



April 5 (Havlin Motorcycle Club #4)

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Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: April 5. The day is burned into her skin like a bad tattoo.

Jagger promised Ruger hed protect his daughter while he was in prison, and a brother never breaks his word. But, over the years, he stepped over the line too many times. His relationship with Katrina grew from guardian to lover—something he pledged on the patch never to do.

Shes his heart.

When Katrina shows up in Seaglass Cove and struts into the clubhouse with fire in her veins, he cant walk away. Ruger might as well put a bullet in his back because theres no way he can stay away from her.

Raised within the Havlin Motorcycle Club and under Mama Sues guidance, Katrina knows what it takes to be the presidents woman. Its all shes ever wanted. Its not fair that her dad put a stop to her relationship. Shes an adult.

Jagger has belonged to her since she was four years old.

So, when she learns about her newly discovered aunt residing in Seaglass Cove, she seizes the opportunity to visit Jagger and break all the rules.

Her decision could end Jaggers life.

Total Pages (Source): 40

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 7:04 am

TWENTY YEARS EARLIER—

Sirens grew louder. Jagger stared down at the man who'd killed his dad, Bruce "Baller" Corbin, last month. The hole in the man's forehead was only a dot, while a river of red flowed out the back of his skull and painted the asphalt.

"Come on. We need to get out of here." Ruger smacked Jagger's shoulder. "Shake it off, and let's get the hell out of here."

He'd seen men die. But he'd never taken a life before.

"I hear them coming." Ruger pulled the nine millimeter out of Jagger's hand. "It's done, man. Let's go."

He'd stood at the door of the crematory while his dad was incinerated, swearing vengeance on the one who had shot Baller on his way home from the clubhouse.

The man went by the name Trader. He sold women and drugs and had a vendetta against Havlin Motorcycle Club for kicking him off the streets of Beaverton. Now, he was dead because Jagger shot him.

Ruger yanked Jagger by the back of the vest. "Come on."

A wave of relief swept through him. He'd done it.

He turned away from the body and jogged, keeping up with Ruger.

"They're close," shouted Ruger.

"Keep going." He looked behind him as he ran.

It was his crime. Ruger came with him because he was the one man he trusted with his life. He also knew Ruger would let him take the man down for killing Baller without talking him out of it. An eye for an eye.

A police car rounded the corner ahead of them. Red and blue lights flashed, urging them on. Their bikes were another block away. They'd never make it.

Ruger pointed, cutting down an alley. Jagger followed, knocking down garbage cans as he weaved between the two buildings to slow the police.

The cop car ran over the cans, not stopping.

"I'll stay back. You go," he shouted.

Ruger caught Jagger's gaze. "I don't leave a brother."

"We're not going to make it."

"We'll make it." Ruger panted. "I have to make it."

Jagger ran faster. He had no one depending on him. Ruger had Katrina. She was just a baby who needed her dad.

A patrol car careened to a stop in front of them, blocking their escape. Jagger turned, prepared to run in the opposite direction, and found every exit blocked. He looked up at the sides of the buildings. There were no ground-floor windows.

"We're fucked." Ruger grabbed Jagger's vest. "You think they found the dead body?"

He never answered. Someone had to have seen them. That was the only reason the cops would be after them.

"Stop and put your hands in the air," came over the loudspeaker.

The driver's side of the cop's car opened, and a pistol barrel pointed at them. It was the end of the line. They weren't going to get out of here.

Jagger put his hands up. "Tell 'em you weren't here. Tell 'em you walked up on me afterward."

Beside him, Ruger raised his arms. "Too late. I'm going down."

Jagger looked at him and frowned. "What the fuck are you talking about? I shot him."

"You might've done the deed, but I have the fucking gun."

Jagger's heartbeat echoed in his head. He hadn't remembered giving the gun to Ruger.

"Go down on your knees," shouted the cop. "Move slow. Don't try anything. We have you covered."

Jagger looked behind them. There were three policemen aiming weapons at them. He had to think fast. Ruger couldn't go down for the crime.

"Don't even think about causing a scene and getting yourself shot." Ruger kneeled. "If I reach down into my vest, they'll kill us both. I'm not leaving my daughter that way. I need to get back to her."

Dread filled Jagger. He'd do anything for his MC brother. Over the years, he and Ruger had grown close. Ruger was the brother Jagger never had.

When his MC brother arrived at the Havlin clubhouse, lost and looking for somewhere to live, Ruger lived with Jagger's mom and dad while he prospected for Havlin.

"I'll tell them—"

"No sense in both of us going down. I've got the gun," said Ruger.

"Down on your stomach, spread your legs, and put your hands behind your head," shouted the officer.

Jagger followed the directions and looked over at Ruger beside him. "Tell them I did it."

"They're not going to believe me." Ruger's gaze intensified. "Promise me you'll take care of Katrina."

His pulse raced. He had to figure a way out for both of them.

"Promise me, damnit." Anger filled Ruger's tone.

"On my life," said Jagger.

"Keep her safe." Ruger grunted as a cop twisted his arms behind his back. "Don't let her forget me."

Jagger's arms were pinned behind him and cuffed. "I'll take care of her."

Hauled to his feet, he watched them frisk Ruger and find the gun. Guilt filled him. It should be him.

Taken to a different patrol car, he lost track of Ruger. The satisfaction of killing the man who'd shot his father darkened by the outcome.

Ruger was going behind bars, and there wasn't a fucking thing Jagger could do to stop him. He owed his MC brother his life.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 7:04 am

JAGGER EXHALED A LINE of smoke straight into the night sky. The boisterous good cheers from Wire and Cora's wedding celebration inside the clubhouse pushed him further into the shadows.

Weeks ago, when Wire approached him wanting to contact Jeff 'Ruger' Albright, he knew doing so would only invite all hell to break loose in his life.

Hell in the name of Katrina Albright.

When he'd left the mother chapter of Havoc-Lincoln 'Havlin' Motorcycle Club in Beaverton to start the new chapter in Seaglass Cove, he'd left everything behind.

Ruger's daughter, Katrina, understood she was not to contact him ever again. She was to stay out of his life.

But she waltzed into the clubhouse as if she belonged, looking more beautiful and tempting than he remembered.

He exhaled roughly. Damn that girl.

Katrina had everything she wanted in Beaverton. Her dad was no longer in prison. She had a profitable job within the club, working as a bartender. She lived across the street from the clubhouse with Jagger's mom.

She had all the support she needed, surrounded by Havlin members willing to take a fucking bullet for her.

She was supposed to stay away from Seaglass Cove. He banged the back of his head against the brick wall of the clubhouse. More importantly, she was supposed to stay away from him.

He was the president of Havlin, except he had no control around Katrina. She was his heart.

Jagger inhaled harder, drawing the smoke deeper into his lungs. Damn, Ruger. He must've told Katrina about Cora—his unknown sister who'd appeared out of the blue. Now Katrina was here to meet her aunt.

An aunt who was inside celebrating her marriage to one of Jagger's men.

Katrina had used the opportunity to come and meet an aunt she knew nothing about and meant nothing to her as an excuse to walk back into Jagger's life.

A life that had no room for her.

Dio and Rush stepped outside. Jagger stayed in the shadow of the building. He was in no mood to talk with anyone, even his MC brothers. There was a party going on. Those attending had no need for the president of Havlin.

He tossed his cigarette to the ground and retraced his steps. Before he reached the entrance to the clubhouse, he stopped at the first Harley lined up against the back of the building and swung his leg over the seat.

Dio looked over, lifted his chin, and returned to talking to the members standing around the burning barrel, passing a joint around. He started the bike and rode around the corner only to spot a lone rider parked across from the front of the building. Recognizing the motorcycle and the rider, he rode around the block and came back around. He stopped and rolled backward until his tire hit the curb.

Shutting off the bike, he toed the kickstand. Ruger was the last person he wanted to see tonight, but he was the only one who would know how long Katrina planned on hanging around.

"Took you long enough to hit the road," muttered Ruger.

He pulled the pack of smokes from his vest pocket, took a cigarette, and tossed the pack to Ruger. "It's your sister's wedding celebration."

In the past, he and Ruger had gone head to head, fist to fist, and pledged to protect each other. Jagger wasn't going to let Ruger poke without poking back.

Ruger lit a cigarette, never acknowledging Cora's special day. From what Jagger had heard, Ruger hadn't denied the relationship with his sister but hadn't made any effort to get to know her. His noncommittal attitude surprised no one, especially Jagger.

At one time, Ruger was more than an MC brother. There was nothing he wouldn't do for him. Hell, he would still do anything for him, even though Ruger would rather kill him than stay in the same room as him.

Ruger was the reason Jagger was in Seaglass Cove without Katrina.

"How long are you going to be around?" Jagger took a hit while he waited for an answer.

No one needed to tell him that Ruger followed Katrina here. As a father, Ruger would protect his daughter wherever she wanted to go. Unless that meant coming to Jagger. Ruger was only waiting for Jagger to touch Katrina, so he'd have an excuse to kill him.

Maybe it was payback from twenty years ago. Maybe it was because Jagger crossed

the line with Katrina. Maybe Ruger—hell, who knew what he thought.

Jagger took another hit and then flicked the cigarette to the curb. Ruger followed his daughter here—whether Katrina knew or not. There wasn't much that got past Ruger when it came to his daughter.

"I'll be here as long as I have to be." Ruger met Jagger's gaze. "Brother or no brother, you touch her while she's here, and I'll shoot you between the eyes in front of everyone."

Jagger started his Harley and popped the bike into gear. He rode away. Whether Ruger would admit it or not, he believed Jagger owed him.

While Ruger spent eighteen years in prison for a crime Jagger committed, he got to spend those same years watching Katrina grow up.

The unfairness of it all wasn't lost on him. If he could go back and change things, he would.

But there came a time when Katrina became responsible for herself. She became an adult and made her own choices. Choices Jagger believed Ruger should respect. But he was never going to see Katrina as a grown-ass adult.

If Ruger had a problem with how Katrina lived her life, he needed to take that up with his daughter, not him.

He rode Highway 101 out of Seaglass Cove. The party would continue until the early morning. His members were having a good time.

Tonight, he'd run away from everything he wanted and needed.

He opened the throttle. Without any hope of having Katrina in his life, he'd set out to run the Havlin chapter away from her.

The twin lights of a truck headed toward him. He stared into the beams until blinded. The throttle maxed out.

Underneath him, the engine whined. The vibration of the Harley crawled through his body, numbing him.

The truck passed him. The wind current from the vehicle pushed him toward the white line.

Jagger shook his head, trying to catch a glimpse of the black asphalt in his impaired vision, and shifted down, slowing his motorcycle.

Behind him, a car honked. He squinted, going over the white line and coming to a stop. He jumped off his bike and yanked off his helmet, throwing it toward the guardrail.

His chest roared. Katrina had no right to enter his life again.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 7:04 am

CORA TALKED WITH THE other women surrounding her, but her hand remained on her husband. Katrina stood against the back wall, studying her newly discovered aunt. She was a beautiful girl. Her aunt was much younger than she had imagined when her dad told her Cora was born after he left home.

She expected someone in her thirties, not someone close to her age.

It was obvious Cora was in love with her husband. Her hands told the truth and rarely left him.

But Cora wasn't the only one holding on. Wire held the back of Cora's neck. They were tangled up in each other.

Katrina lifted the glass of rum and coke to her lips. She still found it hard to believe she had a blood relative.

At first, hearing the news from her dad that his little sister had found him pissed her off. Where was Cora for the last twenty-four years? Where were her grandparents?

She'd grown up believing she was alone.

Katrina swallowed the alcohol, letting it burn her throat and warm her chest. Everything she was led to believe was a lie.

And the things about her that were true were ugly.

Her mom had left her at the hospital—simply gave the nurse a phone number on how

to contact Katrina's dad and then walked out of the hospital after giving birth and never came back.

Her dad raised her alone until he went to prison for murder when she was four years old. He stayed locked up for the next eighteen years of her life. Her exposure to her dad was in the state prison, where she got to visit him every two weeks for an hour.

The rest of the time, she lived with Mama Sue behind the Havlin Motorcycle Club clubhouse in Beaverton, Oregon. Raised within Havlin, the club members became her family.

Unlike other women, she learned everything she knew from men who killed, abused, stole, and deceived. She understood their motives, understood their needs, and understood their desires.

They lived life only needing the basics to survive. Sex and companionship softened their harsh world. And if they were lucky, they found love. Some had a long commitment to love. Others found love every night with different women.

Some would judge her upbringing as rough and lacking. She wouldn't change a thing about the way she grew up.

Rush entered her line of vision and approached her. "Look at you, getting more beautiful each year."

"Damn right, sweetie." She shook her head, smiling at the man who'd taught her to ride a bicycle when she was seven. "And yet, you have never tried to get your hands in my panties." She lifted her arms. "Come give me a hug, old man."

"Who are you calling old, kid?" Rush swept her up into a hug. "It's good to see you, girly. How's Beaverton treating you?"

"Those damn men keep me hopping. I can't stand still for a second without their grabby hands or their mouths yapping their troubles at me." She lifted her glass. "You know, I'm the club's bartender now."

Rush threw back his head and laughed. "Fucking lazy asses can't pour their drinks now, huh?"

"Could they ever?" She grinned. "You're lucky you broke off and came over here. Hopefully, Jagger hasn't spoiled you."

"Fuck no." Rush took out a joint and put it between his lips. "Come out and share this with me."

She kissed his cheek. "Another time. I need to find somewhere to crash before it gets any later."

"You're not staying here?"

She looked around the room. When she'd entered, she'd spotted Jagger immediately, and then he'd disappeared. She thought for sure he'd last more than a minute. If nothing else, to see why she was breaking one of his rules.

"Looks like I'm on my own. Your president took off." She tipped her glass, finishing the rest of the drink. "No worries. I'll find a cheap motel."

It was common knowledge any guest had to be approved by the president. That went for any bitches that stayed after the parties and went into the bedrooms with Havlin members.

She wasn't familiar with the way Jagger ran the clubhouse in Seaglass Cove. But considering Jagger's dad created Havlin years ago, she assumed he'd need to grant her

permission to stay, which would never happen.

"Wait around. He'll be back. There's a party going on. Enjoy yourself. The clubhouse will be bouncing all night." Rush shrugged. "Besides, Jagger won't kick you out, or he'd have to answer to Mama Sue."

Rush winked and walked away from her. Warmth filled her. Being around those she'd come to love through the years brought comfort. It hadn't been the same in Beaverton since Jagger opened the new chapter.

She finished her drink. There were others she knew from Beaverton. Dio and Link. Bane and Cord. Jagger had taken many older members with him when he started the chapter.

That figured, seeing as how he started the chapter from the floor up. He'd want experience backing him and forging the way for new members.

Cora caught Katrina's gaze. It was odd to have an aunt. She would've preferred to have someone twice as old as her to welcome into the family. Someone who she could maybe visit at Christmas like other people tended to do.

What was she going to do with an aunt who was around her age? Swap Snapchat handles?

Used to not fitting in with other women outside of the MC, there was no reason to try and get to know Cora. She wasn't here to be judged for her life, and she sure as hell wouldn't change her life for anyone.

Cora broke away from her husband and approached Katrina. As soon as her aunt reached her side, she grabbed Katrina's hand. Instantly, she stiffened.

"I'm so glad you came." Cora let go of her. "How long can you stay?"

"A few days." She had no other plans.

The club could do without her. The job she had made their life easier but wasn't necessary to keep the club running.

"Would you like to stay at our house?" Cora pointed across the room at Wire. "I—we have a Sprinter van behind the building that we're going to stay in tonight, so we don't have to drive, but I can give you the address—"

Nah." She softened her voice. "Thanks, though. I'm good."

The last thing she wanted to do was crash at her new-found aunt's house and make her think she couldn't take care of herself.

Taking Rush's suggestion, she said, "I'm staying here."

"Oh, good." Cora smiled. "I want to talk with you tomorrow after we all get up. There's so many things I want to ask you."

"Hm." She crossed her arms. "There's not much to say."

"We're related."

"But we don't know each other."

"We will." Cora nodded. "It just takes time."

"If you say so." She turned toward Cora. "I'm going to find a vacant room. I'll catch you later."

"Sure." Cora frowned in disappointment. "See you tomorrow."

She walked away. It wasn't her job to make Cora happy. She came to see what her aunt looked like and found out. There wasn't anything familiar between them, except they both had the same hair color—though Katrina hadn't seen that color on her head since she was sixteen and dyed her honey-colored hair black.

Black hair fits her personality more. There was nothing bubbly about her. She was moody and temperamental—that's what Mama Sue called her.

Passing the table with the drinks set out on it, she grabbed a bottle of whiskey that still had some liquid. She'd need it to get to sleep.

Usually not a drinker, the idea of seeing Jagger tied her up in knots. She needed something to relax.

She walked down the hallway, opening doors. Every clubhouse had vacant rooms, but many times, single members would party and stay at the clubhouse so they wouldn't have to ride after drinking.

Closing the door after seeing a duffle on the floor, she moved to the other side and opened the room. A quick scan had her stepping back into the hallway. But she stopped before going to the next room.

