

“Tell your President he owes me a beer,” Trouble says. “Now, you two can get going and enjoy yourselves. I’ll stay until the night manager shows up. Dice is working, right?”

“He is. I updated him. He’s coming in early to relieve you.”

“Thanks, man. Nice meeting you Brigit. What are you two up to?”

“I thought I’d give Brigit a tour of the hotel. I’m trying to convince her to come work as our HR Manager. It’s what she was doing in Boston.”

“Yes, please, we’ll pay you whatever you want. Whatever you were making in Boston, we’ll double it. Fuck, triple it.” Trouble begs.

I glance at Trouble in surprise. Puma is usually the one opening the purse strings while Trouble keeps a tight grip. “What happened?”

“Chill is a fucking outstanding SOA, but what makes her so good at scaring the shit



out of everyone doesn't make employees comfortable enough to talk with her about their problems."

"They're scared of her?"

"Fucking terrified. We have people quitting rather than going to her."

“Shit, that’s not good.”

“They quit this when my club is working. People know she’s a Demon Dawg, so they wait until the Shadow Borns are working before they quit. Speedster said he’s lost five people today and three yesterday. They wouldn’t tell him why they turned in their notice. He didn’t push it. He was afraid they’d walk instead of finishing their shifts. Didn’t want to be left shorthanded.”

“Did anyone do an exit interview with them?” Brigit asks.

Trouble shakes his head. “What the fuck is that?”

She chuckles. “Exactly like it sounds. You sit with the employee and ask them why they’re leaving. It’s voluntary, but they can be useful. Sometimes people leave for purely personal reasons. However, to have that many leave at the same time. That speaks to a problem. Have there been any policy changes? Or personnel changes? Maybe changes in working conditions? Any of those can lead to turnover.”

“No. We’ve had the same policies in place for about a year now. Until recently, we’ve had little staff turnover. I don’t know about working conditions. What do you mean?”

“It’s a pretty broad topic, but it could be anything from having to deal with faulty equipment to management. Sometimes, a change in management can cause teams to quit. Are these people from the same department or area?”

“I don’t know. Haven’t talked with them. Speedster should know, or it will be on the

computer.”

“See, this is why we need you,” Trouble says, pointing at Brigit. “You need to figure this out and help us fix the problem.”

“We need to clear her of a murder charge first,” I say, saving Brigit from responding.

“Have you given her the influence tour? That should get her to agree.”

I chuckle and take her hand as we leave my office. After locking it up, I fist bump Trouble. “I’ll show her the highlights.”

“Good man.” Trouble moves down the hall and into his office.

“Influence tour?” Brigit asks.

“Something I did with Angelica. Angel’s mom. We wanted to convince her to stay in Vegas and keep Angel close for Max and Viper’s sake. She was working as a cocktail server for another casino. Alisa and I thought maybe if we showed her how we treat our employees, she’d agree to work here. It worked. Better than we expected. She won’t be a server, but will do something much more important.”

“Like what?”

“I’ll show you. Part of the tour includes the pool, weight room, locker room, and spa, but those are downstairs. Should probably stay clear of the public areas for now. Employees have full access to these areas. They can use the pools and the weight rooms on their breaks or during non-working hours. We encourage them to bring their family and friends, too. The employees can get free massages at the spa and a discount on other services. We also have a hair salon, a barbershop, and a tattoo parlor. They get discounts there, too.”

“Tattoo parlor?”

I shrug. “We’re bikers.”

Brigit chuckles as I step up to the door of the daycare center we created for the employees. No one who found themselves in this hallway would realize what was behind the door. A one-way mirror on the wall lets those inside see who is outside, but keeps prying eyes off the kids. The room is soundproofed, so no one walking by can hear the chaos that it’s inside. I hold my keycard up to the reader and open the door.

I watch Brigit as her eyes go wide at the organized chaos inside. At any time, day or night, there are usually kids hanging out inside. Older kids take over the television and video game controllers in one corner. But we also have a second television with more kid-friendly games for the younger ones. Tables fill the space which allows kids to play board games, color, or do other crafts. The third corner contains several bean bags and massive pillows, along with bookcases and eReaders that the kids can use. Against the walls are various arcade games.

“Wildcard!” I hear right before a bullet slams into my legs. Looking down, I see Mal.

“Hey, Mal. I didn’t know you were here. Did you come with Trouble?”

“And me,” says Corrine as she glides her way through the chaos.

“Corrine and Mal, this is Brigit. Brigit, I want you to meet Corrine. She’s Trouble’s Old Lady. This is her son Mal., Who is...”

“Puma’s son. I can see the resemblance,” Brigit says with a laugh as she smiles at the boy and then his mother.

“Yeah, he didn’t get anything from me.”

“Except your intelligence, right Mom?”

Corrine laughs as I ruffle Mal’s hair. “Good thing.”

Corrine grins at Brigit. “Actually, Puma is a genius.”

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“But we have to keep him humble,” Mal finishes.

“That’s what Puma says,” Corrine assures Brigit. “I’d never badmouth him. He’s a great dad to Mal and Elina.”

“I’ve seen him with the kids. He’s been great with Colt. My son. Our son.”

“That’s where I’ve seen you. You were here at the hotel a few nights ago with a little boy that looked just like Wildcard. Trouble will be happy to know he was right.”

“We just saw him. Sorry for dragging you guys back here. I didn’t know the old man would get the short straw.”

Corrine waves me off. “I had to come here, anyway. I’m meeting Alisa to talk about the charity event we’re working on. Plus, she’s taking Mal back to the Demon Dawgs clubhouse. Mal splits his time between the two clubhouses.” She says the last to Brigit.

“What charity are you guys working on now?”

“For the homeless. Called Homeward Bound. We’re purchasing a small hotel and fitting it out into apartments. Those who want the opportunity are required to foster a pet while living there. They’re responsible for training and caring for the animals and helping to get them adopted.”

“That’s an interesting take,” Brigit says. “Gives them companionship and motivation.”

“That’s the idea,” Corrine beams. “Oh, there’s Alisa. It was nice meeting you. I’m certain we’ll see each other often.”

Mal races off to hug Alisa while Corinne follows. I turn to Brigit. “How about dinner? I’ll show you what I think is the best perk for our employees.”

I lead Brigit down the hall to our employee cafeteria. Like the daycare center, we find several employees in the cafeteria.

“We have your typical casino buffet with everything we serve to the public. But you can also order meals from each restaurant. Employees eat free.”

“You spend a lot of money on your employees,” Brigit comments as she scopes out the offerings on the buffet.

“Our employees make us a lot of money. It’s why we don’t understand why so many are leaving us. The pay is better than other places, and we offer several perks. We listen to our employees and implement new programs all the time. Angelica is implementing our most recent one. We’re expanding the childcare facility to include tutoring. Angelica has her teaching credentials, and she’s excited about using them. We’ve never had a problem with employee turnover until recently. I can’t imagine that Chill is the only reason people are leaving.”

“We’ll need to talk to the employees who turned in their notice. That’s the best place to start. I can do that. If you could get me an office or a conference room. I can stay out of sight and talk to them before their last day. For those who quit and left, I could call them. See if they’ll talk to me.” Brigit loads her plate with spare ribs, mashed potatoes, corn, and pasta salad while I go for the Thai food.

“Really? That would be a great help. You can use the office near mine. It was Liz’s, the former HR Manager.”

We finish eating, and I take her to the office she can use. The look of awe on her face tells me she likes the space. Good. She moves to the window and stares at the view that is like mine.

“I love this office.”

“Good. It’s yours.” I grin.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: BRIGIT

I shake my head at Wildcard, but smile back.

“Since I’m here, I can pay back all that you and your club are doing for me,” I tell him. “Why don’t I talk to the workers who have turned in their notice? If they’re still here at work.”

Wildcard frowns. “You don’t have to do that, but I won’t say no. You’re certain?”

I nod. “It will get my feet wet and after that tour, I’m curious why anyone would want to quit.”

Wildcard huffs. “Yeah, we don’t get it either. I’ll get you a computer, but in the meantime, let me grab the personnel folders from Trouble.”

I search the desk until I find a pad of paper and a few pens I can use to take notes. As I wait for Wildcard to return, I jot down a few general questions. I also make a list of potential areas of concern based on past experience. Most of the time, money is the great motivator to leave one job for another. That could be the case here. Even though 1% has the perks, if they aren’t offering great pay and benefits, another casino probably could. I made a note to find out the hourly rate and salaries for each position. Also, it would help to know what benefits other casinos in the area offer



their employees. By the time Wildcard returns, I have several pages filled with actionable items and another with potential questions for the employees.

“Here are the files for all the employees who have quit in the past week,” Wildcard says, as he drops them on my desk. Trouble is right behind him.

“I sent Reggie to locate Bianca Lake. I know she’s working tonight as a cocktail server. Someone can cover her station while she visits with you. We’ll reimburse her for lost tips.” Trouble says. “Thanks for doing this. I hate losing people.”

I glance through the folders to find Bianca’s folder. As I search through them, I notice a pattern until I reach the last folder. “Most of them are women. Just one man.”

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“Is that significant? Most of our employees are women,” Trouble says. “I’d say over seventy percent.”

“I don’t know, but it could be. Harassment is often a contributing factor to turnover.”

“But we don’t tolerate harassment,” Wildcard assures me. “The employees know we’ll protect them. If we see anyone on the floor making a staff member uncomfortable, we kick them out. Whether they’re customers or employees.”

I nod. “That’s good to know. You said all these people quit this past week? Prior to then, turnover rates were low?”

“Yeah.”

“Anything change in the last three or six months?”

Wildcard and Trouble glance at each other before turning back to me. “Why would that matter? These guys quit this past week.”

“Most people don’t make a snap judgement and quit. Usually, the decision takes months, if not longer. Depends on the situation.”

“So, you think something that happened a few months ago triggered their exodus? That makes sense,” Wildcard says. “We lost our HR Manager six months ago. She went on maternityleave and we hired a temp. The temp stayed for eight weeks. Chill’s been handling it since.”

“Not Chill,” Trouble corrects him. “Or at least, not just Chill. She has Viper helping her out since she doesn’t like the touchy-feely aspects of HR. Her words.” Trouble says, raising his hands in defense.

“I think the word you’re looking for is empathy, but I get what you’re saying. One wouldn’t expect a SOA to have much empathy.”

Trouble and Wildcard chuckle. “No, that wouldn’t be a good quality in a SOA.”

“Okay, I have something to work with.”

Trouble and Wildcard leave while I review Bianca’s folder. A few minutes later, someone knocks softly on the door. Standing, I walk over and open it. Standing on the other side is one of the tallest women I’ve ever seen. I’d have to see her next to Viper to know for certain. Her golden eyes and skin the color of black coffee make me think of a panther. She glides into the room as gracefully as one.

“I’m Bianca. You wanted to see me?” Her voice is musical.

“My name is Brigit Jones. Wildcard and Trouble asked me to speak with you. I have a background in Human Resources. They’re concerned because several people have turned in their notice. I’m hoping to find out why and, if there’s a problem they can fix, help them fix it so they don’t lose more people. Would you be willing to talk to me?” I gesture toward the couch near the wall of windows rather than the desk.

She studies me with her cat-like eyes before nodding and walking toward the couch. Her glide would make a runway model jealous. Her straight, black hair falls like an oil geyser from a high ponytail. The short black skirt she’s wearing reveals mile-long legs. She looks like a showgirl. Under the casino’s kutte, she’s wearing a white t-shirt that glows against her gorgeous skin. She sinks onto the couch and watches me expectantly as I join her.

“Why did they ask you to meet with me?”

“They were hoping I could talk you into staying. I was hoping to learn more about why you decided to leave 1%. I see in your file that you’ve been a server here for just over a year. Are you not happy here?”

Bianca studies me for a long minute before she answers. “I don’t know if I can trust you.”

“I get that. Since we’ve never met before. I used to work in Boston as the HR Manager for a small hotel. Nothing like this place. I grew up in Vegas and recently returned. I know Wildcard and he mentioned they needed an HR Manager. From what I understand, their previous manager went on maternity leave and hasn’t come back. He said Chill has been filling in until they can find someone permanent. I’m considering taking the job. Since he and Trouble were concerned about an increased turnover rate, I offered to find out what I could. Does that help?”

“No.”

“Okay.” I put the pen down and study Bianca. She stares back at me defiantly, but I see a sense of fear in her golden eyes. “You can go, and I’m sorry to have wasted your time.”

“That’s it?”

“I can’t make you talk to me. That isn’t what I want. I was hoping you’d want to tell me why you want to leave. Especially if the reason is something they need to fix.”

“What makes you think there is something to fix?”

“Because Wildcard gave me a tour and told me about all the perks they offer. I saw

your file, so I know they offer benefits and a decent salary. Although, I don't know enough about the area to know if others pay more. Like I said, if you're leaving because another casino or hotel is offering you more pay or better benefits, then I'd like to tell Wildcard they need to revisit their compensation package."

"It isn't the salary or the benefits," Bianca says.

I wait for her to continue, so when she doesn't, I thank her. "Okay. I'll let them know. Thank you."

When she doesn't get up to leave, I raise an eyebrow in question. I've dealt with nervous, angry, scared, and resentful employees, but I can't make out Bianca. She's angry and a little scared, but she's also watchful. It's as if she thinks I'm setting her up. At least that's the feeling I'm getting. Chalking it up to my being unfamiliar, I wait her out.

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“Why is the hotel suddenly worried about its employees again?”

I frown at her question as I dismantle it. According to Wildcard and Trouble, they’ve always watched out for their employees. But Bianca is saying otherwise. Did they stop? Is that why people are leaving? I could understand if this was true. People tend not to work in unsafe environments, especially if they have options. Vegas has options.

“Someone harassed you?” I ask. She nods. “Did they hurt you?”

“I didn’t give him the chance.”

“Was it a customer or an employee?”

“Is this a trap? To see if I squeal?”

I jerk back in surprise. “I’m not trying to trap you. Wildcard asked me as a personal favor to find out why people are leaving. He genuinely wants to understand what’s happening. He assured me the club doesn’t let customers harass the staff. That they’ll boot any customer who does. They don’t care who the customer is. Having met Puma and Trouble, I believe they’d do just that. But you’re saying otherwise?”

“He threatened me. Told me if I talked to you, he’d find me and hurt me. That he’d hurt the others.”

Looks like I found the reason.

“A customer or an employee?”

She blinks. “An employee.”

“Can you tell me who?”

“Can you protect me?”

I narrow my eyes. “Oh yeah, I’ll make certain you’re protected. Wildcard and Trouble told me they didn’t tolerate anyone harassing their employees. Customers or employees. So, I know they’ll want to fix this. They were both adamant.”

“They’re bikers,” Bianca said with a shrug. “I’ve seen them kick out customers who bothered the other servers. But this guy works for them. That’s why I told the others not to complain to HR. Chill didn’t believe me when I told her. Said I was lying because she trusted him over me. He’s one of theirs.”

“He’s a biker?”

Bianca nods. “His name is Max.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: WILDCARD

“Think Brigit will find out why we’re losing our staff?” Trouble asks as I follow him into his office.

“I do,” I say without having to think about it. “Might take some time, but I think she’ll dig. She thinks she owes the club because we’re protecting her and we gave her dad a home again.”

“Her dad’s Preacher, right? I remember him. Where did he go?”