A familiar couch sat against the wall. She turned on the light to ensure she saw things right and shut herself inside.

It was Jagger's room.

She'd know his furniture anywhere. He slept on the couch more often than on the bed.

Walking across the room, she sat on the sofa and grabbed his pillow, hugging it to her chest. She closed her eyes. A deep shudder rolled through her.

Tonight was the first time she'd seen him since the night her dad walked in on them. It'd been the worst day of her life.

Back then, she had no say in anything. Her dad had returned and thought he could control her life. And if it wasn't her dad making the decisions, it was Jagger walking away from her.

Curling up in the corner of the couch, she inhaled deeply. The pillow smelled of smoke and leather.

Damn him.

A lot of things had hurt her throughout her life, but Jagger caused the most damage. Her heart would never be the same.

He'd turned her into a bitch.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

JAGGER WALKED THROUGH the clubhouse. Music played over the speakers, but there was no movement in the building.

He stepped over an empty beer bottle. On the nearest couch, Brett held a half-naked woman on top of him. Both were asleep.

Pulling out his cell, he looked at the time—six o'clock.

He headed toward the hallway. The others would spend most of the day catching up on sleep after celebrating Cora and Wire's wedding. He'd use the time to rest. Havlin Motorcycle Parts shop was closed today and tomorrow and would open again on Monday.

The Havlin members running security could rotate without any reminders from him. Right now, he only wanted to wash off the road dust and stretch out for a few hours.

He opened his bedroom door and frowned. The light was on. His gut tightened. He scanned the room, stopping at the couch. Katrina.

Her presence in his room should've surprised him. But he would've been disappointed if she hadn't come looking for him.

As much as he needed to get her out of here and away from him, he couldn't help figuring out how to keep her hidden from everyone. He needed a minute. An hour. The rest of his life with her.

He exhaled quietly, letting her sleep, and removed his cell phone. He pulled up

Bane's contact and typed a text. Where's Ruger?

His thumb hovered over the screen. He couldn't send it. He couldn't send her away. He couldn't call Ruger and have him come and get his daughter.

Shoving the phone in his pocket, he locked the door to his room. Wherever Ruger was, he'd let his guard down and had no idea where Katrina was.

Katrina's dad was probably in another room in the clubhouse, but he wasn't in the room. Ruger couldn't stop him from looking at Katrina.

He lowered himself to the floor, holding in the grunt that automatically slipped out whenever he had to bend his left knee, and sat beside her. Close enough to touch, he inhaled deeply, wishing he could pick up her warm body and hold her against him.

Facing him, she had her legs curled toward her chest, hugging his pillow. Her hair lay tousled underneath her head and hung over the edge of the cushion. He lifted the dark strands and rubbed his thumb over the silky texture.

He brought the strands up to his nose. The flowery scent of her shampoo still clung to her.

Katrina's eyelashes fanned her cheeks. In her sleep, there was always a calmness to her. A serenity that never showed up during the day when she was awake.

The girl had fire in her veins.

His chest tightened. His mom raised her to be a survivor. But he knew another side of her.

Despite how tough it was for Katrina growing up, she was passionate about the club's

strict rules. She craved the staunch loyalty of the people surrounding her. She needed the hardcore proof that people weren't going to leave her.

She needed unconditional love, and he was the only one she allowed to give her that.

For how close she was to his mom, she continually guarded herself, afraid she wouldn't be perfect enough for Mama Sue and would lose the one woman who devoted her life to her.

She loved Ruger and would fight to the death for her dad, but she woke up each day wondering if her dad was going to leave her again. Her insecurities were deeply hidden behind a wall of toughness.

Whether it was her mom abandoning her at birth or her dad going away to prison for most of her life, Katrina only gave her trust to one person. Him.

And he'd done her dirty.

He wouldn't have to look at his phone to see if time was dwindling. Ruger would come looking for his daughter. For his sake, his MC brother couldn't find Katrina in Jagger's room.

But damned if he wanted to let her sleep so he could sit beside her and watch her. Just for a bit longer.

He dragged his gaze from her full lips and collided with a warm and sleepy gaze the color of his favorite malt.

"Jag," whispered Katrina. "You came back."

As soon as the words left her lips, alertness returned to her eyes. She sat up and

tossed his pillow to the other end of the couch.

"What the hell?" She stood, stumbling over his legs as she tried to put distance between them. "Are you just going to sit there and stare at me while I sleep?"

She wiped her hand across her mouth, scowling at him. Back on even ground, he pushed to his feet, unable to keep the grunt of pain from escaping.

"You're not supposed to be here." He stretched to his entire six foot four inches. "Ruger followed you."

"Figures." She shrugged. "My dad's a free man. He can do what he wants."

"Are you pointing him at me?" He refused to let her get away with arguing with him. "You, of all people, should know he'd rather kill me than find out what you're doing here."

She blew out her breath and approached him. He hardened in anticipation of her touching him, but she leaned over and scooped up one of her sneakers she'd kicked off in her sleep.

Bringing up her foot, she slid on the shoe and tied the laces. She walked around the couch and found the other shoe, dipping her head out of view. When she popped back up, she gathered her hair and looked around the room. The habit was so familiar to him that his gut ached from missing her. This was his room in Seaglass Cove. She'd never been here. There were no elastic bands for her hair that she'd left behind. There was no bandana for her to tie around her head. Nothing of hers to remind him of what he'd lost.

She let the mess of hair fall around her shoulders. "I would never sic my dad on you. You know that."

"Why did you come?"

"Because I have an aunt who I've never met before. A blood relative who I had no idea even existed before two weeks ago when my dad gave me the news." She scoffed. "Now, there's three of us in the Albright family."

"How long are you staying?"

"As long as I want." She looked around, patting the back pockets of her jeans. "I lost my phone."

He shoved his hands between the couch cushions and found her cell in the corner. Holding the phone out, he waited until she stepped closer and then hooked her neck with his other hand and brought her forward, claiming her mouth.

Her lips remained firm. He grabbed a fistful of hair and bent her head back until her mouth opened, and he thrust his tongue in.

Her deep moan vibrated his lips. He sampled what he'd already had. The craving to taste every inch of her grew.

His heart pounded. There was only one thing that came before Havlin Motorcycle Club, and that was Katrina.

But having her would get him killed. Maybe not today, but when his guard was down. When his men were preoccupied. Ruger would lay down his punishment.

It was easy to say he'd kill Ruger and get him out of the picture. Nothing would stop him from having Katrina with her father gone.

But killing Ruger would destroy her. In the end, he couldn't do it to her.

His heart pounded. He owed Ruger, and that's a price that outweighed everything.

He pulled back, panting hard, and stared into her eyes. She was deadweight in his arms, not even attempting to stand up on her own.

He grabbed a handful of hair at the base of her neck and pulled her to a standing position. "Get out of here."

His voice was more a growl of protest than an order. Her taste was on his tongue, coating his lips.

Her gaze flickered side to side as she stared him in the eyes. He watched the moment she snapped back to her senses.

Katrina's hand came up. He caught her wrist before her palm met his face. She knew better than to lay a hand on him.

She jerked her arm, trying to break free. He refused to let her go.

Toe to toe with her, he could feel the warmth coming off her thighs against his legs. He bent her arm, placing it behind her back, and then pulled her even closer until her breasts flattened against his chest.

"You're going to get me killed." He kissed her hard.

He pushed her away before he could toss her down on the couch and do what he wanted with her. The phone in his pocket vibrated, barely distracting him.

He pulled the cell out of his pocket and connected the call without taking his gaze off Katrina—letting her know not to make a sound. No one could find out she was in his room.

"Ruger's pulling up outside," said Bane.

"Where are you?" Jagger's gaze dropped to Katrina's breasts, lifting and falling as she breathed out her frustration with him.

"At the back door."

"Give me thirty seconds." He disconnected the call, grabbed Katrina's upper arm, and led her to the door. "Run to Ruger. He's looking for you."

She hesitated, tottering on the toes of her feet. He opened the door.

Katrina grabbed his vest, kissed him hard, and sashayed into the hallway as if she'd been thoroughly fucked. Ruger was going to look at his daughter's rumpled clothing and know she spent the night in one of the rooms and the first person he'd hunt down was Jagger.

The smart thing to do was close the door and pretend she hadn't been in his room. But he had always lost his mind when it came to Katrina.

He stepped into the hallway and shut the door. There was no way he would let Ruger take his anger out on Katrina.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

RUGER BLOCKED KATRINA'S path. "Let's head home."

"No." Katrina folded her arms across her chest. "I haven't had a chance to talk with Cora—"

"She's on her fucking honeymoon. She's probably going somewhere," said her dad.

Behind him, Cora rushed into the clubhouse, scanning the entire room until she spotted Katrina and her dad. She waved, getting her aunt's attention. Perfect timing.

"Jesus," mumbled Ruger. "Let me know when you're done."

Katrina uncrossed her arms, happy to have her dad's attention off her and Jagger. "You don't want to stay and visit with your baby sister?"

Her dad grunted and walked away from her. Katrina relaxed. She'd successfully avoided a collision between her dad and Jagger.

He passed Cora without even acknowledging her and went back out the door. Katrina looked behind her and found Jagger pouring coffee and staring her way. She raised her eyebrows in success.

"Katrina." Cora walked faster. "Hey, I'm so glad I caught you. I was afraid you'd take off before we woke up." Her aunt stopped in front of her. "Do you want to walk down the street to the coffee shop and get a drink? We can hang out there, or we can stay here. Whatever you want."

Not wanting to leave the clubhouse and Jagger, she pointed to a table. "I'll get us a coffee."

She hurried over to where Jagger stood. She moved beside him as she grabbed two mugs out of the cabinet.

"What are you up to?" he whispered.

"Getting to know my aunt." She filled up both cups. "And I wanted to see you."

"No."

"I'm already here, so you have to see me."

"I told you to stay away from me." He walked away from her.

She looped her fingers through the handles of the mugs and grabbed the sugar container, not knowing what Cora would need for her drink. At the table, she sat across from her aunt.

"I suggested the coffee shop because that's where I work." Cora reached for a mug.

"Then, this coffee will suck to you." She sipped, wincing at the scalding heat against the tip of her tongue. "Bikers are notorious for buying bad coffee for the clubhouse."

"That's probably why the majority of them walk down to the end of the block and buy coffee at the shop throughout the day." Cora smiled. "So...tell me about yourself. I've been dying to know more about you since Ruger told me he had a daughter."

She shrugged. "Not much to say. I work as the bartender at the mother chapter of Havlin."

"So, you live with your dad?"

"No." She set the mug down. "You know my Dad's only been out of prison for two years, right?"

Cora nodded. "I don't know too much about what happened. Was it for a long time?"

"Yeah. You can say that." She rolled the bracelet on her wrist. "Pretty much my whole life."

Cora whispered, "Can I ask who raised—?"

"No reason to whisper. I'm not ashamed of my past. Dad loved me despite being locked up." Seeing the hurt reflected in Cora's eyes, Katrina leaned back in the chair. "He cared for me the best he could by having his biker family look after me while he was gone."

"Who raised you?"

"Mama Sue." Saying the name softened her. "She's the best."

"Is Ruger still involved with your mom?"

Katrina's spine snapped to attention. Her father had told her throughout the years how he'd split after his parents found out he'd gotten his girlfriend pregnant. He never told her in words, but she assumed her grandparents hadn't wanted an illegitimate child in their family—as if that mattered nowadays.

"He never told you?" she asked.

Cora shook her head.

"My mom ran out of the hospital after giving birth to me. Dad raised me until he went to prison when I was four. Since then, I've lived with Jagger's mom, Mama Sue."

Cora slumped in her chair. "I'm sorry. I had no idea."

"Nothing to be sorry for. I'm happy with my life." She took another drink.

The last thing she wanted was pity. She also wasn't ready to sing kumbaya around a burning barrel, passing a whiskey bottle back and forth with her newfound aunt. She wasn't sure what knowing her background would do for her aunt, but she wasn't ashamed about who she was.

Yes, her dad was a murderer. But he loved her.

"It's so crazy to think all that happened before I was born." Cora shook her head. "I wish I had known. My parents—they never told me everything that happened."

She sat straighter. "Yeah, they don't sound like people I'd want to know."

"They're dead."

Shit.

What was she supposed to say now? Good riddance?

"Listen. I know there was bad blood between Ruger and my parents, but I don't want that to stop us from being a family now." Cora reached out.

Katrina leaned back, avoiding her aunt's touch, and crossed her arms. She did not like strangers to touch her. Especially by a girl that had no clue how she lived her life. She wasn't here to change anything.

"Look." Katrina exhaled loudly. "I was curious to know what you looked like. That's it. I'm not looking to recruit anyone into my family."

"But I am your family." Cora's chin came up. "If you don't want to know me...fine. But that doesn't mean we're not family. You only know what your dad has told you. I'm not my parents." Her aunt stood. "If you don't want to know more about me, that's on you. Just know that I live in Seaglass Cove." She reached into her purse, grabbed a receipt and a pen, and wrote on the back. "If you ever want to know more, you know where to find me."

Cora put the receipt with her address in front of Katrina and walked out of the clubhouse. Katrina watched her storm out. She hated to admit it, but she was impressed.

She despised weak women. It was nice to see Cora had some balls under that dress. Maybe all Albright women had a wild temper.

Going by the sundress and flip flops and the way Cora wore her hair up in a messy bun, she surprised Katrina. Maybe there was more to her aunt than she figured from her first impression.

Katrina scoffed, losing sight of her aunt. She had bigger things to deal with than an aunt trying to turn her and her dad into one big, cozy family.

She finished the rest of the coffee and regained the strength she'd lost after encountering Jagger that morning. She came to see Cora only because it gave her an excuse to see Jagger.

The last time they'd been together, he swore he was done with her. He'd told her to go on with her life and forget about him. Then, he'd left, giving her no choice but to lose him—after he'd spent years telling her he'd never leave.

It was impossible to stop loving him. He was everything to her. Every memory and significant moment in her life revolved around him. Just because Jagger refused to go against the bylaws which said something stupid like he couldn't touch a member's wife, sister, or daughter since her dad gained his freedom didn't mean she could stop wanting him.

Her dad was out of prison, but he wasn't exactly back in her life. She still lived with Mama Sue.

She continued to stay with Mama Sue because she held up hope that Jagger would ride to Beaverton for the yearly rally. But no one from Seaglass Cove attended the last two years because they were busy setting up the new chapter.

She put her cup in the sink and went outside. Men loitered around, going about their business. She scanned the line of bikes, going to the position closest to the door, knowing if Jagger was still around, his Harley would be parked there.

It was.

She walked faster, going to her car. Now that she'd met Cora, nothing kept her in Seaglass Cove. But she wasn't leaving until she was ready.

Right now, all she wanted to do was take a shower, change out of the clothes she'd worn yesterday, and get another chance at seeing Jagger.

She opened the back door of her Dodge Charger and grabbed her overlarge bag. Not knowing what would happen when she arrived, she'd packed enough clothes for a week. Her cell phone vibrated in her back pocket as she shut the door. She pulled out her cell and read the screen.

It was Mama Sue.

Warmth filled her, and she connected the call. "Did you miss me?"

"Child, I always miss you." Mama Sue clicked her tongue. "How was your trip?"

That wasn't the real reason Mama Sue called. If there was one person in the world who supported her one hundred percent and had stood beside her through every visit with her dad in prison, every fight at school, and every heartbreak with Jagger, it was Mama Sue.

Mama Sue had dried Katrina's tears, calmed her anger, and gave her the love and affection she needed, even when she protested.

She owed the woman everything.

"It was a good trip. There wasn't much traffic since I started late, but I made it here in time for the marriage celebration." She looked around at the men. "I met Cora."

"I'm so happy for you. You finally have someone you can call family."

"You're my family." She swallowed the heavy lump in her throat.

"You can't have too many." Mama Sue paused. "Speaking of family. Have you seen my son?"

"Of course, I've seen him. I've already made him angry at me." She wasn't ready to analyze what their encounter met that morning.

"He's never angry at you. He's mad at himself, child," said Mama Sue.

Half the time, she believed Jagger hated her for loving him. Other times, she wanted to believe he fought with her because he believed he wasn't good enough for her. She

would never care what he'd done in his past or what he'd do in the future as the president of Havlin Motorcycle Club.

All she wanted to do was be with him and love him.

"He hasn't answered my call in two days. Can you pass the phone to him, honey?"

She couldn't hide the smile that erupted on her face. If she didn't know any better, she would think Mama Sue was giving her an excuse to get close to Jagger again.

"Sure. Let me go look for him." She held the phone to her ear and carried her bag with the other hand. "How's everything at home?"

"Quiet with you gone," said Mama Sue.

Katrina laughed. "I bet you like that."

"Hell, no." Mama Sue sniffed. "I miss you like crazy."

One of the bikers noticed her head toward the back of the building with her hands full and jumped to open the door. She winked, thanking him.

Once inside, she dropped her bag and blinked to adjust her vision to the darkness in the room. The clubhouse had no windows and relied on overhead fluorescent lights on the high ceilings.

The moment her eyes adapted, she spotted Jagger at the head of the table, concentrating on a stack of papers. Beside him, sitting to his left was her dad.

"Uh oh," she murmured.

"What's wrong?"

"Dad's with Jagger." She lowered her voice. "Get ready to hear us fight."

"If he starts anything, tell him he'll have to face me when he gets home," said Mama Sue.

She smiled at the warning. Mama Sue was barely a hundred and twenty pounds and only five foot four inches tall. Nothing was intimidating about her, except she was married to the past president of Havoc-Lincoln Motorcycle Club and knew every in and out of the club. Katrina had seen grown men run away from Mama Sue.

"Okay, I'm going over." She made it to the end of the table before her dad spotted her.

Ruger stood and pointed toward the door. "Get out."

"I can't leave." She held out her arm with the phone in her hand. "Mama Sue wants to talk to Jagger."

Ruger's mouth tightened. Even he was afraid of getting on Mama Sue's bad side.

She walked around the table and handed the phone to Jagger. "Keep the phone. I'm going to take a shower. I'll find you when I'm done and pick it up from you."

Jagger ran his hand down his beard and whispered, "Doors unlocked. Use mine. You'll have privacy."

She cocked her eyebrow, surprised he'd offer with her dad sitting eight feet away.

"It's the only one you're guaranteed not to have a member walk in on you," he said loud enough for her dad to hear.

Not wanting to start a war between the two men, she walked away to gather her bag and then slipped into the hallway.

Her dad wouldn't check up on her to see where she went because he had Jagger in sight. She slipped into Jagger's room.

Finding a way to spend time with Jagger with her dad hanging around the clubhouse was proving difficult. But she planned to stay another night, and her dad had to sleep.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

JAGGER SLIPPED THE phone into his vest pocket and turned to continue the conversation with Ruger, only to find him gone. He scanned the room.

His vice president grabbed one of the muffins from the box on the table.

"Did you see where Ruger went?" he asked.

Bane shook his head and swallowed the bite of muffin. "I just got here."

"Damnit." He walked to the door and pushed his way outside.

Looking at the line of motorcycles, he searched for Ruger's bike and came up empty. He jogged to the group of Havlin members standing around the unlit burning barrel.

"Has anyone seen Ruger?" He gazed around the circle of men.

"He rode out less than two minutes ago." Dio carried a brown paper bag. "Want me to hunt him down?"

He shook his head. "Yell if you see him again."

"Will do, Prez."

He returned to the building. As if news of Ruger riding away from the clubhouse made Jagger a free man, he went directly to his bedroom, knowing Katrina would've followed his directions and taken a shower in his room.

He closed and locked the door behind him. The steady hum of the water from the shower let him know Katrina was in the bathroom. No door separated them. It was too tempting not to join her.

Whether he had five minutes or one minute before Ruger returned, he wouldn't waste the time.

He bent over and pulled the laces loose on his boots. When they were loose enough, he toed the heel and pulled his feet out. He set his pistol on the top of the dresser and undid his belt. Afraid she'd turn off the water before he got undressed, he hurried to remove the rest of his clothes.

Once naked, he stepped into the bathroom. Steam rolled out of the shower.

When he'd turned the old bus garage into a clubhouse, he put in enough single rooms to house some of their unmarried members. There were always those who crashed after parties or a long night working before they had to get on the road. The rooms were basic, ten by twelve feet, with one bed, chair, and nightstand. Nothing else was needed. Two rooms had bathrooms—one was used as a playroom for the younger kids when they showed up with a member. Everyone else used the two bathrooms in the hallway, and the bar in the clubhouse had a coffee maker and microwave if they wanted to heat something.

But his room was built for him. It was a large version of the others. The bed was in the main room, but he also had a couch, recliner, dresser, television, and an attached bathroom with a locker-room-style walk-in shower.

He stepped around the partition. His body tightened at the erotic scene in front of him.

Katrina had her head tilted back and her arms up, rinsing the shampoo out of her hair.

His gaze dropped to her breasts. Perky breasts that were plump and more than filled up his hands were raised for his viewing. Her nipples were relaxed and swollen under the flow of water cascading down her body. He curled his fingers. One touch and he'd turn them into hard nubs.

She reached blindly for the towel thrown over the three-quarter wall. He stepped in front of her and grabbed the towel, placing it in her hand.

Katrina dried her face and opened her eyes. Jagger gripped her hips, catching the sway of her body as shock hit her.

"You had to know I'd find a way to come to you," he whispered.

She threw the towel behind him, out of the shower, and snaked her arms around his neck. He held her against his body, taking the time to feel her skin against him.

"I've missed you so much," she whispered against his neck.

He lowered his head and captured her mouth. The frustration and anger from earlier were now gone. All that was left was a desperate need to make sure she still belonged to him. It'd been too long.

He turned her in the shower, letting the water spray beat on his back. Every fucking night he dreamed of having her in his arms again and not having her physically hurt him.

His cock hardened between their bodies. He pressed his hand against her lower back, arching her against him. It wasn't enough.

He shifted, hooking her thigh, and raised her leg. His cock throbbed, searching for home.

Katrina moaned impatiently. They had no time to dry off and go to bed. Ruger could come back any time. He wasn't going to miss his chance.

He pulled his mouth off her and pressed her against the tile. His ragged breath wasn't from the urgency. It'd been too long without her.

He was desperate and needy.

"Tell me to walk away." As he warned her, he took both her wrists and raised her arms above her head so she couldn't leave him.

Her breasts pushed against him in that position. The muscles in his ass tightened.

"I'm not the one who wants to walk away." She lunged forward, but he held her in place. "I want you. I've always wanted you. You're the one—"

He bent his knees, placed his cock between her thighs, and thrust into her in one move. Her groan vibrated throughout him. He pulled back, plunged, and dug his toes against the wet, tiled floor. He needed to bury himself in every single inch of her pussy.

"Jagger." The back of her head hit the wall as she moaned.

"Shut up." He kissed his way up her neck, along her jaw, and took her mouth. "And fuck me," he said against her lips.

He let go of her wrists and picked her up by the waist. "Wrap your legs around me."

Katrina looped her arms around his neck. He hefted her up until her thighs hugged him. Only then could he straighten his legs.

He cupped her ass, moving her against him. As his tongue entered her mouth, he buried his cock into her pussy. Feeling her wrapped around him, holding on to him, he wanted to keep her there. In his head, he'd kill anyone in his way, including Ruger.

Katrina squirmed, fisting his hair. Knowing she needed more, he slipped his cock out of her and put her on her feet. He turned her around and, inch by sweet inch, entered her pussy from behind.

She arched her back. He wrapped his arm around her hip and put his hand between her legs. Finding her wet, swollen clit with his finger, he rubbed without missing a stroke. The rhythm verged on painful and the most pleasurable thing he'd ever experienced.

"Harder." Katrina bucked back against him.

He slammed into her, grinding his cock into her. The front of his thighs slapped the back of her legs.

Katrina's breath came in short gusts. He controlled her breathing with his movements.

He thrust in. She breathed out. Back and forth.

Her ass quivered. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he registered that the water splashing on his calves had turned cold. But nothing would stop him from fucking her.

Her legs quivered. "Yes. Yes."

She exploded. The tightness around his cock clamped down on him, throbbing, milking. He removed his hand from between her legs and grabbed her hips. Plunging into her, he came up on his toes and came inside of her.

Jolt after jolt. She took everything from him and sucked him dry.

Katrina's head rolled forward. Her hands slid on the wall of the shower. He grabbed her waist and pulled her into a standing position. His cock slid out of her.

The pleasure of having her again left him as a heaviness settled on his shoulders. One of the main bylaws of Havlin Motorcycle Club was you wouldn't screw with a member's wife, sister, or daughter.

He wanted to blame fucking her for losing his head. But he wasn't the kind of man who acted before thinking. He knew damn well what he was doing.

Holding her close, he ran his hand up the inside of her arm until he found the birth control implant under her skin. He'd taken her to the doctor and had it put in her. He knew how long they lasted.

"Is that a new one?" It'd been over three years since he'd taken her to the clinic.

She turned in his arms and looked up at him. "Do you think I'd try and get pregnant?"

"To keep me? Yeah." He stepped into the spray of the water, quickly rinsing off. "The water's cold." He stepped around her. "Clean up the best you can, get dressed, and then I need to get you out of here."

He exited the shower, grabbed a towel, and entered the bedroom. Redressing, he understood how badly he'd fucked up.

When it came to Katrina, he acted first and thought later. She was his heart. He needed her more than life, and it was hell living without her.

He only had himself to blame. He let her depend on him. He even encouraged her.

That's what Ruger had wanted him to do. But it all changed as she got older.

He'd started the Seaglass Cove Chapter to get away from Katrina. If they ever ran into each other again, he hoped that whatever kept him tied to her would disappear. As much as he hated the thought of her falling in love with someone else, it would've been easier if she'd walked away from him.

Katrina came out of the bathroom naked and grabbed her bag. "That was low, even for you, Jagger. You can't have me and then turn around and be an asshole."

They had no time to discuss what was happening between them. He'd told her to stay away from him, and she showed up in Seaglass Cove. She had to know what would happen. He had no control around her.

"Get your ass in gear." He slid his pistol into his inner vest pocket. "Ruger could show up at any time."

She shoved her arm through her shirt. "I'm so sick of hearing about my dad."

"I'm sworn to the patch." He ogled her body as she pulled on a pair of panties and grabbed her jeans. "I'm the president of—"

"Whatever."

"Katrina." He exhaled harshly. "We've had this argument before."

She shoved her feet in a pair of Chucks. "It's bullshit."

"Watch your mouth."

She flung her wet hair over her shoulder, picked up her duffle, and swung it in front

of her, trying to hit him. He stepped back. She could be pissed all she wanted, and nothing would change until Ruger permitted him to have a relationship with Katrina.

The last time Ruger caught him with his hands on Katrina, he crawled away with a broken shoulder and bruised kidneys. There wouldn't be a next time because Ruger would kill him instantly—and the club would support Ruger because it was written in the bylaws.

His only hope was that once Katrina became an age where Ruger believed she could make mature decisions, he'd let her lead her life the way she chooses.

Of course, by then, he'd probably be dead.

She swung the bag again, hitting him on the shoulder. He could see her spiraling. The benefits of having her grow up within the club meant she knew how to protect herself and there were hundreds of men ready to defend her. But the drawback was she picked up a biker's lifestyle too easily.

Her temper often went from zero to a hundred in the blink of an eye. She had a dirty mouth that could scar a man. While living around Havlin members, she'd learned to punch, kick, and stab.

She was tough.

But underneath that hard exterior she'd built, she was soft. She was his. And he'd never change her because to him, she was perfect.

Wild and loyal, and a little crazy.

He walked to the door and cracked it open. The hallway was clear. He motioned for her to leave.

She walked toward him, barely keeping her chin from trembling. He stopped her before she could slip past him.

Holding on to her wrist, he forced himself to send her away. "Take care of yourself, Katrina."

"I hate you." The words barely got beyond her clamped lips.

"No, you don't."

"I do." A tear slid down her cheek.

He caught it with the pad of his thumb. "Damnit, don't cry."

Katrina lashed out, swinging her arms. He took the pounding. He deserved every ounce of pain he'd caused her.

He knew when she was thirteen years old and infatuated with him that he should've sent her away.

When she was sixteen and found every opportunity to throw her arms around his neck, he should've forbidden her to enter the clubhouse.

Time after time, life threw them together until their age difference no longer mattered. They were two healthy people who connected on a different level.

She'd slipped into his heart and refused to leave. And he could do nothing about it because he was in too deep with her.

He loved Katrina more than he loved the club, and that was dangerous for a man like him. He was a leader. But Katrina made him blind and irresponsible.

Her bag hit the floor. She pummeled his chest with both fists.

"You're just like everyone else," she screamed.

He refused to stop her from hitting him. Since she was a little girl, she feared people leaving her. Understandable, considering her mom abandoned her. Her father left her and spent almost her whole life in prison.

He'd repeatedly promised her he would never leave, and she took him moving to Seaglass Cove as another person who had left her.

"No, I'm not," he whispered. "You know me better than that."

"You leave and don't even think about me." She slapped his shoulders. "You promised me."

He hadn't left her willingly.

She kicked out and yelled in pain when her foot connected with his boot.

Bane entered the hallway, grabbing Katrina from behind and dragging her away from him. He never took his gaze off her.

"Fuck you, Jagger." She squirmed in Bane's grasp. "You dirty cock-sucker. You can go to hell, asshole."

Her screams of profanity kept going long after Bane took her out of sight. Jagger walked back into the bedroom. The door shut. He swung out and punched the wall.

Hot pain radiated throughout his hand. Even his agony couldn't distract him from the painful cries filtering into his room.

She had a right to act out toward him. He deserved every name she could throw at him. He also knew that once she settled down, she'd be right back fighting for him, and that was a hard love to walk away from.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

CARRIED OUT OF THE clubhouse, Katrina pushed against Bane, trying to break free. "Don't fucking touch me."

Bane dropped her onto her feet. She stumbled backward, shoving him with all her strength.

"You're an asshole, too, Bane." She pulled her shirt down. "Touch me again, and I'll have my dad—"

"Katrina."

She stiffened at the sound of her dad's voice. Her threat was left unspoken. While she was mad enough to use her relationship with her dad as her protector, she wouldn't tell him why Bane carried her out of the clubhouse.

Her dad walked over to her. "Talk."

She glared at Bane and spoke to her father. "He wanted to argue about what chapter is better, and I put all my bets on Hatchet, obvi."

"Talk English," he mumbled.

If the V.P. cared about his life, he'd take her cue and not open his mouth. Her dad was a loose cannon when it came to her. It was one of the reasons why she had never had a heart-to-heart conversation with him about her feelings toward Jagger.

While she felt safe in her dad's presence because of his devotion toward her, there

was some respectful fear, too. He was a hard man to understand. Despite all the weekly visits to the prison throughout her life, there was still a lot of mystery surrounding her dad.

There were things he would not discuss, even with her.

That fear kept her from spilling her guts to him because she would never do anything to put Jagger's life in danger.

And even though her dad had never caught her and Jagger together-together, he was irrational because he once caught her sitting on Jagger's lap in his room. The situation had become violent for reasons she had yet to figure out.

She'd asked Jagger many, many times and even discussed the problem with Mama Sue. No one would tell her why her dad had such hostility toward Jagger.

She often wondered if her dad was jealous because Jagger got to be with her while she grew up, and her dad was locked in a cell. But that wasn't her fault. Her dad made his own choices and committed a crime. He couldn't blame her for his incarceration.

"Are you ready to get out of here?" mumbled her dad.

She wanted to tell him yes because Jagger infuriated her. But she couldn't face leaving him again.

"Katrina," shouted a woman behind her, stopping her from answering her dad.

She turned around and found Cora holding her breasts as she ran across the parking lot behind the clubhouse.

"Jesus. We don't need this shit." Her dad exhaled loudly. "Be ready to ride out in an

hour."

Her dad stalked toward his bike, escaping. Katrina pressed her lips together. Her father wanted nothing to do with his younger sister. A sister he hadn't even known about his whole life.

Cora glanced at the duffle bag on the ground where Bane had dropped it and frowned. "Are you leaving?"

"I..." She thrust her hand in her hair.

She had no idea what was happening. Jagger manipulated their relationship. Her father wanted to control her life. She worked for Havlin in Beaverton and had never known anything but the lifestyle. For once, she would love to have some say about her life.

Cora frowned. "Is everything okay?"

She knew nothing about her aunt. Yet the woman seemed to want to reach out to her. How many ways could she tell her that she had no room in her life for someone else?

"If staying at the clubhouse is hard, you're welcome to stay in the spare bedroom at our house." Cora raised her brows. "Or hey, you can stay in the van."

"Van?" She scoffed. "Yeah, right."

Couch surfing was one thing, but going homeless and sleeping in the back of a van had no appeal to her.

"A BMW Sprinter van." Cora laughed. "It's nice. I lived in it for a year while I traveled around. I can take you to the house to check it out."

Blood relative or not, Cora was whacked out of her damn head. Where the hell would she get a Sprinter van at her age unless she stole it?

"I'm serious." Cora looked at her expectedly. "You can stay anywhere. At the house, a campground, or even park behind the club—I'm sure it'd be okay. Of course, you'd have to ask Jagger first. But he let me stay here last summer when I tried to find my brother—your dad."

Her upper lip curled before she could control her jealousy. Jagger went out of his way for Cora but not for her.

She crossed her arms and looked over at the clubhouse. Surprised to see Jagger standing outside having a cigarette, she had a wild idea.

"So, let me get this straight. You don't care if I live in the van in your driveway?" she asked.

"I would love it." Cora smiled wildly. "Meeting the rest of my family is all I've wanted for eighteen months. We can use the time to get to know each other."

"I'd need a job," she mumbled as ideas formed.

"I could ask at the coffee shop to see if we could use another—"

"No." She shuddered. "I'm used to serving drinks—to bikers, not to townspeople."

"Oh, well, everyone here gets their own drinks at the Havlin parties." Cora motioned her arm. "Let me ask Wire. He'd know what happens here when the women aren't here."

"Hm." She stared at Jagger.