“Prison. From what he’s said, I think Squiggy set him up. He got out not too long ago and lived up at Red Rock Canyon. Viper ran into him and invited him to come visit the club.”

“How long ago did he go in?” Trouble asks with a frown.

“Six years ago, why?”

“That fucker Squiggy. He was bragging one night about setting a guy up to go to prison. Claimed he wanted something the guy had and planned on taking it once he was safely in prison.”

“Brigit,” I breathe out in anger. I suspected that was his game. Knowing I was right doesn’t make me feel vindicated. It makes me angry that Squiggy is already dead.

I consider going to my office to get work done and leave Trouble alone, but Brigit calls and asks me to come back to her office. “Did you interview everyone already?”

“No, I will, but we have a problem that needs solving.” I nod for her to continue. She relates what she’s learned. When I shake my head, Bianca backs away. Brigit steps closer to the woman and draws herself up.

“You told me you protect your employees. Was that a lie?”

Her question jolts me. “No, of course it wasn’t. But Max? I know Max. He would hurt no one. She has to be mistaken.”



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“He said his name was Max, and that he was a member of the Demon Dawgs. That, since he was an owner, he could do whatever he wanted.”

I stare at the girl as my mind processes her words. Her description of Max doesn't fit the man I know. Max isn't a member. He's a prospect, so he has no stake in the hotel. Yet. “He's hardly ever here,” I protest. “He spends most of his time at the clubhouse with the kids and the Old Ladies.”

“He's always here and watching us,” Bianca corrects me.

I glance at Trouble, who shrugs. “Can't say I've seen him here. If he's pulling stunts like this, then I imagine he'd stay out of sight of the brothers.”

“But this isn't like him,” I protest. “There's only one way to know for certain.” Pulling out my phone, I send a text to Chill and tell her to bring Max to 1%. She replies that they're on their way.

“If he sees me, he'll kill me,” Bianca says, shaking. Brigit puts her arm around the girl to calm her.

“No, he won't. If he did these things, he won't be bothering anyone,” I assure her. What I don't say is that he won't be bothering anyone ever again. He'll be too scared, or more likely, too dead.

“You said he watches you. Has he done anything else?” I ask Bianca. The haunted look in her eyes tells me the story. “Son of a bitch!” I explode and punch the wall. “How could this have happened here? Where the fuck was security?”

“He knows the blind-spots,” Bianca says.

“Has he hurt you?” Brigit asks.

Bianca shrugs. “He’s bruised my breasts by grabbing them and he’s grabbed my pussy. I don’t think he’s raped anyone. At least not that I know of. But it’s only a matter of time. I know I’m not the only one he’s gone after. He tells us we belong to him. When I fought him off, he laughed and told me they’d have fun breaking me. He said that as bikers, they own us and he can do whatever he wants.”

“That’s fucking bullshit!” Trouble explodes. “I can’t believe Chill heard this and brushed it off. What the fuck is she thinking?”

“I didn’t tell Chill everything,” Bianca says. “All this started happening after Liz left. I went to the temp who was filling in and made my first complaint. That just made everything worse. He threatened to kill me if I complained again.”

“I thought you spoke to Chill?” Brigit asks.

“When I heard she fired the temp, I went to Chill. When Chill didn’t believe me, I expected Max to retaliate. However, he said nothing about it. But he’s still harassing us.”

“We need to talk to the others,” Trouble says. “I don’t understand how this happened. We also need to fix the holes in our security. This should never have happened. Our employees need to feel safe. Has any other club member bothered you?”

Bianca shakes her head. “Just Max.”

“And you say he’s targeted other girls?” Brigit asks. When Bianca nods, she glances at me. “There is more going on here than just a horny biker enthralled with a

beautiful woman. He's targeting multiple women. He's a psychopath."

This makes no sense. I've never seen Max hit on any of the women who hang out at the club. I've even considered the possibility that he's gay and just not comfortable telling us yet. Not that anyone would care, but I could understand a prospect not wanting to give club members a reason to boot him.

When the door opens and Chill steps in with Max and Viper, I'm fuming mad. I swing on Max and grab him by the t-shirt, lifting him up and slamming him against the wall.

"What the fuck?" Chill and Viper explode. Each coming to stand on either side of me. Neither dares to interfere since I'm the VP. I outrank them.

"You attacked that girl?" I demand of Max, whose frightened eyes dart around the room.

"What girl? I didn't attack anyone!" Max chokes out.

"Don't fucking play dumb," I snarl.

"Wait," comes a small voice from behind him. "That's not him."

I keep hold of Max but turn my attention to Bianca, who is standing right behind me.

"What?"

"That's not him. He looks like him. But that isn't the same guy. The guy who attacked me was a few years older, and he has blue eyes, not green."

"Wait, I know you," Chill says. "You came to file a complaint against—" She turns

slowly and looks at Max. “Max.”

“I didn’t attack her!” Max protests. “I swear it. You know me. I’d never hurt a woman.”

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Chill nods. "That's what I said. I thought you were lying. How do we know she isn't?"

"Because I interviewed her and she told me what happened," Brigit says. "She turned in her notice because you didn't believe her. Or protect her. She's not the only one. There are others who claim Max harassed them."

Chill swings to look at Brigit. "I never heard anyone else complain. Just her."

"I told them not to bother going to you after what you said to me," Bianca snaps back.

"Okay, hold on a minute," I say, letting Max slide back to the floor. "Is this the man who accosted you?" I ask Bianca, pointing at Max.

She shakes her head. "They look similar, but that's not him."

"But, he said his name was Max?" Brigit asks. Bianca nods.

"Was he wearing this kutte or one like mine?" I ask.

"Umm, neither, he wore a 1% kutte," Bianca replies, then her eyes go wide. "I'm an idiot. I'm sorry, I didn't put that together until now. If he was a member of the Demon Dawgs, he would have been wearing your kutte." She shifts closer and stares up into Max's face. "You're not him. I got a good look at him when he had me up against the wall with his hand up my skirt."

“What?” shouts Chill and Viper.

“That’s why I asked you down here. Some asshole is physically harassing our staff. He told her his name was Max and that he’s a member of the Demon Dawgs. Don’t know if it is his real name or if he’s impersonating our Max.”

“He shouldn’t be hard to find if he looks like our Max,” Chill says. She turns to Bianca. “I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you. Seems like I screwed up when I fired that Clark bitch.”

“She wasn’t any help,” Bianca says. “I went to her first. She told me to suck it up. Told me that the club members could do whatever they wanted because they owned the hotel. I think she told him I complained, because he threatened me afterwards.”

“This is no how we do things here,” I say. “We need to tighten security and figure out how this guy harassed women without someone seeing him. I don’t like it. The employees have to feel safe here.” I reiterate. “Do you think you’ll stay if we take care of Max?”

Bianca shrugs. “I enjoy working here, so yeah. But I won’t lie. I’m scared.”

“We’ll make sure you’re protected. I’ll contact Spark and tell him what’s going on. He’s pulling the feed to see if we can spot this fake Max. We’ll also be reviewing all the cameras to eliminate blind spots,” Chill says.

“I’ll follow up with the other employees who gave notice,” Brigit says. “Maybe if they know we’re rectifying the situation, they’ll stay. But I also want to make sure we aren’t overlooking another issue.”

“I can spread the word,” Bianca offers. “I know who most of the others are. But what about the ones who already left?”

I share a look with Trouble. He looks as surprised as I feel. “What do you mean? The ones who already left? I have eight people who turned in their two-week notice, but they’re still working.”

“Not them. The ones that stopped coming in,” Bianca says. She frowns when we just look at her. “I know of five girls who stopped coming in to work. He harassed them, too.”

“We’ll talk to them, too,” Brigit says, walking Bianca to the door. After she shuts it, she turns to look at me. “What’s going on?”