He was looking at her. Probably trying to figure out why she was still here. If she played her cards right, she could stay longer, and her father would either have to change chapters to stay with her or go back to Beaverton, which would leave her alone with Jagger.

Excitement filled her. They had never had a time when they weren't fighting to find time together.

Their moods were always off. When she needed him, he pushed her away.

Just like today.

And yet, she'd swear that he needed her as much as she needed him. If he wasn't allowed to have a relationship with her because he was a Havlin member, then now that he was the president of Seaglass Cove, there was no way he'd bend the rules.

But he'd never keep his distance if she were here twenty/four-seven. What they had was beyond anything they could control.

Nobody would be able to keep them apart, especially her dad.

Wire joined Cora. Her aunt snuggled against his side. It wasn't hard to tell they were newlyweds.

Timing was one reason she wouldn't want to live in the house with her aunt. She wasn't that big of a bitch to ruin someone else's relationship when they'd just gotten married.

But Cora had a fancy-ass van. Hell, yeah, she'd live in one if it meant she could be close to Jagger.

As Cora talked with her husband, Katrina stepped away and picked up her duffle bag, keeping an eye on Jagger. She would prove to him how useful she could be around here, just like she'd done back in Beaverton.

As soon as Wire gave his okay on Cora's plan, she'd call Mama Sue and let her know she intended to extend her vacation and have her get the message to Hatchet. The mother chapter would have to make their own drinks for a while.

"You're the best." Cora threw her arms around her husband. "I'm so excited."

She turned her attention to her aunt. Going by her happiness, she must've gotten her way.

Cora bounced with joy. "You can stay in the van. Wire's going to ask Jagger if—"

"No." She hurried the three steps back to Cora and Wire. "Don't ask him."

"But you wanted to stay at the clubhouse," said Cora.

She glanced at Wire. He studied her. She had to think fast.

"For now, I'll stay at your house. In your driveway. I won't be a bother, I promise." She quickly added. "If that's okay?"

"OFC." Cora hugged her.

"OFC?" said Wire.

Cora let Katrina go and laughed. "It means, of course, honey."

Katrina swung her duffle bag over her shoulder. "I need to track down my dad and

tell him about my plan. When do you think you'll head home?"

"Anytime you're ready." Cora slid the strap to her sundress up on her shoulder. "Wire has a meeting, but I can leave whenever I want. I planned on taking the van home while he stayed at the clubhouse."

"Give me a few minutes." She lugged her duffle to her car and threw the bag onto the backseat.

Taking out her cell, she pushed the number for her dad and put the phone to her ear. He picked up on the second ring.

"Hey. It's me." She looked at Jagger as she spoke with her dad. "Cora invited me to stay at her place. She's offered some fancy van she's not using at her house for me to sleep in, so I'm going to spend a couple of weeks in Seaglass Cove—get to know my aunt."

She'd met her aunt. That's all she'd wanted to do. Cora was just an excuse to see Jagger.

"I need to get back to Beaverton." Her dad paused. "It's best you go back with me."

"I've never had time off from slinging drinks, Dad. This is the first time I've been to the coast. In my life." She frowned when Wire walked over to Jagger.

She had to think fast before Cora's husband blabbed about her staying at their house and ruined her shot at staying there. In the mood Jagger was in, he'd haul her ass to the interstate and have his men escort her out of town.

So, she did the only thing that gave her a slim chance of having her dad agree to let her stay. She said, "Please."

Her heart pounded. She never begged anyone for anything.

Even though she was twenty-four, she lived within Havlin Motorcycle Club. Everything had to be approved by her dad. Even when she lived with Mama Sue, her dad had the final say over her care from inside the prison walls.

It would be a different story if she cut ties with the club. But she would never walk away from family.

"Stay under the protection of Havlin," he muttered.

"Thanks, Dad." She disconnected the call before he could change his mind.

Shooting a smile across the parking lot toward Jagger, all the adrenaline coiled in her stomach when she watched him take his phone from his pocket and hold it to his ear. Two seconds later, his gaze snapped at her.

God damn, son-of-a-bitch. Her dad had called Jagger less than thirty seconds after talking to her and ratted her out.

She turned and found Cora waiting in front of the van. "Hey, you ready?"

It was even more vital for her to get out of there and away from Jagger. He'd need time to cool off before accepting that she would hang around for longer.

"Yeah. Just follow me." Cora walked toward the driver's door.

Katrina hurried and got in the car, starting the vehicle. She needed to slip out of sight and let Jagger calm down.

She wasn't staying at the club yet. Going to Cora's house was her only option. Jagger

had the final say over club business but had no say in family matters.

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SEVERAL LOW WHISTLES went off around the table in the Havlin clubhouse. Jagger slid an AR-15 semi-automatic in front of them and pointed for Bane to pass it around.

Dio leaned over, inspecting the rifle as Bane sighted down the barrel. "No markings?"

Jagger shook his head. "A gift from Moroad Motorcycle Club over in Federal, Idaho."

"It's not Christmas." Maverick leaned back in his chair, letting Cord pass the rifle in front of him to Dio. "Isn't there another MC selling guns in Idaho?"

"Bantorus." Jagger shrugged. "Legal ones."

Dio rubbed the stock. "This one doesn't even have a scratched-out serial."

"It's a blank." Jagger sat back down in the chair. "Moroad supplies the majority of the weapons to the underground."

"Sweet." Cord put the rifle back in front of Jagger. "Nicer than the military."

"This gift is why I called the meeting." Jagger clasped his hands behind his head. "Moroad is expanding but has run out of resources to launder the money from the guns. Since we run security on the pot shops along highway 101. They want to know if we'd like to work with them."

"For how much?" asked Bane.

"Forty percent." Jagger fingered the tip of the barrel.

"No way." Dio shook his head. "They aren't known for sharing, so why offer us that percentage?"

"Because the pot shops are in Havlin territory, and there's nothing Moroad can do about taking that zone away from us." He leaned back in the chair. "Most of them can't leave the state. They only have a handful of men who can cross the line without breaking probation."

Bane scratched his jaw through his beard. "Will we touch the guns?"

Jagger pulled out a cigarette and tapped the filter against the table. "Nope, only the cash. What happens between these four walls remains tight. We already have enough manpower and enough businesses to run cash rolls. Three pot shops alone could handle the cash flow without raising eyebrows, and we are in control of six of them."

"I got another kid coming in three months. Count me in." Rush raised his hand.

"Are the feds after Moroad?" asked Bane.

"Nope." Jagger respected his men for asking the questions. "Not at the moment."

He'd already gone through every scenario. Eventually, something would go wrong. Word would spread. There was a possibility of the federal agents getting involved, not to mention the local P.D. But today was a good time to jump on the new opportunity to bring money into the club.

"There's risks." He thrummed his thumb on the table. "Same as with every job. The moment we slip on the vest in the morning, the odds of living through the day get lower."

Bane looked at the rifle again. "What kind of money are we talking about?"

He flipped over the paper in front of him and slid it to his Vice President. He and Jeremy, the president of Moroad Motorcycle Club, had talked twice over the last month after the other club heard about Los Li's attack on Havlin. That opened the gate for discussing the new business venture with Moroad.

If it were only him, he'd take the deal. But he needed his men's support.

He'd learned from the best how to run the club. His father had written the Havoc-Lincoln Motorcycle Club bylaws.

It'd been twenty years since he lost his old man. Missed the fucker every damn day.

He'd planned on carrying the mother chapter into the future after his dad retired from old age, but that dream ended when he buried his father. As V.P., Hatchet stepped up into the presidential role. By the time Jagger thought about taking over, he knew it was better to branch off from the mother chapter and come to Seaglass Cove.

Beaverton was Katrina's home. She had Jagger's mom to support her. It was better to leave his past behind. Deep down, he knew his dad would've approved.

It was his time to make something out of the Seaglass Cove Chapter.

He let the men talk back and forth. Once everyone had checked out the amount of money written on the paper and realized earning that sum was doable if they all pulled together, he called for a vote.

Going into business with Moroad Motorcycle Club passed unanimously. Havlin was now in the money laundering business.

"Meeting over." He hit the gavel on the table. "There are five more rifles in my room. They go to the officers."

Cheers roared around the table. Jagger grinned. He knew that would make the men happy. As long as they had their Harley, access to women, a never-ending supply of alcohol, and big guns, they were content.

He stepped away from the table. The meeting lasted three hours. With the backdoor of the clubhouse locked, no one could enter.

He had Brett and two newer prospects, Camhead and Trigger, holding down the parts shop. He glanced at the screen of his phone, making sure he hadn't received any calls during the meeting and had somehow missed the vibration.

The call he'd received from Ruger informing him that Katrina would stay in Seaglass Cove for the time being had rocked his foundation. He couldn't run a club and deal with Katrina at the same time.

Nobody had called or texted.

He shoved the cell back in his pocket and headed for the door to the parts shop. As soon as Katrina returned, he'd send her home.

"Prez?" shouted Wire.

He closed the door without walking out and waited for Wire. "What's up?"

"I wanted to let you know Cora invited Katrina to stay at the house." Wire grimaced. "I understand you put a no-touch order out to the club on Katrina at the beginning of the meeting, so I wanted you to know Cora asked her to hang around. She still hopes to get her brother and Katrina to accept her into the family."

"She's staying with you?"

Wire nodded. "Cora offered up the Sprinter."

Fuck. He wanted to hate Ruger for not caring for his daughter but understood Katrina was her own woman.

She was a foul-mouthed, too sexy for her own good, bull-headed woman who would only fight dirty if pushed into a corner. Her favorite person to fight with was him. And, damned if the thought of her fighting to stay here turned him on.

"I've got a couple of jobs lined up this afternoon. Do you need anything before I ride off?" asked Wire.

Wire ran his own company as an electrician and stayed busy when he wasn't working for the club. His loyalties were in the right place, and he had become irreplaceable since moving to Seaglass Cove.

"Nah." He slapped Wire's shoulder. "I've got things covered here, brother."

He stepped into the parts shop, shut the door, picked up the nearest box, and sailed it against the racks. The wild swing of testosterone left him desperate to see Katrina.

"Jesus. What was that?" shouted Brett.

"I'll check it out," said Camhead, the newest prospect.

Exhaling harshly, Jagger schooled his emotions, unflexed his fingers, and walked into their sight. "Take a break. I'll cover the front. Send Link and Dio to the shop to work."

"Dio walked Maverick's kid over to the swimming pool. He said he'd be back after the girl gets her ribbon for passing some swim class." Brett picked up his pack of cigarettes off the counter.

"Find Link, then." He walked over to the computer and studied the screen.

There were orders to fill. That would keep his hands busy before he starts swinging and getting his frustrations out.

Katrina. What the fuck was she doing to him?

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

KATRINA SAT ON THE step outside the Sprinter van. When she agreed to stay in the van, she hadn't figured in all the alone time she'd have while living in someone else's driveway.

Earlier, Cora—she wasn't going to call her Aunt Cora, considering they were two and a half years apart—had brought her a plate of food. Lasagna and garlic bread had hit the spot, and she'd finished every bite.

Cora also told her she could use the house while they were gone. But trespassing hadn't sat right with her.

The distant roar of the ocean kept her company. She closed her eyes. The soothing hum echoed the rhythm of her heart. She was closer to nature on the coast than in Beaverton.

She inhaled deeply. The briny aroma clung to her skin like a salty kiss from the ocean, making her feel alive despite the depression settling in her. She wanted to be a part of what Jagger was doing in Seaglass Cove and experience a new place with him, despite him wanting her away from the clubhouse.

Despite being away from him, away from Mama Sue, away from her dad, she found a sense of peace here that she couldn't explain.

She opened her eyes. Soon, she'd need to go down to the beach. She had a feeling the sheer amount of water rolling over the earth would be unforgettable.

As a child, she'd always wanted to go to the coast. But despite living less than three

hours away, there was never anyone around to take her. At the time, her dad was in prison, Mama Sue was taking care of her, and the bikers weren't allowed to put her on the back of their motorcycles.

She pulled up Jagger's number on the phone, wanting to share how she was feeling with him but hesitated. Not once since her dad was released from prison had Jagger returned one of her calls.

April 5th was burned into her skin like a bad tattoo.

It was the day her dad got arrested and taken from her and, ironically, the date that he was released from prison, forcing Jagger to leave her. Her heart would only take so much breakage before it shriveled up and died.

Maybe that's why she often called Jagger and spoke to his voicemail in the off-chance he'd listen. She was trying to move forward, but it was impossible when all she wanted was him.

She connected the call and stared into the dark. The call went to voicemail.

She often wondered if he ever listened to what she had to say.

"It's me," she whispered. "I've been thinking about you."

She sighed, hating the way loneliness consumed her.

"I guess that's nothing new." She walked inside the van, shut the door, and stretched out on the pull-out bed. "I hoped seeing you, being with you, would make it easier, but it only makes it harder to think of returning home. I hate how I can't be with you. You're the only reason I came to Seaglass Cove." She looked around the van. "I don't even know what I'm doing here. It's hard to be so close to you. I could drive to the

clubhouse and see you in five minutes, but I feel I'm far away."

The wind rocked the van.

"Cora and Wire are at the clubhouse, probably partying with you, and all I can think about is you being with another woman. It kills me to think of how many women you must've had in the past while I'm alone and wanting you." Blackness settled over her. "Whoever is with you tonight, I hope she dies."

Tears rolled into her hairline. "It seems like everyone has someone, and the only person I want doesn't want me back, and I hate you for that because I know you're lying. I know you better than anyone." Her voice broke, and she sniffed. "My life has never been easy, but you gave me easy...until you took that away from me."

She wheezed.

"Sometimes I wish I'd never met you, Jagger." Her chest squeezed tighter. "I hope that whoever you're with makes you miserable." She struggled to breathe. "You can lie to yourself and pretend the women mean something to you, but they'll never know you the way I do."

She blindly disconnected the call and dropped the phone to the floor of the van, giving in to the pain that tormented her.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

THE MUSIC PLAYING AND the raised voices created a hum inside the clubhouse. Jagger lifted the bottle of whiskey to his lips, trying his best to numb the pain.

Bane walked into the clubhouse with his arm around Daisy. Jagger pushed off the wall, set down the whiskey bottle, and headed toward the hallway. There was no reason for him to stay at the party now that his V.P. was around to make sure the men wouldn't kill each other.

The men deserved to let loose. Let them party and wear themselves out before the real work starts.

One of the bitches stepped in front of him, curling around him like a snake. Her half-naked body warm and inviting.

"I can make you feel good." She cupped his crotch.

His cock pulsed for attention. He'd tried to find comfort with others. Tried to lose himself in the arms of other women. But it was only sex, a temporary distraction.

"Find someone else, sweetheart." He smacked her ass, sending her on her way.

In his room, he shut the door. Taking the pistol out from underneath his belt, he set the gun on the dresser. It was early yet. The party would go on until the early morning.

He stretched out on the couch and dug his phone out of his vest pocket. As he noticed the missed call, his body tightened, and he sat up.

Hitting voicemail, he waited for the voice that haunted his dreams.

"It's me. I've been thinking about you."

His pulse roared in his ears. He walked across the room, grabbed his pistol, and tucked the weapon underneath his belt while listening to the end of the message. Then, he stormed out of the room and through the clubhouse.

Dio darted toward him, jogging to keep up with him. "Hey, what's the hurry?"

"Tell Bane to stick around for a few hours." Jagger pushed out the door. "I've got somewhere I need to go."

"Do you need riders?"

He shook his head. "Not tonight."

"Sure, Prez." Dio hung back. "Ride safe."

He took his helmet off the handlebar and slapped it on his head. Within twenty seconds, he rolled away from the clubhouse. What other women couldn't do for him, Katrina could do with one simple message on the phone.

He had a collection of messages through the years. Times when he couldn't listen to the sound of her voice because she made him reckless, and as the president of Havlin, it was a cost he couldn't afford. Other times, he waited impatiently for her call to go to voicemail so he could listen over and over.

At the party, he'd seen Wire and Cora there. They were having a good time near the pool table. There was no one home with Katrina. She was alone.

The closeness of her staying at Wire's house, just five minutes away, made it impossible for him to ignore her call. It starkly contrasted with when she lived in Beaverton, where the added distance gave him the time to resist her. He'd started many rides, heading north, only to turn around before reaching the mother chapter. Now, with her so close, he couldn't resist the call.

As he rolled into the driveway, the magnitude of Katrina's power over him bolstered him forward. It was a power that kept him coming back to her, time and time again.

A power he gave to her. Only her.

Katrina was tough and strong for everyone in her life. She played the perfect adopted daughter for Mama Sue. She bent over backward to be the daughter Ruger wanted. Around Havlin members, she was the sexy chick with a quick comeback and a heart of gold or the kid sister many of them never had.

But to him, she was life.

He was a cold-hearted asshole. Raised by Baller to walk in his footsteps, Jagger had no room for emotions, love, and regrets. All those fast-hard rules, loyalty pledges, and riding under the same colors were placed there for a reason.

Katrina broke through every barrier he'd set up. She'd shown him there was more he needed in life besides the club, danger, and fighting every day to retain his freedom.

He pulled to a stop behind the van parked in Wire's driveway. Toeing the kickstand, he swung his leg over the seat and stalked toward the side of the vehicle.