I glance at Trouble and shake my head. “I don’t fucking know.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: BRIGIT

“I take it you have computer records. Not everything is on hard copy, right?” I ask.

“We have records on the computer, but only Spark knows how to access them,” Trouble says. I look at him, and he shrugs. “What? We’re old school.”

I shake my head.

“There is a computer in the HR office,” Chill says. “I can take you there and we’ll get you access.”

I look around the room. “I thought this was the HR office?”

“No, this is your HR office because Wildcard wants you nearby,” Chill says with a smirk. “I’ll take you to the other office.”

Viper and Max follow us out the door, and we head down one floor. Chill unlocks a

door and lets me precede her inside. Most of the office is clean and orderly, but the desk looks like someone's dumped out all the drawers.



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“Did someone search in here?” Viper asks.

“Yeah, me,” Chill says with a shrug. “I was looking for the contact information for the temp agency. Couldn’t find it and got frustrated.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but why did they put you in charge of HR?” I ask her.

The three of them laugh. “I know, right? I told Puma he was making a mistake, but since I fired the last bitch, he told me I had to do the job until we hired a replacement. Pretty sure he regrets it, but he won’t give in. So believe me when I say that I’m grateful Wildcard has talked you into taking the job.”

“Why did you fire the temp?”

“She snapped at me,” Chill says. I just stare at her without blinking. “What? I came in here to talk to her about something and she snapped my head off. She’s lucky I only fired her.”

“Okay, let me see what I can find.” I say, taking the seat behind the desk. The others spread out around the room.

“This fake Max guy...” Viper starts, and Max groans.

“Can we come up with a different name?”

Viper chuckles. “Brigit will find his name. But I was thinking. If he looks so much

like Max, is it possible dear old dad left us another surprise gift?"

"You think he might be your brother?" I ask.

Viper shrugs. "Maybe. We just discovered that we have a little sister. Half-sister. Maybe we have an older half-brother?"

"Angel is your half-sister, right?"

"She is. We found out when we ran a DNA test. Avery noticed how much Angel looked like she could be our daughter." Both she and Max shudder at the thought, making me laugh.

They entertain me with the story of how Viper learned Max was her long-lost twin and the chaos that followed when their dad showed up at the clubhouse to claim Angel.

Viper tells me about her father's murder and how someone tried to frame Viper. How Rafe broke rules to protect her. That makes me feel better about trusting him. I'm clicking through the HR records looking for a photo of anyone who looks like Max. I start several weeks back since that's when Bianca said he first showed up. Doesn't take me long to locate him.

"Got him," I say. "Walt Turner. He started working here three months back."

The three of them shift to stand behind him.

"Damn, he could be your twin, Max," Chill says.

I hear a punch and Chill's chuckle. "I'm his twin. He can only have one."

“Who’s his manager?” Chill asks.

“Pamela Clark.”

“That fucking bitch. I bet she’s in on it, whatever the fuck this is. She’s the temp who started when Liz went on maternity leave. She put him in the system three days after she started. Do we have an address?”

I read off the address and Chill swears. “That’s the address of the hotel. Well, damn.”

“Looks like I have access to payroll. Maybe we can learn more.”

I click through to the payroll program and find that his paycheck is automatically deposited every two weeks to a local bank. So no help there.

“At least we have a picture. Send that to me and I’ll forward it to the guys. They can share it with security. I’ll also send his information to Spark. Maybe he can find him.”

“What if he isn’t working alone?” Viper asks. “Security should have caught this guy harassing the women.”

While they discuss this thought, I follow up on a different hunch and type in Pamela Clark’s name. I’m not surprised when she pops up. I click through to the payroll section and see she’s been receiving a paycheck deposited into the same bank as Walt. In fact... “Pamela’s listed as an employee and she’s been earning a paycheck. Even after you fired her. It’s not only going into the same bank as Walt, but into the same account. If she came from a temp agency, wouldn’t you be paying them?”

“Yes, god dammit. That bitch. Show me.” Chill comes back around the desk and nods. “Yep, that’s her. Her timesheet shows she checks in daily. Someone is clocking

her in. Let's see..." She clicks a few keys and then nods. "Walt keys in at the same time. He might clock her in, too. He usually clocks in at 3:00. We're coming up on that soon."

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“How does that work? Is there a computer where they log in when they arrive?”

“Any computer will take their employee id and log it. But we can find out which one she used. I’ll call Spark and get him searching. He can grab the image off the security feed.”

“Are you calling the cops?” I ask.

Chill shakes her head. “No. Not yet. I don’t think we have the complete story.”

“How about I talk to the other girls Walt harassed? Might learn more.” I offer.

“Good idea. I’m going downstairs. It’s almost time for Walt to show up. Viper, you coming, or do you want to stay and help Brigit?”

“I’ll stay. I can help convince the girls that Max isn’t the bad guy they think he is,” Viper says, punching her brother on the arm as he rolls his eyes.

I go through the stack of employee files Trouble gave me and call up the next one. Tanya is a blackjack dealer who I catch on a break. When she knocks on the door, Viper opens it and lets the girl come in. She’s vastly different from Bianca, with short blonde hair, pale skin, and big brown eyes. Although she has a forceful personality and it shows the minute she sees Max.

“What the hell? I’m out of here.” She turns to the door, but Viper stands in her way.

“Wait, this isn’t Max. Well, yes, it is Max, but it isn’t the Max who harassed you. In

fact, that guy isn't Max. His name is Walt." Viper rushes through the explanation. Her explanation seemsto cause confusion instead of comfort from the look on Tanya's face.

"What?"

"I didn't explain it right..." Viper looks at me.

"We spoke with Bianca. She told us why she turned in her notice and why others have as well. She mentioned a man named Max who made threats against her. He told her he was a member of the Demon Dawgs. He isn't. However, this Max is. But he's rarely at the casino. Bianca confirmed that this wasn't the same man, even though they look similar."

Tanya glares at me, but turns to look at Max, who is standing a few feet away. Close enough for her to see him, but far enough away so as not to intimidate her. I see it when she realizes the truth.

"That isn't the same man. You could be twins."

Viper chuckles. "They're not. We are. Look, I'm an Enforcer with the Demon Dawgs. Max is my twin brother, and he's a prospect. We learned that there is a man working here who looks like Max and is pretending to be him. His name is Walt. We understand that he's been harassing women. Bianca admitted that the only reason she's leaving is to get away from him. We're searching for Walt and we will find him. We're hoping you and the others will stay once we do."

"If that's true, then yes, I want to stay. But he scares me. I'd seen him around the casino, but he didn't talk to me until a week ago. He said he was with the club and that he could help me move up. I'm a blackjack dealer and I love it. Told him no thanks. He didn't like it. He said that women don't say no to bikers and that I should

get used to doing as I'm told."

Max and Viper frown at each other. "That's not true. I mean, maybe for other clubs. But not the Demon Dawgs. Did you believe him?"

"No. I know Trouble and Dice. They've both sat at my table. I considered talking to them, but then Bianca said she talked with the HR lady, Pamela. Pamela told Bianca that things were changing. I figured that was my cue to leave."

"Okay, thanks Tanya. We don't want to keep you any longer. I hope you stay on," I say to her. She nods and turns toward the door.

"That's two down. Five more to go."

We repeat the process five more times. Their stories are the same, so we learn very little more, but we convinced all of them to stay on. I also speak to the sole male who is leaving, only to discover that he's moving across the country to be with his girl. As he leaves, Bianca shows up. She's out of breath when she enters the room. Almost as if she ran up the stairs.

"I caught you, good. I was talking to some of the other servers and they reminded me of something. Max, the fake Max, talked to other girls who worked here. They quit, too. I can get some names if you want to call them. I knew two, casually. Ingrid Bolger and Jasmine Lee."

I look up their names and find the girls, but both are listed as currently employed.