Every light was out at the house and in the van. It was after midnight. She probably fell asleep.

"Kat." He knocked on the side of the van loud enough to wake the dead. "Wake up."

The door slid open. Katrina stood in the opening, brushing the hair away from her eyes, wearing a pair of black panties and a tank that landed several inches above her belly button.

His cock pulsed to life the moment she recognized him standing outside. She leaped. He caught her and carried her back into the van. Her warm body took the chill of him from the ride over.

"You came." She wrapped her legs around him.

He sat on the couch, not letting her go. Framing her face with his hands, he held her close but couldn't see her in the dark.

"Where's the light?" He flung his arm to the side, trailing his hand against the van's interior.

"Here."

An overhead beam came on, filling the van with a dim light. He blinked against the glare, taking in Katrina's heavy-lidded eyes. She'd been crying. Mascara stained her face.

"I think about you." The answer to the question she left on the phone ripped from his soul. "All the fucking time, Kat. You know that."

"Why are you so mean to me?" She thrust her fingers into his hair, smoothing back the strands. "I want us to be together."

"We have tonight." He captured her mouth. "Right now."

"I want more," she said against his lips.

Greedy girl. She always wanted more. She'd taken everything from him.

He slid his hands down the front of her neck. Her skin was warm from sleep. He cupped her breasts, feeling the weight of them in his palms. This all should be his every night. Every day. It was his right. She'd given herself to him. Katrina belonged to him.

She pulled the edges of his vest apart, diving her hands underneath and tugging on his shirt.

He used his mouth to open her lips. "Give me the tip of your tongue."

She moaned, meeting his tongue. He took her into his mouth, stroking the velvet softness. She had the sweetest mouth that could start a war, but it belonged to him.

"I want—" She fought him with her tongue. "To touch all of you."

He pulled his mouth off her, shrugged out of his vest, and set his pistol on the couch. Grabbing the collar of his shirt at the back of his neck, he yanked the material until he was bare-chested.

Katrina planted both hands on his chest, kneading the front of him. He let his head fall back. His cock wanted out of his jeans. If she continued touching him, he was going to blow his load.

He hooked his thumb in the elastic of her panties and tugged her closer, rocking her on his lap. The urgency to have her escalated. His blood rolled hot.

Afraid of hurting her, he held back, letting her love on him instead. Greedily taking

her attention—any bit of attention he could get.

There was nobody else he'd rather hold. She made him crazy. She made life dangerous.

Never a thrill seeker, he found himself aching for the adrenaline rush she brought with her every time they got together.

He pulled his mouth off her, breathing heavily. Ruger was right. Jagger had no right to touch her.

The hum of a motorcycle made it through the walls of the van. It would never be the right time for them or the right place. He owed Ruger.

Katrina whined, pulling his hair and trying to kiss him. The material at her hip ripped in his hands. Bare skin burned his soul. He picked her up and tossed her off before standing.

Katrina frowned at him. "Jag?"

He thrust his hands through his hair. "You need to get out of here."

"Me?" She stood. "I'm staying in the van."

"You need to get out of town. Go back to Beaverton. Go back to Ruger." He cupped his cock, rearranging it in his jeans. "It was a bad idea coming here."

"I want to be with you."

He gritted his teeth. "We both know I should've stayed away tonight."

"I don't care what my dad says. I want—"

"This has nothing to do with what you want, Kat. This is about my loyalty to Havlin."

"Fuck Havlin." Katrina stood, ignoring her ripped panties hanging on one thigh. "Ever since I can remember, Havlin has taken you from me. If it's not the club, it's my dad. You're going to end up dead, having never had the chance to love me the way I know you want to love me. Damnit, Jagger. I can see how you feel about me." She patted her chest. "I know. Don't lie to me."

"You think what I want matters?" " He shut off the light, spread the blinds with his fingers, and peeked outside. "Wire and Cora are home."

"So." Katrina folded her arms.

"So...neither one of them is going to understand why I'm in the van with you." He slipped his shirt back on, picked his pistol up, and slid his arms into his vest. "If I didn't have a club to run, I'd let Ruger kill me and put me out of my fucking misery."

"That's not funny."

He took in her tousled hair. Any member of Havlin would take one look at her with her red, swollen lips, ripped panties, and his handprints on her bare skin and execute him on sight.

"For both our fucking sakes, stay in the van and let me handle Wire." He paused at the door, knowing it could be the last time he got to be alone with her again. He stepped in front of her and kissed her deeply.

When he pulled back, there were tears in her eyes. He cupped her face, strumming her cheeks with his thumbs. Forty-six years old, and this girl, this woman, was going

to get him killed.

He walked backward, reaching for the door handle. The moment he opened the door, he jumped out of the van and closed it up tight. Katrina needed to stay inside.

His hope that Wire went inside with his wife ended as he reached his Harley. Wire stood several feet away. All he could see was the cherry glow of his cigarette in the night.

"Prez."

Jagger sat on his bike. "Is the party dying down?"

"Nah." Wire stepped closer. "Cora's covering for Maverick's old lady at the coffee shop tomorrow and has to get up early, so we left early."

He grunted and put on his helmet.

"Night." Wire slapped him on the shoulder. "Watch the road."

"Yep." He started the Harley and rode away.

Wire wouldn't say anything to Ruger about Jagger being in the van tonight with Katrina. As the president, his men would not turn on him. But Wire's old lady was another story. Cora, being big on family, would run straight to Ruger if she believed Katrina was in danger of getting used.

The two girls had only found each other, but if Cora believed Katrina would get hurt, she'd shout out to the world who was responsible.

He needed to talk to Ruger.

Katrina couldn't go on living under the impression that he was afraid of facing Ruger about their feelings toward each other. Throughout the years, he had never told anyone, not even the members of Havlin, what happened the night Ruger got arrested.

If Katrina found out he was responsible for her losing her dad for eighteen years, it would rip away any love she had for Jagger. She loved Ruger with the fierceness of someone who had lost the most important person in her life and had been blessed to get him back. She wasn't going to do anything to lose her dad again.

He pulled into the back of the clubhouse and parked near the door. Music replaced the rumble of his Harley as he shut off the bike.

In his pocket, his phone vibrated. Katrina wasn't going to give him any peace tonight.

Looking at the screen, he frowned. It was Bane.

"Yeah?" he said.

"How close are you to coming back to the clubhouse?"

"I just got back and parked my bike."

"Stay there. I'll come out."

He put the phone back in his pocket and lit a cigarette. It was going to be a long fucking night. His balls ached. His head pounded. The only thing he could do was go inside and pick up his best friend, Jack Daniels.

The back door swung open, and Bane stepped outside, looking around. He moved away from his bike and got out of the shadows.

His V.P. came right to him. "Sorry to spring this on you, Prez, but I got a call from Hatchet."

The president of Havlin, who'd taken over after Baller got murdered, rarely called unless shit was going down or it was time for the quarterly meeting.

"They took Mama Sue to the hospital—"

"Why?" Tension braced him for bad news, and he tossed his cigarette to the ground.

"They believe she had a heart attack."

"Get Hatchet on the phone and have someone grab my duffle from my room." He pulled out his phone and called Wire.

Wire answered on the first ring. "Prez?"

"I need a favor," said Jagger.

"Name it."

"I need to leave town and could use your Sprinter van."

"Sure. I'll get Katrina out and—"

"Leave her alone. She's going with me." He disconnected the call and found Bane holding a phone out to him.

Wide awake, all he needed to do was get to Beaverton. Nothing else mattered. His mom needed family around her.

As Hatchet filled him in on finding his mom slumped over on the porch in her rocker and gave him the hospital information where the ambulance took Mama Sue, he prepared himself for the worst. Three hours was a long time to travel when each second mattered.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

MIST COATED THE VAN'S windshield, splintering the headlights aimed in their direction with each passing car. Katrina sat in the passenger seat, wrapped in a blanket, and prayed Mama Sue would be okay when they arrived at the hospital.

She should've been there with her, maybe she could've helped or recognized that she was having a heart attack. Jagger's mom had always been there for her when she needed her most.

Guilt filled her. Instead, she was foolishly chasing Jagger.

Mama Sue was the one constant person in her life. A strong woman who hadn't abandoned or forgotten about her. Her dad had committed a crime with no thought that he'd had a daughter to raise, leaving her behind. Jagger chose life with Havlin over a life with her.

Tears pooled, threatening to spill. She inhaled deeply, refusing to let herself lose hope. Mama Sue had to live. If anyone could survive a heart attack, it would be her.

She had the strength of a saint.

Glancing at Jagger, her heart ached. She couldn't forget that despite loving Mama Sue with all her being, Jagger was her real son, and he was worried about his mom.

The vein near his temple pulsed in the glow from the dashboard. She swallowed the lump of emotions threatening to drown her. How had they wandered so far from each other?

She wanted to be there for him, but he'd pushed her away. Even now, he closed himself off—the indestructible president of Havlin. Strong and solid for everyone. But who would take care of him?

His men stood behind him. They protected his back.

Jagger needed someone to stand beside him and hold his hand. The others would never see how news of his mother's heart attack had affected him. He wouldn't allow others to see the fear of losing his mom.

The rest of the trip dragged on. The sun rose in the east as they pulled into the hospital parking lot. Shedding the blanket, she slipped on her shoes and followed Jagger out of the van.

His long strides headed straight to the front door of the white building. She jogged to keep up with him.

When he slowed down to inquire at the front desk where he could find his mom, Katrina grabbed his hand. He squeezed hard enough to make her wince, but she refused to let go.

A whistle pierced the quiet morning inside the hospital. Katrina raised her head and found Brady, a Havlin member, motioning them through. She tugged Jagger's arm and stepped away from the desk.

They both jogged down the corridor. Her emotions made it impossible to breathe deeply enough, and she held on to Jagger as she swayed.

Brady motioned for them to go through the door. As they entered, Hatchet stepped away from the nurse's station.

Sadness gazed back at them through a stoic expression. The slight shake of Hatchet's head destroyed all hope. A scream of anguish caught in her throat. She covered her mouth, looking at Jagger.

He dropped her hand and stepped back. She reached for him, but he turned away in anguish.

Brady jumped in, wrapping both arms around Jagger as he swung wildly, fighting the loss of his mother. Hatchet jumped into the fray. Together, the two men struggled to contain Jagger as he fought the truth.

Katrina fell to her knees, hugging her middle, as the devastating loss hit home.

Mama Sue was gone.

Never again would she feel her gentle hand stroke her face or her quick laugh fill the room. The woman who'd rocked her to sleep, chased away her nightmares, and helped her shop for her school clothes every year was gone.

Her heart shattered. Pain radiated through her upper body. Grief made a permanent scar on her. She would never be the same. She would never have another mother figure who loved her like Mama Sue.

She wanted one more hour. One more minute to touch Mama Sue's face. To hold her hand and memorize the softness of her touch.

Big hands encircled her upper arms, lifting her to her feet. She raised her head and, through blurry vision, found her dad. She buried her head in his broad chest, letting him hold her.

Ruger's hand palmed the back of her head. From the safety of her father's arms, she

watched Jagger struggle with the pain of losing his last parent all alone.

She cried for him.

And, she cried for herself.

"Get the fuck off me." Jagger broke free of the men.

Wild and disheveled, Jagger had black circles under his eyes from the worry and lack of sleep as he drove home. He could've gotten here in half the time on his motorcycle, but he'd brought her, hoping they'd get here in time.

They were too late.

"Take a minute, brother." Hatchet patted Jagger's chest.

"I need to see her."

His raw, hoarse voice broke Katrina. She stepped out of her dad's arms and reached him before anyone could stop her.

"Let me go with you," she whispered. "Please."

She had a million things to tell Mama Sue, but nothing more important than wanting to be with Jagger as he said goodbye to his mom.

He raised his head and looked over her head. She glanced over her shoulder and met her dad's gaze, begging him not to start a fight with Jagger. Tonight was not the night.

Her dad dipped his chin.

She grabbed Jagger's hand. For several minutes, people talked all around them. She followed Jagger back and forth as he paced, never letting go of his hand. Everything blurred around her. She couldn't put two thoughts together to make sense of what was happening or why they had to wait for a doctor's approval.

Mama Sue belonged to them. She wasn't some patient.

Jagger moved, leading her down the hallway. A nurse opened a door on the left and stepped out of their way.

"Take your time. There's no rush," said the nurse softly.

The smell of oranges nauseated her. On the few occasions she'd visited a hospital, they always used a citrusy scent to cover the smell of formaldehyde and sickness. Death. Her stomach rolled, and she groaned.

Jagger stopped, turning her around. "You don't have to stay."

She held on to his hand and shook her head. "I want to be with you."

He inhaled deeply as if the job ahead was too much for him to handle, and then he strode forward and walked around the edge of the white curtain to the foot of the bed. A white sheet had been draped over Mama Sue.

Katrina's heart raced. Blackness floated around the edges of her vision. She forced herself to breathe the citrusy air.

Jagger moved along the bed and stopped, putting his hand over the sheet covering Mama Sue. He fisted his hand and then slowly unfurled his fingers and laid his palm on her chest, over her heart.

His chin dropped to his chest, and he closed his eyes. She let go of his hand and put her arms around his waist, pressing against his body. Inside, she trembled. She could pretend that it wasn't Mama Sue under the sheet. It was some stranger. Some older person who had no family. Maybe a John Doe. Someone nobody would miss.

Not Mama Sue.

"I should've been here," he whispered.

She squeezed her eyes shut, feeling the guilt. She would've been here if she hadn't gone to Seaglass Cove. Mama Sue wouldn't have been alone.

"Forgive me, Mama." He leaned down and laid his cheek against her chest.

It wasn't Jagger's fault. Mama Sue was eighty years old and had heart problems. She made no secret about her life and always talked about the day she'd join Baller wherever old bikers go up in the sky. Then, she'd laugh at what a big party they'd have with bottles of whiskey, loud music, and all their friends who had gone before them.

"She was proud of you," she whispered. "She always talked about how you were walking in your father's footsteps."

He straightened, bringing her around to the front of him and wrapping his arms around her. His chest shuddered underneath her cheek, and he kissed the top of her head.

Eventually, he sniffed and inhaled deeper. "Are you okay?"

It took everything in her to hold it together. She wasn't okay. Life could never go back and be safe, like when Mama Sue was alive and taking care of her.

Instead of lying, she held him tighter.

He exhaled loudly. "I need to take care of her."

She nodded against him.

"You should go with your dad—"

"No." She lifted her head and looked him in the eyes. "I want to stay with you in the van."

"Katrina." He shook his head.

"Come to me." She looked behind her. "When you can, I'll be there."

He kissed her hard, taking what he needed from her. She gladly gave her support.

"I'll park the van at the mother chapter while we care for my mom." He stepped away from her and held out his hand.

She knew the rules. No affection in front of her dad. They had to keep their relationship secret.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

THREE DAYS LATER, JAGGER pulled himself out of his drunken stupor and showered. He'd attacked the bottle in the only way he knew to numb the pain of cremating his mother and adding her to the slot on the wall at the cemetery with his father.

His lifestyle had no room to mourn. He was responsible for too many men, too many families. It was time to go back to Seaglass Cove.

He walked into the main room of the clubhouse and scanned the area. He found Katrina behind the bar. The days and nights blurred in his head. He barely remembered her serving him the alcohol and him yelling at her to get away from the bikers. When that hadn't worked, he'd done the only thing he could do while he was inebriated. He told Ruger to take care of his daughter, or he would.

She spotted him and carried over a glass of tomato juice. "This'll help."

Compassion oozed from her despite his treatment. He didn't deserve her.

He brought the drink to his lips, but before he drank, he asked, "Ruger?"

"Out."

He took a drink, almost gagging when his stomach rolled. "Does he know you're here?"

"He came by the van earlier to tell me he was riding and wouldn't return until tomorrow." She folded her arms and then flung them straight down to her sides. "He

knows I work for the club."

He raised his brow. Just because she had a job didn't mean having her around the men was the smartest decision. If he had his way—fuck it.

"I need to get back to Seaglass Cove." He set the glass down. "I'll have one of my men bring you your car."

"I'll go back with you."

He shook his head and instantly regretted it. "That can't happen."

"I came here with you."

"Kat." He pressed his lips together. "We're both hurting. Stay here. Take your time."

"What about you?" She stuck her chin higher. "You lost your mom and think you can jump back into running the club today?"

"That's exactly what I plan on doing."

She shook her head. "Mama Sue was right."

"About what?"

"You're just like your daddy." Her gaze intensified. "The only woman strong enough to make him listen was Mama Sue."

"And you think you're the woman who can boss me around?" He scoffed. "Wake up, Kat. You know what kind of life I lead." He stood and leaned over her. "You're not strong enough to survive."

She flinched before she could hide the pain he'd caused her. He walked away, knowing he only lied because she was better off in Beaverton than fighting a losing battle for him.

She had every reason to hate him. He needed her to hate him because it was impossible for him to stop loving her.

Despite what came out of his mouth, he held on to her like a dying man, knowing she was his saving grace.

If he could go back twenty years and stop Ruger from taking the pistol he'd used to shoot his father's killer, he'd do it in a heartbeat.