"You said they quit?"

"I think so. I haven't seen either of them for several weeks. They were the two who warned me about Max."

“Thanks, Bianca. Here’s my number. If you think of any other employees who fake Max approached. Call me.” She takes the scrap of paper with my number, waves and leaves us.

Viper looks at me. “What?”

“Both women show as being employed by the casino. I checked and they both usually check in at the same time as Max. They’re getting paychecks sent directly to the bank.”

“Let me guess. The same one as Walt and Pamela?”



“Same account, too.”

“Can you search on that account? See if others are set to that account?”

I complete the search and look at Viper and Max. “Twenty-seven.”

### CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: WILDCARD

Trouble and I head to the casino floor to find Reggie. He’s a prospect, like Max, but he’s been working here longer. He’s Angelica’s man and will probably be Angel’s step-father one day. We brought Reggie into the fold, hoping Angelica would stay close. But we’re finding Reggie to be more than we expected. Knowing that fake Max has been harassing women with impunity, I don’t feel comfortable trusting anyone but Reggie. Something we’ll rectify soon. But first, we need to find fake Max and take him to The Pit for Chill. When we find Reggie, I tell him what we’ve learned about fake Max.

“Son of a bitch, I’ve seen him,” Reggie admits.

“Today?”

“No, not today. I think I saw him yesterday, or the day before. I thought he was Max. He was far enough away from me he didn’t see me wave. I figured he was here to pick up an Old Lady or one of the kids. Shit.”

“Don’t beat yourself up. None of us noticed him either. He’s been here for several weeks.”

I answer my phone when I see Chill's name. She tells me what they've found about fake Max. "His name is Walt Turner. He's scheduled to start at 3:00. It's almost that time. Let's spread out and search for him. Max, the real Max, is upstairs with Brigit."

We split up and wander the floor. I see Bianca and make my way to her station. She's talking with two other servers and a bartender. When she sees me, she gestures me over.

"I was telling them about how Max isn't a member of the club."

"Not the man you know of as Max," I clarify. "His real name is Walt Turner. We're looking for him. He's scheduled to work at 3:00. If you see him, don't approach him. Just let one of us know. Okay?"

Bianca and the others nod as I continue my circuit. We're coming up on three. He should be in the building. I've made one circuit when my phone buzzes again. This time it's Spark.

"He just clocked in. I see him on the security feed. He's in receiving."

"Watch him. I'm getting the others."

Spotting Chill, I gesture her over. "Spark found him. He's in receiving. Grab Trouble and I'll grab Reggie."

"We'll surround him and take him to The Pit?" Chill asks.

I grin at her.

"Hot damn!" She jogs off in search of Trouble.

I spot Reggie as he's making his way toward me. "Saw Chill. She told me where to find you. Should I request backup?"

"No. We don't know if he's working alone. I have a hard time believing that he's avoided security without help. We'll find out. In the meantime. The four of us can take him. Let's go."

I get Spark back on the phone. "Is he still there?"

"Yeah. I logged into the system. He's entered his employee number, but he's also entering several others. What the hell is he doing?"

"I don't know. That's a question Chill will ask him when she gets her hands on him."

Receiving is our hub for all deliveries to the casino and the hotel. It's a smart place to use the computer. The bay is usually empty unless we have a delivery. Then whoever is working the delivery is too busy to pay attention to anything else. I see Trouble and Chill coming from the opposite direction. We'll reach Walt at the same time. I can see enough of his profile to understand how so many mistook this asshole for our Max. His focus isn't on his surroundings, but on the computer. He doesn't sense us. Fucking idiot.

Chill, being the SOA, takes the lead. She doesn't give him a chance to defend himself. She kicks his knee hard. We hear a pop as he buckles. Before he can scream, she has him in a chokehold. He passes out seconds later. Dropping him to the floor, she pulls out two thick zip ties and binds his wrists behind him before moving to his feet. She tosses him into a nearby supply closet before taking out her phone.

"Max, need you to grab the SUV. We have cargo to load up in receiving."

The staff unloading a meat and poultry delivery for the restaurants ignores us as they

hustle to get the truck unloaded. When they're done, the truck drives off and we're alone in the warehouse. Max reverses into the now empty spot and hops out of the SUV, along with Brigit and Viper. I send Max the stink eye for bringing Brigit with them.

He holds his hands up. "I couldn't stop her without hog tying her to the desk. Besides, I think you need to hear what she has to say."

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I fold my arms as Brigit approaches. “You shouldn’t be here. Club business.”

She positions herself so that she’s facing me with her back to activity going on behind her. Viper and Max carry Walt’s limp form to the SUV and toss him inside as if he were a sack of flour. Brigit’s eyes never leave mine.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I just came down here to tell you what I’ve found. The HR person Chill fired entered herself into the system as an employee. She received a paycheck from 1% and the temp agency. The check goes into the same account as Walt’s. But that’s not all. Bianca came to see me. She said several girls Walt was harassing left the casino. However, when I checked their names, they are still listed as active employees. Their checks are going into the same account.”

“Fuck,” I say, rubbing my hand over my face. “They’ve been stealing from us?”

“It’s worse than that,” Brigit says. “I tried contacting the two employees Bianca mentioned. Their phones are inactive. So, I tried calling their emergency contacts. The girls are missing. No one has seen them since their last shift here.”

I glare at the SUV as Max drives off. Chill and Viper walk toward us.

“Did she tell you?” Chill asks. I nod.

“Need to alert Spark. See if he can get us our money back. In the meantime...” I stop talking when my phone buzzes. “What the fuck now?” I growl, answering it because it’s coming from the front desk.

“Wildcard, this is Alex at the front desk. Becky is helping a gentleman who is asking several questions about a woman who recently stayed with us. Becky alerted me that the woman was here as Alisa’s guest.”

My heart freezes at his words. “Don’t give out any information. Keep him there. I’m headed to security.”

“I would never betray a guest of Alisa’s,” Alex assures me, but I end the call and call Spark. When he picks up, I grab Brigit’s hand. “I need you to get eyes on the front desk. Becky is talking to someone who is asking questions about Brigit. I need to know who it is. Might be Sully.”

Brigit tenses next to me, but she follows without hesitation when I pull her to the elevator. We take it up to the second floor and I guide her into the security office that houses our monitors. Reggie jumps into action and commandeers a monitor. He clicks several keys before we get a visual on the front desk. We can see Becky, but the man she’s talking to has his back to us. He’s wearing a long wool coat. Two men flank him. He isn’t Sully. So who the fuck is he? Reggie clicks a couple more keys and splits the screen so we can see them from a different angle. Brigit sucks in a breath next to me. I turn to look at her.

“That’s Misha in the middle. I recognize him. Along with his two goons. They’re the ones who chased me out of the building after he shot Mike.”

“Confirmed,” says Spark and I realize I put him on speaker.

“What should we do?” Brigit asks me. Her eyes are wide with fear. “He found me.”

“Shit. We need to get you out of here.”

“Wait,” Chills says, which earns her a growl from me.

“Why is he here? Think about it. Sully went looking for her at the clubhouse. If he’s working for Misha, like we think he is, then Misha would look for her there. Maybe he knows she’s here. He could be setting a trap.”

“You think if we leave, he’ll have his men waiting for us?” I ask.

Chill shrugs. “I would. We have the advantage here and at the clubhouse. The only time Brigit is vulnerable would be between here and there.”

“What do you suggest?”

“Killing two birds. We capture Misha and his men, then get him to confess to murdering Brigit’s boss.”

“We’ll need to involve the cops,” Viper says. “It’s the only way to get the charges dropped against her.”

“Call Rafe and get him to come down here. Tell him what we’re trying to accomplish,” I direct Viper, who steps away to make the call. “We need to figure out how to get him to confess.”