But he couldn't rewind the clock.

Once he checked in with the men packing Mama Sue's belongings and putting them in storage, he needed to hit the road back to Seaglass Cove.

He pushed out of the building. Halfway across the lot, a force plowed into the back of him, latching onto him. He stumbled forward under the weight, keeping his assailant from biting the ground. He knew who attacked him because he'd had her body pressed against him more times than he could count.

"You can't do this to me." She clung to him. "I need you."

She struggled, lashing out. He grabbed her arms and threw her over his shoulder, not letting her hit him.

Great sobs racked her body as she struggled to breathe and scream at him at the same time. Her emotional outburst was aimed at him but understanding sucker punched him. Caught up in losing his mom, he'd let Katrina take care of him. But he hadn't

taken care of her.

His mom was the closest thing Katrina had to a parent. The one person who knew about his relationship with Katrina and supported her through the struggles of loving him. His mom would've liked nothing more than to see her son and her adopted daughter make it out of the world together.

He grabbed Katrina, holding her tightly to his chest as she battled her sorrow, screamed her heartache, and fought her fears. The words tumbling out of her mouth made no sense, and they weren't aimed at him or anyone else anymore. She wanted her Mama Sue back.

Her weight grew heavier, and he went down to his knees, holding her to his chest. He understood her pain. A pain he drowned in the bottle and kept buried deep inside of him. But Katrina needed the release.

A group of bikers clustered at the back of the building. He ignored the gawkers. Katrina hadn't picked now to fall apart. He'd given her a reason by letting her know he was leaving. He should've known how hard she'd take the news.

And while she fell apart, he thought of ways to make her feel better.

Ruger was gone. There was no one stopping him from taking care of her.

She needed to get away from the club and the only home she remembered and find a safe spot to mourn. He pushed to his feet and carried her to the van.

He hadn't planned on taking her back to Seaglass Cove. But Ruger wasn't here to stop him. If his MC brother had a problem with him taking care of Katrina when she needed someone to help her, then Ruger could come and get his daughter.

For now, he was taking her home with him.

At the van, he set her down on her feet. "Do you need anything before we go?"

She looked back at the house where Mama Sue raised her. He turned her face away from the memories. That house would always belong to Katrina. When his mom turned eighty, he'd helped her put the deed in Katrina's name so that she always had a house that belonged to her.

"All her things are going into storage." He smoothed her hair off her face. "You're not losing anything more."

"I want her back," whispered Katrina. "I just want her back."

"Get into the van. We'll stop for gas, and then I'll drive straight to Seaglass Cove. Why don't you stretch out on the couch and sleep."

She walked inside and curled into a ball on the couch, cuddling her pillow to her chest. He sat in the driver's seat and sent a text to Hatchet. Then, he texted Ruger.

Katrina's a mess. I'm taking her back to Seaglass Cove. Come and get her.

Before he left the city limits of Beaverton, Katrina fell asleep. She'd worn herself out.

He couldn't relax, though. More and more, he felt himself backed into a corner.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

JAGGER PULLED BEHIND the clubhouse. Katrina had put on her shoes and sat in the passenger seat twenty miles back. They'd both taken the trip in silence.

A familiar biker stood out amongst the line of motorcycles. He glanced at Katrina, wondering if she noticed. Going by the heavy exhale, she'd seen her dad.

"He told me he was on a ride." She hugged her middle. "I was telling the truth."

"Apparently, he was riding in this direction." Jagger unfolded himself out of the seat.

"Jagger?" She swallowed. "I don't want to go back. I just can't. Not now."

"I'll talk to him. You can't drive back until you've had time to rest. This week has been shit for sleep for both of us."

"What if I want to stay permanently in Seaglass cove?"

"He'll never let you."

"What if I have a job? You can hire me." She rubbed her lips together in worry. "I can serve drinks."

"No, Kat." He cupped her cheek. "Let's get through today before we start worrying about tomorrow, huh?"

"I'll text Cora and let her know we returned. She'll probably want the van back at the house." She paused. "Unless you'll let me stay here."

"It's not going to matter. Knowing your dad, he'll stay in the van with you to keep me away." He walked to the sliding door and let himself out.

With heavy footsteps, he headed toward the back door. Out of his peripheral vision, he watched Ruger head toward him. Katrina's dad wasn't going to waste any time.

Ruger's fist arrived first.

Pain radiated along Jagger's jaw, whipping his body around. A scream penetrated his head, knocking the truth into him. He shook his head, getting his vision straight, and faced Ruger.

"I'm in no mood, brother." He raised his hands out to the side. "Go ahead and kill me. Put me out of my misery."

No," screamed Katrina. "Dad, don't."

Ruger never glanced at his daughter. All his attention was on Jagger. He lowered his arms. For eighteen fucking years that Ruger was locked up, Jagger made sure Katrina had everything she needed.

He'd fought long. Suffered year after year. For what? To walk away and be miserable?

This lifestyle was hard.

His dad's life was cut short. He'd watched his mom miss his dad every single day after his death.

He wouldn't spend the rest of his days never having the one thing he wanted.

Katrina ran between them, putting her hands on her dad's chest. "Don't hit him."

"Get out of my way." Ruger sidestepped.

Katrina jumped in his path. "Damnit, Dad. It's time you listen to me."

Jagger's spine stiffened. Katrina had mouthed off to everyone in the clubhouse and held her own against the bikers throughout the years, but she had never once gone up against her dad.

Her tough exterior was a coat of armor for the vulnerability of not wanting to lose anyone again.

Until now, she had never shown that side to anyone but Jagger because she feared she wouldn't be good enough to love.

"You can't stop Jagger from being with me." Katrina stepped back, glancing between the two men. "I love him."

Rugger growled. "You don't fucking lov—"

"You don't know." Her voice rose, and she patted her chest. "You don't know me. All the years you were in prison, who do you think I went to when I needed something?"

"Mama Sue," said Ruger.

She shook her head. "Every time I needed my dad, who do you think I went to?"

"God damnit, Kat," grumbled Ruger, fisting his hands. "I'm not in prison now."

Jagger was ready to jump between father and daughter. Emotions ran high already. It

wouldn't take much for Ruger to lose control or for Katrina to say something she'd regret. While he understood what Katrina was saying and supported her one hundred percent, they were words that cut a man to his core.

"You're not in prison anymore. I'm twenty-four years old. I have a right to be with Jagger." Katrina's voice softened. "I don't care what is happening between the both of you. Just know that if you kill him, my relationship with you is over. I will never forgive you."

"You'd pick him over me?" Ruger's head tilted, and his gaze narrowed.

Jagger was an arm's length away from Katrina. He wouldn't let her father raise a hand at her.

At one time, he trusted his friend with his life. But he came out of prison a hardened man. He had no idea what Ruger would do.

Katrina lifted her chin and met her dad's gaze. "I'd pick Jagger over myself."

"Kat." Jagger stepped up to her.

She reached out and grabbed his arm, stopping him from interrupting. "I'm always losing everyone, and now I lost a woman who was like a mother to me." She glanced at Jagger. "He's lost his mom." She inhaled deeply and looked back at her dad. "I. Will. Not. Leave. Him."

Ruger never budged or spoke.

Instead, Katrina walked away. She went straight to the clubhouse, never looking back.

Ruger watched his daughter.

Jagger watched his MC brother. The history between them went back twenty-five years. At the top of their bylaws, they pledged loyalty, respect, and integrity. Family came first. Ruger trusted Jagger as Katrina's guardian while he was imprisoned. The bylaws were made to protect Katrina. The same laws were there to keep Jagger from touching or falling in love with her.

He took out his cell and tossed it to Ruger. A part of him was relieved it was over. He'd do anything for Ruger. He owed his MC brother that much and more. But he couldn't stop loving Katrina.

"What's this for?" Ruger held the phone.

"Make the call to Hatchet. He'll need to meet with Bane about stepping into the president's seat." He shrugged out of his vest and tossed it to Ruger. "I'm tired of putting Katrina through hell because I broke the bylaws. Kill me. Strip the dragon from my skin. Rip off my patch. Do whatever the fuck you want to do, Ruger. It's your call."

"You stole my daughter."

He shook his head. "I loved your daughter."

Jagger walked into the clubhouse without his vest—he might as well have been naked. With each step, he expected a bullet in his back. When the door closed behind him, and he was still alive, he went straight to his room.

Katrina sat on the edge of the bed and gasped at the sight of him. "What did he do?"

"Nothing."

"Then, what did you do?" she whispered. "Where's your vest?"

"I gave everything up."

Katrina stood. "Why?"

"Because I'm not giving up on you." He framed her face with his hands. "I would do anything for you, Kat. I knew the consequences. I tried to save you the pain of loving me, but I should've known you wouldn't stay away." He swallowed hard. "You're my heart."

Katrina lunged, wrapping herself around him. He held her tight, emotionally spent.

He always thought a day would come when Ruger would look at his daughter and realize that she needed to live her own life and find her happiness. When that day came, he would be there to love her without hiding his feelings toward her. But Ruger only got more stubborn as time passed.

"You've lived the lifestyle, Kat," he whispered. "You know what happens next."

"I won't let him kill you." She held on to his t-shirt. "I'll talk to him."

"It's in his hands." He kissed her softly on the lips. "I knew what I was doing and wouldn't change anything."

"But—"

He kissed her harder, needing to squeeze in as much time with her as possible. It wouldn't take long for Ruger to place the call and the process for punishment to start. In all his time as a member of Havlin and as acting President of Seaglass Cove, he'd only witnessed one member get punished.

That member fucked a brother's old lady.

He was now buried in the ground.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

Jagger stiffened as the knock on the door jarred him away from Katrina. She grabbed the front of his shirt, shaking her head. Her dad was insane to think he could punish Jagger for loving her.

It was all a mistake.

"I'll talk to my dad." She tugged at his shirt, keeping him from going to the door and leaving her. "I'll fix everything."

He dried the tears on her cheek with the pad of his thumb. "What kind of man would I be if I hid behind a woman?"

"It's my fault—"

"Shut the fuck up, Kat." The calmness in his voice surprised her. "I chose to step over the line and get involved with you. We had six years that we had to hide our relationship. I'd take one night where I could love you in front of everyone in the clubhouse and not have to hide how I feel in exchange for the punishment coming down on me."

A month after she turned eighteen, their relationship went from guardian and minor to consenting lovers. It was a natural response to how she felt all through her life. The only way she could express how much she loved him was through having sex.

"He'll kill you," she whispered.

She'd heard the rumors and had been around the club twenty-four/seven since birth. Her dad was a murderer. He'd done time for the crime, but that hadn't erased his past. No one trusted him. They were all a little afraid of her dad.

If she weren't related to a Havlin member, not one of the bikers would blink twice at her being with Jagger.

"Yo, Prez."

"Just wait," she screamed at the person behind the door.

"Kat."

"They can't do this to you."

He held her face. "My beautiful, Kat."

"Please." She had no idea what she was asking.

She'd run with him wherever he wanted to go. She'd hide with him for the rest of her life.

He kissed her hard and fast and stepped away while she fell apart. She hugged her middle, feeling the loss of him immediately. Damn Havlin Motorcycle Club and their rules. She would never understand why they asked for such deep, unforgivable loyalty and yet broke the law every time they turned around.

Jagger opened the door. Bane stood in the hallway. Katrina stepped behind him and fisted his shirt as if she had the strength to keep him from walking out of the room.

"Here's your stuff." Bane handed over a phone and Jagger's vest. "Ruger wanted me

to give it back."

"Where is he?" Jagger took his things.

Katrina's heart raced. Had her dad changed his mind?

"He rode off." Bane shrugged. "That's the most he's ever spoken to me. I didn't think to interrogate him."

Katrina pushed past Jagger and Bane and ran down the hallway. Her heart hammered, knowing her dad often rode off for days, and she was never sure he would return. He never gave anyone an explanation of where he would go.

She pushed outside and stopped, studying the line of motorcycles. To her horror, her dad was gone.

Jagger approached her, putting his hand on the back of her neck. "Do you know where he went?"

She shook her head. "What's this mean for you?"

"It means when Ruger wants to seek punishment, he will." He inhaled deeply. "You mentioned he was on a ride when we left Beaverton, and then he showed up in Seaglass Cove before we did."

"Yeah." She turned to him. "What are you thinking?"

"He must be nearby."

She looked at his chest. He'd put on his vest.

"Do you want to stay in the van or my room?"

She startled at the question. He couldn't have shocked her more.

"But what about my dad?"

"He can do what he wants." He massaged the back of her neck. "As of right now, I'm still the president of Havlin. I'm calling a meeting and letting them know what I've done. They can decide to replace me immediately or wait until Ruger shows up, states his grievances before the club, and settles on a punishment. Either way, there's no reason to hide, Kat."

"Until my dad comes back and hurts you," she mumbled.

"He'll come back, but the truth is out. No more hiding." He kissed her temple. "Think you can handle whatever comes our way?"

She studied him. He was taking the threat to his life better than she was. She hoped his club would support him against her dad's accusations.

"I never want to leave you."

He kissed her and smiled against her lips. "Then, let's get you settled in my room."

Her stomach fluttered. Tomorrow was uncertain. But she trusted Jagger.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

WITH KATRINA TUCKED safely in the bedroom, Jagger sat at the head of the table in the clubhouse after explaining the long history and involvement with Ruger's daughter to his men. The reactions were a mix of disappointment, anger, interest, and disinterest.

He ignored the emotions around the table. He needed to stay focused on running his club until they voted him out of his seat. The only person he'd hand his life to was Ruger. But he wasn't going to remove his patch or quit his club.

It was how his dad had ruled over Havlin all those years ago and the way he wanted to run his club. These men meant everything to him. The bylaws ruled their lives. There was no need to change anything.

He'd put his life on the line more times than he could count to ensure every member had his support. Every family was safe. Every man belonged.

"As I've broken the bylaws, Ruger has the right to inform the mother chapter and name the punishment. I stand before the club, admitting my crime and not stopping Ruger from taking what he wants from me. As is protocol, the Seaglass Cove Chapter of Havlin now must vote if they want me to step down or retain my seat at the table." He met Bane's gaze. "I'll turn the meeting over to the vice president from here on out to carry the vote."

He stood from the table and walked out the door. Before he could take two steps, Camhead stopped him.

"Sorry, Prez. Bane wants me to watch you." Camhead ducked his head. "He needs

you to stay on the property."

"I'm not going anywhere." He pulled out a cigarette, leaned against the building, and lit his smoke.

He held out his pack to Camhead, who turned down the offer. Exhaling into the sky, he noted dark clouds in the distance. There was a storm coming in off the ocean.

"Looks like the rains will be here before tonight." He pointed to the sky.

"I tipped all the caps that were left out, just in case." Camhead dug his heel into the gravel. "I sure get tired of the rain."

Inside, the men were voting on his life. Without the club, he had nothing.

"What do you want out of your life, son?" he asked.

Camhead was only twenty-one years old. A kid compared to him. Some would say Katrina was too young for him at twenty-four, but she was raised within the club. There was a big difference between a club kid and someone trying to find a home.

"I'd like to ride for Havlin, sir." He met Jagger's gaze. "I worked real hard to get my Harley."

"I see that."

"I want a family." Camhead's Adam's apple bobbed. "I only have my aunt, and she's in assisted living now."

"Who sponsored you?"

"Rush."

He nodded. "Good. He'll do you right."

Camhead grinned and stood taller. Jagger liked to touch base with the prospects. Their eagerness had a touch of innocence that experience would kill off. Sooner than they realized, they'd become hardened men willing to die for their brother and club.

He stubbed out his cigarette and flicked it into the bucket of sand by the back door. The vote could take hours or minutes. All he had to do was wait until the others decided his fate.

His phone vibrated. He took the cell out of his pocket and answered. "Yeah?"

"How long do I have to wait?" asked Katrina.

"Until I come and get you." He looked at the time. "You didn't sleep long."

"I kept tossing and turning." She paused. "You haven't seen my dad, have you?"

"No."

"Oh."

Katrina was pulled in two directions. She wanted Jagger and needed her dad. While she was too young to remember when Ruger went to prison, he remembered how close she was with her dad.

She'd follow Ruger around like a shadow. On the shy side as a toddler, she'd cling to Ruger's leg when he hung around talking to the other members. After a while, he'd pick her up, and she'd fall asleep on his shoulder. The two of them were inseparable.

But that all changed when Ruger walked out of prison. Eighteen years behind bars changed a man. He couldn't blame Ruger for how he dealt with life and his daughter because Jagger was responsible for those changes.

Ruger would've done anything for his daughter.

But while Ruger was incarcerated, Katrina had grown up. Sometimes, Jagger wondered if Ruger had any idea about his grown daughter. He wanted to protect her like a child who couldn't care for herself.

He couldn't blame Ruger for holding on to the past. He'd been robbed of watching Katrina grow up. He never got to experience the different stages she went through.

Jagger had. Every single one.

"I'm gonna call Cora and see if she knows where Ruger went," said Katrina.

He grunted. Cora always hit a dead-end when reaching out to her brother.

"I'll let you go. I know you're in a meeting."