“The only way is to confront him and I’m the only one who can do it,” Brigit says. I swear my heart stops.

## CHAPTER THIRTY: BRIGIT

Wildcard swings to glare at me. Although the heat in his eyes is more fear than anger.

“Absolutely not. You’re not bait. He’ll kill you if he sees you.”

“Not if we plan it and stack the deck in our favor,” Trouble says. He puts his hands

up to stop Wildcard from spewing. “I get it. I do. If it were Corinne, I’d be plotting my death just like you are. But, let’s discuss our options. This is the perfect place to trap him into making a confession. The only person he’ll let his guard down with is the person who knows the truth. Brigit.”

“He’ll kill her as soon as he sees her,” Wildcard says again, gritting his teeth.



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“Not if he thinks he has the upper hand.”

Trouble lays out a plan that has me equal parts terrified and confident. But as Trouble explains, my confidence grows. I know Wildcard will protect me, but I trust the others just as much. Viper and Chill have a specific role to play in Trouble’s plan. Which involves shopping. They drag me along with them to a fashion mall inside the casino. While we shop, Trouble keeps Misha occupied.

I stay in the dressing room while Viper runs back and forth until she finds an outfit for me that meets with her approval. She selects a dress of deep emerald with long sleeves and a longflowing skirt with a slit in the side. The loose material conceals the knife Chill straps to my leg. While the slit gives me easy access. I’m not proficient with knives or any weapons, but Chill and Wildcard both want me armed. The shoes have stilettos that Viper assures me hurt like a bitch if I dig them into a foot or a leg. The last stop is the spa, where beauty consultants apply makeup to make my transformation complete.

By the time they’ve finished with me, Viper and Chill are ready. They’re both wearing form fitting gowns that enhance their assets. Viper, a former showgirl, stands over six feet in high-heeled boots that add several inches. She’s wearing a bright red dress that clings to her curves. Chill’s dress is a dark blue that wraps around her trim form and ends mid-thigh. Her long legs are muscular and toned. They’re both stunningly beautiful women. Trouble’s plan relies on their stunning good looks and my looking the part I’m about to play.

Chill and Viper flank me as we pass through the casino and through to the conference rooms. Each room has a name tied to famous biker events or routes. We find Trouble

waiting for us outside Route 66. When we reach him, he puts his hands on my shoulders and leans over to stare into my eyes. “You doing okay? You can still say no if you want to back out.”

I shake my head. “No, this is a good plan. I trust you. All of you. I need to get out from under this murder charge and get on with my life.”

“Good girl,” Trouble says with a grin. “You remember what we discussed? Just play your part and we’ll do the rest.”

I nod and take a deep breath.

Trouble wraps his hand around my right bicep just as he opens the door. He drags me into the room behind him, Chill and Viper right behind us. They move to either side as I glance around the room. I’m supposed to fake fear, but seeing Misha and his two goons makes acting unnecessary. When none of them makes a move to draw their weapons, I relax into the role I need to play.

“Who the fuck are they?” Misha snaps.

Trouble shrugs. “My girls. Don’t mind them. They’re happy little sluts, aren’t you?”

Chill purrs and slides her hand up Trouble’s chest. “Yes, daddy, you make me feel so good.”

“Drugged?” Misha asks. I see him eyeing Viper with a hunger that makes my stomach roil.

“They like their candy. Keeps them pliant, if you know what I mean? Want a taste?” Trouble releases my arm to push Chill and Viper forward so they’re between them and me.

“Maybe later. We have other business to discuss.” He nods at me, which I take as my cue.

“What are you doing? You said you’d protect me!” I shout at Trouble, pounding my fist against his chest. He grabs my hand and turns me so I’m trapped in his arms. “Is this her?” Trouble asks Misha, who grins back.

“Yep, that’s the bitch. Thanks for handing her over. See, you gave her a few smacks. I’ll take her off your hands.”

“Please don’t,” I beg. “You don’t know what he is.”

“I fucking know who he is. You’re a bitch who lied to us. Thought you were hiding from your husband, not the fucking Bratva. No fucking way we want to tangle with them. You put us at risk.”

“But he killed a cop. You’ll be accessories to a cop’s murder if you let him take me,” I plead.

Misha laughs. “I didn’t kill a fucking cop. Mike did that. He killed George, too. I killed Mike. Took out a cop killer. They should make me a fucking hero.”

The room erupts with noise. Shouts, crashes, and fists hitting flesh reverberate around me. I can’t see anything, because Trouble pushed me to floor and covered me with his body. I tremble under Trouble’s bulk until he moves and helps me stand. A set of familiar arms encircle me as Wildcard crushes me to his chest. He kisses the top of my head, my temple, and my cheek before finding my mouth. We both find peace in the kiss.

Breaking away, I glance around the room and see the aftermath. Viper and Chill are each sitting on one of Misha’s goons. The two men are unconscious as they fasten zip

ties around their wrists. Rafe stands over them with his gun drawn.

Misha is on the floor, glaring at me with hatred. The man fastening handcuffs on his wrists is Detective Sully. I glance at Wildcard in question.

“Turns out we misread Detective Sully’s motivation. He wasn’t working for Misha. By putting you up as the primary suspect, he hoped to find you and get you into protective custody. He wanted to find you before Misha did.”

“The cop Mike murdered was the son of my old partner,” Sully says, yanking Misha to his feet. “He was working on a case against Misha with George. When George didn’t return his call, Harry went looking for him. He should have called for backup, but he didn’t want to blow his cover. Guess Mike killed them both.”

“Do you have enough to convict Misha?” I ask.

Sully nods. “Should. We have plenty of evidence. Including the video feed from the hotel showing Misha and these guys leaving Mike’s office. Plus, we have evidence Harry gathered before Mike killed him. His confession today seals it. You might have to testify, though.”

I nod in resignation. I don’t want to go back to Boston and testify, but I will if it means putting Misha in jail.

“You’re a brave woman. Sorry, if I caused you distress by hunting you. Knew this asshole would try to find you and I didn’t know how well you hid.”

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His comment reminds me of something. “My friend Abby. Did Misha find her?”

“No, I did. She’s safe. Made sure of it before I came out here. Found her standing in her living room, pissed as hell because these assholes made a mess searching it. She pulled a gun on me.” Sully chuckles. “Hell of a woman.”

I smirk at the bemused look on the Detective’s face. Abby is a hell of a woman. “She is. Can you have her call me?”

“Will do. As soon as I get back to Boston with these bastards.”

“How are you getting back? You aren’t taking them alone, are you?”

“Nah. Got help from the feds. They should be here soon. I called them and told them about the plan as soon as Rafe filled me in. Haven’t ever teamed up with bikers before. You guys put on one hell of a show. Had me fooled. It was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Brooks.” Sully sticks his hand out to Puma, who has joined us.

“Puma. Don’t really answer to Brooks any longer. Thanks for taking the filth out of our city. If you ever need help, just call. We have a Chapter in Boston. Havoc is the President. He’s a good friend to have.”

“I’ll look him up.” Sully and Rafe lead the prisoners out of the room. Viper and Chill following close to provide backup.

I lean against Wildcard. “Is it finally over?”

“This situation? Yeah,” Puma says. “We still have the problem with Walt Turner to deal with. Hear you’re our new HR Manager. Welcome. We are very grateful, especially Chill. She was a disaster in that role.”

“Probably shouldn’t have made her do it, huh?” I tease Puma, who barks out a laugh.

“No, I shouldn’t have. I’ve made mistakes. That was one of the worst. But I’m making up for it later. We’re having a big party later. Lots to celebrate.”

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: WILDCARD

Watching Brigit step into the room where Misha waited for her was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. Harder than leaving her behind in Boston. I couldn’t have done it if I didn’t know Trouble, Chill, and Viper would keep her safe.