"I'll come let you out as soon as I can." He waited until she disconnected the call and returned his phone in his pocket.

She had no idea they were voting on his livelihood at the moment. It was a good thing he'd locked the door, or she would run into the meeting to try and save his job.

That's the kind of woman Katrina was. The kind that would make a damn good ol' lady to the president.

He lit another cigarette, wishing he had a shot of Jack to take the edge off waiting.

It'd been a hell of a week. It couldn't get much worse.

The back door opened. Dio stuck his head out and whistled.

"Looks like they're ready for you, Prez." Camhead rocked back on the heels of his boots, unaware of what was happening inside the clubhouse.

He looked down at the long line of motorcycles. These were his men. His club. He'd worked his ass off to grow from a handful of members willing to branch off from the mother chapter to over one hundred members in the Seaglass Cove Chapter. They were an asset to the Havoc-Lincoln Motorcycle Club.

He squared his shoulders. Taught to respect the bylaws, he set an example to his men. But Katrina was family. Not only part of his family but also the club's family.

Walking to the clubhouse, he went with confidence. They would never find someone better, with his experience, to run the club. It wasn't a line of bullshit. He'd stand behind it.

As he walked to the table, he stopped at Bane's chair because his vice president had stepped into the role of president. He remained standing, refusing to sit in a position he had no interest in.

He wasn't handing over the president's patch. They'd have to rip it from his vest.

"We followed the bylaws set before us to deal with the transgression and had the five officers vote. If it was not unanimous, we then had twenty percent of the chapter in attendance that would give us the majority." Bane stood. "But it never came to that. The vote was unanimous."

The pressure in his head intensified. If he had his life to live over again, he'd do the

same damn thing. There was no life without Katrina in it.

His only regret was that he tried to do the right thing and put distance between himself and Katrina. He'd wasted a lot of years with her.

Bane stepped away from the chair. "Take your spot, Prez."

Relief hit him in the gut. He changed positions with Bane. Looking around the table, he nodded at each officer. He received the loyalty he'd drilled into the club from the beginning. He would not let them down.

"When Ruger gets back, he'll have the final say in the punishment. Whatever outcome comes afterward, Bane will be here to handle everything." He sat and exhaled. "Katrina, in the meantime, is staying with me. If someone has a problem with that, speak now."

His heartbeat filled the silence.

Picking up the gavel, he hit the table.

Chairs scrapped back. The men left.

Bane, Dio, Wire, Cord, and Rush remained sitting. The clubhouse cleared out quickly, giving the officers time to talk privately.

"Appreciate the support." Jagger leaned back in the chair. "I trust that each of you will hold up your responsibilities toward the club when the punishment is handed down."

"Fuck, Jagger." Dio leaned forward. "I understand the need for the bylaws, but I don't see Ruger docking your pay or taking your seat from you. That motherfucker will

take the option to kill you without losing any sleep."

"Katrina's an adult." Cord pulled on his beard. "It doesn't seem right that you're punished for loving her when she's old enough to make her own decisions."

"My mother raised her. I was in her life daily as she grew up. I've loved her whole life." He shrugged. "She's twenty-four years old, and I'm forty-six. I started sleeping with her when she was eighteen—that's not a crime. What I did was personal against Ruger. He asked me to protect her, and I broke the bylaws getting emotionally and sexually involved with her without seeking my brother's permission first."

"At least you waited." Rush stretched his arms out and tilted back in the chair. "Half the fuckers standing outside wouldn't have waited. Hell, Ruger's one of them. He's stood in line to fuck the bitches in Beaverton at more parties than I can count. He sure in the hell wasn't asking to see their driver's license to make sure they were legal age."

"It's his daughter." Jagger stood. "He's got the right to do what he wants with me."

"He took off." Dio thumped his fist against the table.

"He'll be back." He walked away from the table.

The others could talk about his problem until they accepted what would happen. As for him, he was done. Katrina was waiting for him.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

KATRINA PACED THE ROOM, going back and forth in worry. She couldn't sit still. Despite Jagger not telling her what was going on, she knew.

The bikers could vote him out of the club, all because he loved her, and there was nothing she could do to stop them.

They would respect him less if she voiced her support. No man wanted a woman to fight for him in front of his brothers.

It seemed stupid to her that she couldn't defend Jagger. But it was life for him.

She wasn't his ol' lady. There was nothing she could do.

Guilt ate away at her. Ruger was her father. She felt responsible.

Being intimate with Jagger came with consequences. When she was young, he'd warn her about the others not understanding their relationship, and she had to stop hugging, kissing, and touching him.

All she'd wanted to do was show him how much he meant to her. Looking back, she now understood that her upbringing was different than other people's. She was raised without boundaries. She knew right from wrong, but in the biker lifestyle, lines blurred. She often witnessed adults do things she knew people at school would view as wrong. Bikers messed around with bitches in front of her. She got a different kind of education. Affection was never kept from her. It was a part of life.

So, being told that she couldn't kiss, touch, or feel good seemed unfair.

It wasn't until she overheard a conversation between two Havlin members saying the bitches coming around were eighteen and legal that everything started to make sense. There was a time frame that made her more attractive to men—specifically, Jagger.

God, it seemed to take forever until she was eighteen years old.

He broke her heart the day she became legal by turning her away. But she hadn't given up. Maybe if she had walked away and forgotten about Jagger, he wouldn't be fighting for his life within the club now.

The door opened. She whirled around, holding her breath. At the sight of Jagger, her gaze went to his chest, covered by his vest. The president's patch remained over his heart. She met his gaze, silently begging him to tell her everything was okay. That he would be okay. That they would be okay.

He stepped inside and shut the door. He removed his pistol and set it on the dresser without saying anything. She watched his every move.

He never looked away from her as he removed his vest, folded the leather in half, and set it beside his gun. When he bent over and unlaced his boots, anticipation curled inside her, and she kicked off her sneakers.

He toed his boots off while he worked on his belt. She removed her shirt and easily unhooked her bra, sending it to the floor.

When he stepped out of his jeans, she inhaled deeply, shuddering. Having him return to her as the president of Havlin opened the flood gates of emotions. His club supported him.

Naked, she rushed to him and threw her arms around his neck. Her legs around his waist.

Kissing him deeply, she clung to him as he carried her to the bed. She landed on top of him.

He slipped his fingers into the crack of her butt, trailed his hand down, and hooked the back of her upper thigh, pulling her fully on top of him.

Her body trapped his hardness between them. She raised her mouth off him and gazed into his dark eyes.

She belonged to him no matter what her dad or the Havlin members said.

He was her man, even when they had to hide their relationship.

Jagger brought her head down and captured her lips. The roughness of his beard curled her toes. She widened her knees until she straddled him.

The tip of his cock danced at the opening of her pussy, seeking the entrance. She moved until the pressure of his size slid between her lower lips.

His hands squeezed her ass, and he raised his pelvis. She pressed down, taking him inch by inch.

She captured his mouth, teasing him with her tongue. His breathing deepened, fanning her face.

"Jagger." She sucked in air.

He pulled her back down, thrusting his tongue between her lips, sliding over her tongue.

Her breasts, pressed against his chest, ached in pleasure. She fumbled with where to

touch him, wanting to have her hands all over, but held on to his sides. Afraid if she let go, he'd disappear.

Jagger lifted her and brought her down on him, moving his cock through her wetness. Her mouth came off him. She sat, straddling his hips and taking his whole length.

His eyelids remained at half-mast while he looked at her. She panted, wanting to have him buried inside of her so nobody and nothing could take him from her.

It'd taken him years to bring their relationship out into the open, only to be punished for loving her. It wasn't fair.

He palmed her thighs, rubbing her legs. "Don't think."

"I'm scared." She inhaled a trembling breath. "I can't lose you."

"You'll never lose me."

"You don't know that."

The thought of her dad killing Jagger overwhelmed her. She stopped moving on top of him.

"What do we do?" She swallowed.

He flinched, his gaze narrowing. "Trust me."

He lifted her off him. She rolled into a ball, dazed at the loss of him. She wasn't prepared to handle everything that was happening.

Jagger got up on his knees. Then, he guided her onto her hands and knees in front of

him. He pressed his hand onto her upper back, pushing her upper body down. She went clear to the bed, putting her head on the blanket with her ass in the air.

He thrust into her pussy from behind. She moaned, taken by surprise. Before she gained her next breath, he pounded into her.

Her heart beat wildly, echoing in her ears. The force of how he took her was a reminder of how much he wanted her. The urgency at which he loved her showed how much he worried that his time was short.

She knew him too well. They never needed to talk. She knew. He couldn't hide his feelings from her.

"Jagger?" She couldn't breathe

Sexual pleasure mixed with panic. She had no control and was slipping.

"I've always loved you." He plunged so hard her knees came off the bed. "I will always love you."

"I-I-I love you." She panted.

Held hostage, her breasts flattened against the mattress. She fisted the blanket, unable to move.

He turned her into a desperate lover. She bit her lower lip, expecting each thrust. Waiting for each thrust. Begging for each thrust.

Her body sang for him. Her desire for Jagger was out in the open for his view, his touch. It'd been that way for most of her life.

She belonged to him.

"I'll do whatever I can to never leave you," he muttered, shifting behind her. "Can't leave you."

He slid his hand between her legs and found her clit. With his cock inside of her, stroking her soul, he rubbed the sensitive nub. She arched her back in response.

Instead of pumping into her, he held himself still. All his attention went to his fingers. Those calloused, rough fingers knew exactly how to bring her pleasure.

Her insides curled tighter, and her wetness coated his movements. She moved against his hand, back and forth.

Whimpering, she clung to the bed, unable to stop spiraling. She danced under his touch, making her love him more.

Taking his cock out of her, he slid the hardness against her butt and over her slit while his fingers circled her clitoris. She rocked on the bed.

Her sex pulsed, needing him. Wanting him. Dying for him.

Her core clenched, straining. "Jagger."

His hand left her. His cock left her. At the cusp of an orgasm, she moaned in protest, wanting him back inside her.

The guttural sound cut off instantly as he slammed his cock inside of her. Her toes dug into the bed. He pounded her. The slap of their skin filled the room.

In his control, he orchestrated her pleasure. Her pussy greedily sucked him in with

each thrust. Her climax exploded, ripping a scream out of her lungs.

Her orgasm kept going, stealing all her strength until he thrust one final time, deep inside her, and pressed her flat to the mattress.

Trapped under his weight, she violently shuddered.

Fear of losing him returned swiftly. She grabbed his hands.

His lips settled on her ear. "I will do whatever I can to stay here and love you until I'm old, Kat. Whatever happens, know I never gave up fighting for us."

"I'm sorry," she whispered, unable to breathe. "If I hadn't loved you—"

"Don't." He growled. "Don't ever be sorry. You're the most beautiful thing I've had in my life."

Her body stiffened underneath him. "I don't know what to do."

"Love me. No matter what happens," he whispered, linking his hands with hers. "You'd make a damn good ol' lady, Kat."

She nodded, afraid to speak. He deserved all her support, even when she was falling apart.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

CORA AND WIRE STOOD in the driveway. Katrina pulled the van to a stop and glanced in the side mirror to make sure Jagger was still behind her. He'd followed on his Harley, wanting to go with her when she returned the van.

Shutting off the engine, she looked around the interior, double-checking to see if she missed anything. She'd taken all her belongings and cleaned the whole van before returning it.

Outside, the Harley shut off. She slid her phone into her back pocket and greeted her aunt.

Cora hurried to her, engulfing her in a hug. "I'm so sorry about your loss."

She glanced at Jagger, wondering how much her aunt knew about their situation. The last week had been a whirlwind of heartbreaks, ending with the explosion at the clubhouse between Jagger and her dad.

"Thanks." She let go of Cora.

Mama Sue was hers. She felt possessive of the woman who'd raised her and was the only constant parental figure in her life. Sharing her life with Cora felt artificial. Her aunt was always too friendly. It was unnatural.

"Wire mentioned you were going to stay with Jagger." Cora chewed the corner of her lip. "Does that mean my brother will stay in Seaglass Cove, too?"

She wondered why Cora wanted to get close to her dad when he'd done nothing to

give her the idea that he was close to anyone. Now that her dad was gunning for Jagger, she wasn't even sure she ever wanted to see her dad again.

"He took off." She shrugged. "I don't know where he is."

Cora frowned as the soft sound of disappointment escaped her lips. "I hadn't heard."

"Yeah, well, that's the way he is. He doesn't answer anyone." She looked over her shoulder. "Thanks for letting us use the van."

"Any time." Cora walked with her to join the men. "I'm glad I got to see you before work."

Wire reached for Cora the second she was within touching distance. Katrina stood off to the side. Others knew that she and Jagger were together, but they had never shown that relationship to others. She felt more disconnected now than when their love for each other was a secret.

Jagger clasped Wire's hand and then put his hand on her back and led her to the Harley. Getting on the back of his motorcycle was a familiar action. He handed her the extra helmet strapped to the bar. She climbed on behind him, wrapping her arms around his waist. She ignored her aunt and her husband watching them. All she wanted to do was get out of there.

Instead of going downtown, Jagger cruised one of the residential streets and parked outside a duplex. She slid off the motorcycle when he toed the kickstand.

"Take off your shoes." He swung his leg off the bike and removed his helmet. "You can leave them by the Harley."

"Why are we here?"

"It's Bane and Daisy's place." He took her helmet and set it on the handlebar, then gathered her hand in his, leading her to the side of the house.

Once off the driveway, her feet hit the sand. She dug her toes in as she walked, trying to keep up with Jagger's longer strides. He hadn't taken off his boots and seemed to have no trouble walking.

Past the house, they walked over a dune. She gazed straight ahead, unable to take her sight off the Pacific Ocean. It was just like she'd imagined. The water went as far as her eyes could see, meeting the sky in the distance.

A haze hung in the air. Mist landed on her face but was quickly dried by the constant wind. She squeezed Jagger's hand. He'd held up his promise of taking her to the beach.

He pointed to the water. She nodded, following him. What she hadn't imagined was the sheer volume of the noise from the waves and the overwhelming sense of how big the world was going by the size of the ocean. And to think this was a small fraction of the water on earth.

The sand turned wet and cold. She no longer dug her toes in but walked on the hard-packed surface.

The waves came toward her and then drew back. She couldn't tell if the tide was coming or going.

Bits of broken seashells littered the ground, only to be stolen by the water.

Jagger stopped and put her in front of him. He wrapped his arms around her. His back provided a windbreak, and his body warmed the chill off her.

A seagull swept in front of them. She pressed her back against Jagger's chest, feeling his body rumble with amusement. It wasn't her first time around seagulls. They often came clear to Beaverton if the weather was severe enough to push them inland. But none of them had come so close to her before.

"Thank you for bringing me here." She looked over her shoulder at him. "Isn't it wonderful?"

He gazed out in the distance. "Every place has it's darkness that you don't see."

She turned in his arms to face him. "You don't like the ocean?"

"It serves a purpose." He kissed her. "I prefer being on two wheels, riding the highway."

Hit with an idea, she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Let's do that. We can pack some clothes and tour the United States. Just you and me."

"Kat."

"No, really." She stretched to her toes. "There are so many places we could see. You could do as much riding as you want every day."

"I'm not leaving the club." He pressed his forehead against her forehead. "Everything will be okay. You'll be taken care of. Mom's house is yours. The club will look after you. I have enough money socked away to support you for the rest of your—"

"I don't care about any of that." The urge to scream burned her throat. "I only want you."

He palmed the back of her head, bringing her to his chest. She held on to his vest.

The family she depended on were the same people who would punish Jagger.

It made no sense that her father would blame Jagger in any way for loving her. He should be thanking him.

She looked into Jagger's eyes. "I'll never forgive him."

"You will." He inhaled deeply. "He has a right to punish me."

"For loving me?" She scoffed. "That's ridic—"

"There's things you don't know, Kat." He blinked an extra second. "You're going to have to trust me that what happens is part of the lifestyle. It's how we keep Havlin a safe place for family. There are too many men who would hurt each other if the bylaws were lifted."

"How can you say that?" Her heart shattered. "It's your life you could lose. You could lose me. Don't I matter?"

"If that happens, it'll be just punishment."

"For loving me? No, I'm the one being punished for loving you." She pushed away from him, no longer wanting to be by the ocean, where she had to yell for him to hear her. "Nobody can tell me that loving you is wrong."

He reached for her. She shook her head and stepped away. Strung tight, her emotions were all over the place. Yelling caused her anxiety to increase.

The last several days, Jagger had walked around as if trying to fit in everything he'd ever promised her into the week and spent more time with her. It was starting to feel as if he expected to be executed by the club. Almost the equivalent of his last supper.

"I thought you were going to fight for us," she yelled.

He refused to answer. Her body shook. Had she fantasized about the day he would claim her as his ol' lady?

During those years, he told her it was impossible because she was too young. She was twenty-fucking-four years old now. How old would she need to be to prove to him and everyone else that she loved him more than anyone?

It wasn't enough that he now touched her in front of the other members if that ended the moment her dad returned.

She turned from him and walked through the sand toward the dune. Each step made it harder to breathe. She could count the times they'd fought on one hand. Looking back, it was always over insignificant things pertaining to her growing up and wanting more freedom.