Trouble’s plan is good, even though I hate it. We vastly outnumbered Misha and his men, but that doesn’t matter when the woman you love goes up against a member of the Russian mob. I didn’t want her in the same room as him, but the plan required it. I’d much rather she hid with me behind the partition.

After Viper called Rafe and Puma, she and Chill took Brigit shopping. Puma and Dice arrived first. We were all surprised when Sully showed up with Rafe. But that surprise was nothing when Sully explained his real reason for being in Vegas. He knew all along that Misha killed Mike. He pushed the investigation towards Brigit in order to protect her. Who would have thought I’d be grateful to a cop? Especially him?

When Reggie escorted Misha and his men into Route 66, we were all waiting in the PCH Conference Room. A thin partition separates the two spaces so we could hear everything going on in the other room. I hated not being able to see Brigit. Misha admitting to killing Mike was all Sully needed. Now, we can put this behind us.

Brigit may need to go back to Boston to testify. But she won't be going alone and afterwards she'll be coming back here to stay.

"Ready to go?" I ask Brigit. I want to get her back to the clubhouse and our son. All I want to do is curl up with the two of them and watch a movie, but I've still got work to do. Walt is probably pissing his pants in The Pit. If not, he will be when Chill starts on him. We need to know what that bastard has been up to under our fucking noses.

"We're taking your bike?" I nod, so she continues. "Then I want to change back into jeans. What should I do with the dress?"

"Keep it."

She scrunches up her nose. "It's a gorgeous dress, but I won't want to wear it again. It will remind me too much of Misha and what happened."

I shrug. "Bring it back to the clubhouse. We have a room full of clothes for the kutte bunnies to use. Or we can donate it."

"Okay, I'll change and be right back."

"Wash the makeup off your face, too," I remind her. "I hate seeing it looking bruised, even if it is fake." Trouble had the makeup artists at the spa fix up Brigit's face, so she looked battered. It was part of the act to keep Misha thinking Trouble was an ally instead of an enemy.

As soon as Brigit changes, we head downstairs to get my bike. Puma and the others waited for us, so we all ride in formation back to the clubhouse. I'm behind him to the right, Chill to my left. Viper and Dice bring up the rear. When we get to the clubhouse, we find all the Old Ladies, along with Desdemona, Claudia, and Gramps decorating the clubhouse for the party. The kids are running around 'helping.'

“What’s the party for?” Brigit asks, laughing as Colt and Mal let loose balloons they were filling with helium and watching them fly away. They’re laughing like loons. Guess it didn’t take long for those two to make friends.

“We’re having a patching in party for Max,” I tell her.

She beams at me. “Max is getting his patch?”

“Yeah. He doesn’t know. Puma thought tonight would be a good night for it after what happened at 1%. He spoke with Max earlier. Max is beating himself up for what Walt was doing.”

“How could he have known?”



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“Chill said something to him after Bianca spoke to her. Since Chill didn’t believe Bianca, Max let it go, too. He thinks if he had sought Bianca out and talked to her, he could have realized something was off sooner.”

“Hmm. Maybe, but my guess is that he would have scared the hell out of her if he had approached her and mentioned talking to Chill. She might have just left and not come back. We’d probably have uncovered Walt’s actions without her, but I hate to think of her out there worried the club was going to hunt her down.”

“I didn’t think about that. I’ll talk to Max. Look I have to take care of club business. Will you be okay on your own?”

Brigit chuckles as she glances around the room. “I don’t think I’ll be alone. I’ll help them get ready for the party. You go do club stuff.”

I kiss her before making my way through the chaos to the back door. Opening the door to The Pit, I hear screams. Music to my ears. Sounds like Chill has already started. I find her standing in front of Walt, who hangs from a hook. He’s stripped down to nothing. Sweat pours off him. His left eye is swollen shut and I can see areas on his torso that will turn into bruises. If he lives long enough.

Puma, Max, and Dice lean against the wall while Viper rotates poker in the fire. My ass clenches at the sight. I’ve seen what they do with those poker on men who have assaulted or abused women. Makes me glad I know how to treat women with respect.

“Has she gotten anything yet?” I ask.

“Not yet. She’s just warming him up,” Dice says with a chuckle.

Viper pulls a poker out of the fire and approaches Walt with a gleam in her eye. When she was a prospect, I doubted her ability to keep up with Chill as an Enforcer. But Viper has no problem inflicting pain on those who have earned it.

“Who is Pamela?” Viper asks, waving the poker in front of Walt’s eyes. He flinches, but doesn’t answer. When Viper lowers the poker toward the man’s junk, he whimpers. “Last chance.”

He doesn’t tell us what we want to know, but he does scream like a bitch when Viper lays the hot poker against his inner thigh. She shoves that poker back into the fire and grabs another one. When Walt sees it, he breaks.

“She’s my mother,” he sputters.

“Who’s your father?” Viper asks

He glares at her.

Chill glances over to Dice. “Go get Pamela, maybe she’ll talk.”

“No!” Walt screams. “Leave her alone. He made her do it.”

“Who?”

“My dad.”

“Wayne Turner?” Viper asks, waving the poker closer to his right thigh.

He shakes his head. “Wade Turner.”

“Oh shit,” says Max.

“You know who he is?” Viper asks her brother.

Max slowly nods. “He’s Wayne’s twin brother. I remember dad mentioning him a few times. They did business together, but rarely.”

“That’s because he wasn’t a true believer,” Walt snarls. “He refused to join us.”

“Us?” Viper asks.

“The Brotherhood. The Keepers of the Third Reich.”

“Well, fuck. Figures our family would add Nazi bullshit to the mix,” Viper sneers.

“You were stealing from us for this fucking Brotherhood, weren’t you?” Chill asks.

Walt chuckles. “We took thousands from you and you didn’t even notice.”

“What did you do with the women you kidnapped?” I ask, playing a hunch.

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The smile slips off his face as he turns cagey. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Puma gives me the side-eye but says nothing. Chill, however, speaks for all of us.

“You have a choice. Keep spilling what you know and I’ll give you a quick death. Fuck with us and I’ll gladly keep you alive so I can try out all my tools.” She opens the two cabinets that hold every torture advice imaginable. She has the standards, like whips, knives, and acid, but she has a few tricks that are hers and hers alone. Including a box of adult diapers. What the hell?

“What are the diapers for?” I have to ask.

She chuckles. “I’m glad you asked, Wildcard. This came to me when we were decorating for Halloween. Remember, we bought that dry ice to put into tubs of water to create fog? Turns out dry ice burns when it touches skin. I plan on filling the diaper with dry ice. How about it Walt? Want to know how it feels to have your junk burned off via dry ice?” She turns to face Walt, who stares at her in horror.

“The Brotherhood makes money selling women. They give me a shopping list and I find girls that meet the requirements. I test them out to see how submissive they are and to make them believe they’re at our mercy. They think you guys sold them to the Brotherhood. Dad either keeps them or sells them on.”

“You son of a bitch!” Viper screams as she impales the hot poker up Walt’s ass.

His cry of agony ricochets off the walls until he passes out from the pain.

“Well, fuck, Viper. We need him to give us the location of this fucking Brotherhood,” Chill admonishes her as she pokes at the unconscious Walt. “We’re in luck. He’s still alive. I’m sure he’ll tell us more in the morning. I need a drink.”

Puma and I lead the way back to the clubhouse, with Dice and Chill right behind us. Viper delays Max to give us a head start. We enter to see that the Old Ladies, the prospects, and the kids have done a great job of decorating the place for the upcoming celebration. The kids made a banner, or at least I’m assuming the kids made it. I think it’s supposed to be ‘Congratulations!’ But I can’t read it.

Puma hustles over to the bar to grab the box containing Max’s new kutte. I search the crowd for Brigit and move over to join her and Colt as we wait for Max to enter. We quiet down when we hear Viper and Max come through the back door.

Max looks around the room in surprise and confusion. We’re all cheering, but that seems to confuse him more.

## EPILOGUE: BRIGIT

It’s fun to watch the kids decorating the clubhouse for Max. You can see how much they adore him. But what I find most interesting is how much they understand about what this means for Max. They’re coloring the sign that should say ‘Congratulations!’ but they obviously don’t think it conveys enough information. They’ve drawn pictures of activities they’ve shared with Max, using the letters as part of the tableau. There is very little left of the letters, but I think Max will find their creativity more heartfelt.

“They really love him, don’t they?” I ask Alisa.

“He’s their hero and their protector,” she says. “They adore all the club members, but Max is the one they’ll run to if they need help. When I first brought Elina here, Viper

and Max shared babysitting duties. Took me some time before I trusted them. Not because they did anything wrong, but because I kept thinking they'd resent being babysitters. But neither of them saw it that way. They considered caring for Elina, then later Mal and Slade, as an honor. I'm a little disappointed that Max won't be watching them any longer, but I'm happy for him. He earned this."

Spotting my dad talking to Claudia, I make my way over to them. He's sporting his kutte and I see the name Gramps. Maybe he wasn't happy with the road name at first, but he seems pleased now. He and Claudia are frosting cupcakes. I smirk. With the balloons, streamers, and now cupcakes, this seems more like a kid's birthday party than a patch in party for a motorcycle club.

"Cupcakes?" I ask.

My dad chuckles. "That's what the kids ordered for the party. We'll have the sugar rush first and after the kids go to bed, they'll break out the adult party. Pretty sure Max won't mind starting out the celebration with the kids. He cares about them."

"I hear there was some excitement at the casino," my dad says, watching me. I glance around for Colt, but see he's still busy coloring the banner with the others.

"More than some. Who did you hear it from?"

"Trouble gave us the rundown." He gestures across the room to where Trouble is standing with Corinne. I make a mental note to stop by and thank him again for protecting me.

"He said you uncovered some folks stealing from the club and stopped a guy from harassing the women. He also said the police have Misha in custody."

"Wow, you weren't gone that long," Claudia says.

I chuckle. “It was a busy few hours. Wildcard was just going to give me a tour and talk me into taking over as the HR Manager. It quickly exploded into craziness.”

“Are you taking the job?”

I nod. “I am. The hotel and the casino are amazing. The perks they offer the employees will make hiring staff easy. Plus, I’ll be working with Wildcard and helping the club. They’ve done so much for me. I’m glad I can do something for them.”

“I’ve heard Chill complaining about her temporary role in HR. Having you take over will make her your friend for life. She’s a good person to have on your side,” Claudia says, then chuckles. “Definitely wouldn’t want to be on her bad side.”

I nod at that remark. Chill is not someone you want to cross.

“How are you doing?” comes a voice behind me. I turn to find Corinne and Trouble sidling up to us.

“I’m wonderful. Thanks to your man. Appreciate all you did for me today.”

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:25 pm*

“Just glad I could help,” Trouble grins. “Hope I didn’t hurt you when I covered you.”

“No, you didn’t. Scared me when you spoke to Misha. Almost had me convinced you were turning me over to him.”

“I was channeling Squiggy. The bastard. But I almost lost it when Chill called me daddy.”

“She what?” Corinne asks, spluttering as she was just taking a sip of her drink.

Trouble pats her on the back before slinging his arm around her shoulders and pulling her close. “She was pretending to be my drugged up side-piece, so Misha and his thugs would disregard them. Didn’t want the bastards to know that they were the biggest threat in the room.”

“I imagine they had the two goons on the floor before they knew what hit them,” my father says.

Trouble lifts his beer up in a salute.

“You got it. Had them on the floor and out cold while Misha was still looking around for who crashed through the wall.”

“What?” Claudia asks.

“We were in the conference room that has a sliding divider. Rafe, Detective Sully, Puma, and Dice were on the other side, listening. As soon as Misha admitted to



killing Mike, Puma slammed open the partition.”

“That was the crash I heard,” I muse. “I still can’t get over Sully being a good guy. He was so rude when he came to the clubhouse. Was that an act?”

Trouble snorts. “Doubt it. He doesn’t like bikers. Or at least he didn’t. Wonder if he’ll change his mind now that we’ve handed him the head of the Russian Bratva in Boston.”

We chat while waiting for Max to attend his party. My phone rings, but when I go to answer it, the call drops. I don’t recognize the number, but the area code is local. Before I can hit call back, Alisa shouts out that we have to get in position. Max is on his way to the clubhouse. Colt runs over to me.

“This is so exciting,” he says. “Elina said that getting patched in is more important than a birthday, but less important than a wedding. Mal said patching in is more important than getting married. They’ve agreed to disagree, but Elina is mad at Mal.”

I have to stop myself from laughing at the drama of five-year-olds. These kids are going to have a lifetime of disagreements as they grow older together. Knowing Colt will be right there with them makes me happy. We’ve found our home and I couldn’t be happier.

Puma and Wildcard enter first. Puma heads for the bar, but Wildcard comes right to us. He lifts Colt up and places his hand on my waist so I can snuggle in close. Correction. This is the happiest I’ve ever been. Right here, in Wildcard’s arms.

Chill and Dice come in together and break off to find their significant others. Then it’s Max’s turn. We’re all grinning at cheering, but he doesn’t recognize that this is all for him.

“Get the fuck over here, Max,” Puma bellows.

Max walks through the crowd to stand in front of Puma.

“You came to us looking for your sister, but you stayed to become someone we all rely upon. You’ve protected the kids more often than I can count. They love you and that makes you someone special. Every member recognizes the effort you’ve put in as a prospect. You’ve earned this. We’re proud to call you brother.” Puma opens the box and pulls out the leather kutte. The club logo is on the back. The rockers above and below read, Demon Dawgs Las Vegas. Max rips off his denim prospect kutte and lays it on the bar. Puma holds up the new kutte for Max to slide into. He rubs his hand over his new name. Rattler.

“Thank you,” Rattler says, choking up. “I won’t let you down.” He glances around the room at each of us.

Puma smacks him on the back. “You never have, doubt you ever will. Now let’s celebrate!”

“Why Rattler?” I ask Wildcard.

“Because of all the snakes. Rattler and Viper have a room full of snakes back there,” Colt says, waving toward the bedrooms.

“What?” I choke out. “I thought you were joking before.”

Wildcard grins at me. “Scared? Don’t be. They don’t get out much.”

“What?”

Wildcard laughs as he lowers Colt to the ground, so he can go congratulate Rattler

with the other kids.

“We need to pick out a house plan and get it built right away,” I tell Wildcard, who chuckles.

“Only if I get you pregnant.”

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 6:25 pm*

I put down my drink and grab his hand. “Let’s go.”

However, he pulls me back into his arms and hugs me. “We have to stay for a bit longer. But don’t worry, we’ll get started tonight.”

My phone rings again. I glance at the display, and it is the same number that called before. Answering it, I expect another dropped call. But it isn’t.

“Ms. Jones, this is Bianca. I’m calling from my car. I think someone is following me. Can you help me? I don’t know what to do.”

“What?” I cry out, putting the call on speaker. Wildcard calls out for silence. “Bianca, you’re on speaker. Where are you? What’s going on?”

“I just left work, and I was on my way home when I realized I was being followed. He’s been behind me since I left the casino. I think it’s Walt.”

“It isn’t Walt, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be careful. Where are you? Maybe you can drive to us.”

She tells us where she is, which isn’t close to the clubhouse.

“Okay, how about a police station?” Viper chimes in. “There’s a station further up ahead on the right.”

“Okay, I’m heading there,” Bianca says, but then the sound of squealing tires and Bianca’s scream fill the room.

The End