Her anger came bubbling out. She wasn't even mad at him. Or maybe she was.

Despite Jagger telling her not to involve herself in his problems, she would find her dad and have him straighten everything out. For fuck's sake, they were two grown men who belonged to the same damn club.

She reached the top of the dune and fell to her knees, unable to walk any more. Her calf muscles ached from walking in the dry sand, and her heart raced. On the verge of passing out, she had no energy to cry. Her temper got the best of her.

A couple of minutes later, Jagger plopped beside her, pulled her onto his lap, and held her.

She was tired of talking. Tired of arguing. Tired of worrying about losing him.

"I wish I could talk to Mama Sue." She swallowed hard. "She was the only one who believed in us."

Jagger's mom understood how much she loved him. Looking back, Mama Sue had warned her about him, putting the club before her. It was something his father had done, too. Mama Sue told her she would need to be strong. Stronger than she ever thought she could be.

What was it with Corbin men?

She had no idea how long they sat in the sand. The sun had broken through the clouds and warmed them enough that they sought shade and moved away from the dune. They rode back to the clubhouse together.

While Jagger took care of business with his men, she went to the bedroom to shower. In the privacy of the room, she checked her phone. There was no message from her dad.

She pulled up his contact and hit connect. The call went to voicemail.

"You need to call me." She disconnected.

She couldn't stand back and not do anything.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

BANE AND DIO WALKED into the clubhouse from the parts shop. Jagger motioned them over to the bar. The clubhouse was quiet on a Wednesday afternoon.

"What's up?" Dio jumped up on the counter and sat. "Rush told us we're off the schedule for the rest of the week."

Bane widened his stance and crossed his arms. "Moroad Motorcycle Club is delivering the package next week."

"This has nothing to do with our contract with Moroad." Jagger leaned against the counter. "I need you both to find Ruger."

"I wouldn't think you were in a big rush to have him return," said Bane.

"Katrina's been trying to contact him for the last ten days. Hatchet claims he hasn't shown up at the mother chapter." He rubbed his whiskered jaw. "As much as I'd like to prolong his return, Katrina needs her dad."

He wouldn't get into Katrina's personal life with his MC brothers. Hell, she wasn't even discussing her worry about her dad with him. But he was aware she kept trying to contact him by phone. His absence had begun to interrupt her sleep. She was having nightmares and talking in her sleep.

"I'll ask around." Bane pulled out his phone. "Do you know where he usually hangs out?"

He shook his head. Since Ruger's release, he'd become a loner.

"Katrina mentioned he was riding out the day we left Beaverton. He arrived in Seaglass Cove before us, so whatever business he's tending to, he's close." He took a cigarette from his pack and put it unlit in his mouth. "I've put Brett and Cord in the shop."

Dio hopped down and slapped Bane on the chest. "Let's hit the road, brother."

The two of them left. Jagger headed toward the hallway when Katrina rounded the corner and peered around for him. Her gaze locked on him, and she relaxed. Stress was getting to her.

She approached him wearing a pair of cutoffs that were unsnapped under her belly button. Her diamond piercing twinkled in the low light of the clubhouse. He gazed at her breasts, spilling out of her bikini top.

He'd seen her many times, parading around in the same outfit. This time, he wanted to enjoy watching and touching her.

"Ready?" he asked.

She nodded. "I'm not in the mood to swim or hang out with my aunt. I don't know why you're insisting it'll be good for me to go to the pool with her."

"Lighten up." He looped his arm around her bare shoulders. "I'll be with you."

"You're going swimming?"

"Yep."

She stopped walking. "You?"

He chuckled. "Why the surprise?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe because you never once have taken me swimming my entire life." She gawked at him. "I didn't even know you could swim."

"I paid for your swimming lessons when you were in grade school."

"That's not the same as swimming with me." She leaned against him as they went through the door into the parts shop. "Where's your trunks?"

"Don't need them."

She laughed. "We're going to last thirty seconds and get kicked out of the city pool."

He pushed the door open and walked out onto the sidewalk. It'd already hit eighty degrees. It was a warm one for the coast.

Walking down the sidewalk, he kissed her. She spotted Cora standing outside the doors as they went up the steps.

Her aunt waved. "Oh, good. You came. Daisy's giving us an hour to have the pool to ourselves. Wire's already in there with Brooke and Maverick." Cora pointed toward the left. "Girl's locker room is that way if you're picky."

"I'll take her." Jagger walked her into the room.

Katrina glanced at him. "You didn't bring a towel."

"I'll borrow yours." He shucked off his vest and set his pistol underneath the leather on the bench.

"No one else is here?" she asked.

"Nope. Just those who belong to Havlin." He pulled off his shirt.

Katrina walked over to the door leading to the pool. "Whoa."

The pool was impressive—well maintained and an asset to the city. Luckily for the club, Bane's ol' lady was the pool manager. They had figured out long ago how to shut off the security cameras to give them a little privacy while they cooled off.

"It's like a sauna in there," she said.

He finished getting undressed and walked naked to her. Katrina glanced at him and burst out laughing.

"There are others out there." She wrapped her hand around his flaccid cock.

"Are you going to make me walk out with a stiff one?" He slapped her ass. "You're going to learn fast that Wire and Maverick will be naked, too."

She rolled her eyes. "So, nothing I wouldn't see at a Havlin party. Got it."

She was born into the lifestyle. Nothing surprised her anymore.

Cora popped out of another door and joined Katrina at the side of the pool. Together, they lowered themselves into the water.

Jagger stepped off the edge and sunk below the surface. Surfacing, he shook out his hair and ran his hand down his beard.

Katrina's gaze widened, and she caught her bottom lip between her teeth. If she kept

looking at him that way, he'd take her back into the locker room and bend her over a bench.

She slipped into the pool and floated to him, looping her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist. He cupped her ass, fingering the thin strip of material between her cheeks.

Cora brought Brooke over and introduced her to Katrina. He held her in the water, knowing she was uncomfortable around other women. For years, all she had was Mama Sue and the bitches that hung around the clubhouse. It was one of the reasons why Katrina grew up with a mouth on her. She mimicked the others from a young age.

"We both work at the coffee shop." Cora grinned. "Except today. It's slow, so Dania, the owner, let us have the afternoon off."

"I belong to Maverick." Brooke pointed to a large man sitting on the steps at the end of the pool. "Well, he belongs to me. Actually..." She laughed. "We both belong to Skye."

Cora grinned. "Skye is Brooke's niece and Maverick's daughter."

Katrina stared blankly at the women. Jagger could see the wheel turning in her head. She was curious about Brooke but refused to show any emotion toward an unfamiliar female associated with the club.

"It's complicated but it works." Brooke glanced at Jagger before asking Katrina a question. "You're from Beaverton?"

"Yeah." She leaned back, getting her hair wet. "I know Maverick. He rode under Hatchet before he went to prison."

He patted her ass. That was enough info sharing. In his experience ol' ladies got jealous fast, and Katrina was every biker's little sister. She had stories to tell, that shouldn't be told.

Maverick had a past, just like them all. Some things were better left unsaid.

"I know." Brooke glanced at her husband. "Now he's here, with me."

Katrina rolled her eyes. Jagger swam with her, putting some distance between her and the other women. She clung to his neck, kicking her legs to stay afloat.

"Do you hang out with those two?" asked Katrina.

So, that's why Katrina wasn't in the mood to talk to the other women. He grinned, running his hands over her hips. She was jealous.

She slapped his shoulder, splashing them both. He let her go and swam farther into the deep end. He'd let her stew. She knew the lifestyle. He wasn't talking.

The last two years he'd built a motorcycle club from the ground up. She worried for nothing.

When he swam back, he stood at the six foot mark in the pool. Katrina floated, ignoring him. He grabbed her foot and pulled her to him.

"Jagger?" She stayed on her back, looking at the sky through the glass enclosure. "How many women were you with in the last two years?"

"Don't go there." He grabbed her ankle and pulled her over to him. "You're with me now."

"I'm being serious. I'm not naive."

"We're not having this discussion."

"Maybe a better way to express my feelings right now is by telling you what I've done the last two years when you moved to Seaglass Cove." She flipped and treaded water. "Do you realize that every night I've gone to bed thinking about you being with other women because you weren't with me?"

"Kat," he muttered, lunging for her.

She swam backward, out of his reach. He stalked toward her. Because of her youth, she pulled herself out of the pool before he could reach her.

"Get back in the water."

Katrina stood at the edge, looking down at him. "Every single night, Jagger."

"You know how I feel about you."

"Bikers only think with their cock." She reached behind her and undid her bikini top, letting it fall to the side of the pool, and then she wiggled out of the bottoms. "You strut to the pool, letting everyone look at you." She held her arms out to the sides and turned in a circle. "What does this do for you?"

Her temper rose fast. He swept his hair off his forehead. In two seconds, he'd take her back to the clubhouse and show her exactly how he felt toward her.

She stared him down. "I wonder how I look to Wire. Hm. Maybe Maverick. He's a big guy."

A feminine gasp came from behind him. Probably Brooke. If Katrina continued, he'd be breaking up a girl fight.

"I've proven myself to you so many times, Jagger, I've lost track." She planted her hands on her hips. "Mama Sue told me to wait. To be patient. So, I waited and waited. I cried myself to sleep almost every fucking night. I fought men away from me because inside I belonged to you. I never once got drunk at parties because I wasn't going to let drinking be an excuse for making the biggest mistake of my life." She fisted her hands. "All because I believed one day, you'd get your shit together and finally claim me. Now you want to act like your life will end but it's okay because we have today, maybe tonight. It's bullshit." She raised her hands in the air. "Our lives together could end tonight. Whenever my dad returns." She patted her chest. "You've lived your life. But I haven't lived mine, and it's unfair that I didn't get a lifetime with you."

Katrina held her ground. He pulled himself out of the pool. She'd worked herself up until she exploded.

He picked up her bikini and handed it to her. "Get dressed."

Her gaze narrowed. Instead of arguing, she turned and sashayed her ass into the dressing room. She knew better than to put their private issues in front of club members.

Ignoring the others, he followed Katrina inside. By the time he got dressed, she was gone.

At that moment, she reminded him a lot of Ruger.

Fuck.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

"I WANT TO TALK TO HER."

"No," said Jagger.

"She's my niece," shouted Cora.

Katrina pressed her ear against the door, surprised by her aunt beating Jagger back to the clubhouse. But then again, Jagger had more clothes to put on and boots to lace.

"I heard what she said." Cora's voice lowered. "A child— you hurt her—"

She strained to hear what they talked about, but the conversation quieted beyond her hearing. Katrina opened the door and faced Jagger and Cora. Behind them, across the hallway, stood Wire.

Cora reached her first. "Are you okay?"

She shrugged off her aunt's touch and stared at Jagger. "I'm fine."

"Has he hurt you?" whispered Cora.

"For fuck's sake." Jagger exhaled harshly. "Wire, take your ol' lady out of here. I'm tired of the damn drama."

"She's my niece." Cora never budged.

"And she's my woman." Jagger turned to Wire. "Get her out. Now."

Wire hustled to get Cora out of the hallway. Jagger walked forward, backing Katrina up into the bedroom.

"You're going to claim me now that I'm going to lose you?" Katrina walked over to the dresser, picked up an unopened bottle of whiskey, and broke the seal. "This is what I'm talking about."

"I'm not following."

She lifted the bottle. He grabbed her wrist. "You don't want to drink."

"Maybe I do. Maybe that's how I'm supposed to handle everything happening to me." She shook her head. "Everything has been on your time. You waited years to show your true feelings toward me. Then you waited to have sex with me. Then you told me we had to stop, and nobody could find out how we felt about each other. Year after year. Not once did you ask what I wanted."

He looked at the bottle in his hand and frowned. She snorted, seeing that he'd love to numb the pain and tune her out. But she was tired of being quiet.

"Do you have any idea how much I love you?" She pressed her palm to her chest. "You are no longer my crush or the first man I had sex with or my first heartbreak. That's all in the past, and you need to see how much I've lived my life belonging to you for six years, and I have nothing to show for all that time."

"We're together now." He set the bottle on the dresser.

"No, what you're doing is cramming in a lifetime of memories before my dad comes back and seeks punishment—a punishment that doesn't even make sense to me because I wanted everything that happened between us."

"A Havlin member cannot have a sexual relationship with a member's ol' lady, daughter, or sister without the member's permission." He stepped closer and grabbed her wrist. "When you were twelve years old, you kissed me while I was sleeping in the clubhouse after partying all night."

"You were passed out." She jerked her arm, but he refused to let her go. "And that was me kissing you, not the other way around. You didn't break the rules."

He shook his head. "When you were sixteen, I took you on the back of my Harley to pick up a dress for a dance at school."

She remembered the frustration that day. It had taken a long time trying on different dresses for him to approve of one that looked like a thirty-year-old would wear to church. Ultimately, she never wore the dress because the boy—she couldn't even remember his name—stood her up.

"Do you remember what happened?"

"I didn't go."

"You didn't go because I told the boy if he touched you, I'd kill him." His gaze softened. "Do you remember what happened that night? I taught you how to dance under the stars outside Mama Sue's house."

"We weren't dancing." Her stomach warmed.

"We were..." He pulled her closer and put his hands on her hips. "Swaying."

She looked up at him. "You told me men like when women sway. When they walk. When they dance."

"Mm-hm." He raised one of his hands and palmed the back of her neck, holding her close to him, swaying. "When you were seventeen, I let you kiss me."

"French kiss," she mumbled.

It was the first time she'd ever had someone else's tongue in her mouth. It was more intimate than anything she'd ever experienced. Even more than having sex for the first time. That kissing session had ignited something wild and uncontrollable inside of her.

"At eighteen, you grew up." He caressed the side of her face with his beard and kept moving, side to side. "You knew what your body would do to me."

"I watched the bitches in the clubhouse when I snuck out of Mama Sue's house."

He chuckled in her ear. "I bet you did."

She closed her eyes as his hot breath skimmed her neck. Her temper simmered. All she wanted was to have him hold her and keep swaying.

"When your dad walked out of prison, and I left to start a new chapter, who did I sleep with every time I returned to Beaverton?"

"Me," she whispered.

He put his mouth on her ear. "Somewhere between twelve years old and now, I crossed a line without even being conscious of doing it."

"It's not your fault."

"I'm guilty." He pulled his head back and kissed her lips. "And it was worth every

fucking minute."

She kissed him back, madly holding on to him. He walked her backward, pulling at her bikini top. She jumped from one foot to the other as he pushed down her shorts and removed her damp bottoms she wore swimming.

His tongue stroked her mouth. She searched and found his buckle and undid his jeans. Pushing the denim down to his hips, she ignored taking anything off him and jumped into his embrace, wrapping her arms around his neck.

He gripped her waist, thrust into her pussy, and then pressed her back against the wall. A moan of pleasure escaped her lips before she found his mouth again.

The wall provided no cushion. Every plunge of his cock rocked her. She clung to his shoulders as the inside of her thighs quivered.

Her core coiled tighter and tighter. She ripped her mouth off him and pulled his head to her neck, sucking in air.

He thrust. She exhaled.

He withdrew. She inhaled

Until Jagger's movements became too fast to breathe. She panted.

Her limbs tightened around him, holding on.

He held her ass, moving in and upward. Her spine arched, and her head snapped back, hitting the wall.

Her orgasm took hold, paralyzing her.

"Oh, God." Her jaw dropped. "Jagger."

"I got you." He plunged, pinning her to the wall.

Her insides shuddered, squeezing down on him. He grunted his release.

Jagger's knees bent. She wrapped her arms around his neck, not wanting him to leave her body yet.

Breathing heavily, Jagger stumbled backward, carrying her, until he bumped into the bed. He sat on the edge of the mattress. On his lap, she stayed wrapped around him, holding his cock inside of her.

"I need to talk to my dad," she whispered. "I can convince him that we love each other. I can get him to give you permission to be with me."

"There will still be a punishment, Kat. It's the way we live."

She swallowed and voiced her fears. "But maybe he won't kill you."

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

CORA SERVED THE COUPLE at the counter of Whale's Tail Coffee Shop. Katrina sat at the corner table, waiting until her aunt had a moment to talk with her. She came to set Cora's mind at ease that she wasn't in any danger.

Jagger had mentioned that relieving Cora's fears would make it easier for Wire—because everyone knew the Havlin members carried enough stress. She tapped her fingernails against the surface of the table. It wasn't her idea. She believed her life wasn't any of her aunt's business.

Cora carried two cups of coffee and sat one in front of Katrina. "Sorry it took so long. I had to wait until Brooke got back from her break."

Katrina looked over Cora's shoulder and found Brooke glancing at them curiously. She took a sip of coffee. After her blow-up at the pool, everyone was probably wondering what was happening to her.

"Thanks for the drink." She cupped her hands around the mug. "Jagger wanted—I thought I better come over and let you know there's no reason to worry about what goes on between Jagger and me."

Cora frowned. Katrina inhaled swiftly. She probably could've phrased that better.

"Listen." She leaned forward. "I've loved Jagger my whole life. His mom raised me. There shouldn't be a problem with us being together, but apparently, my dad thinks Jagger's in the wrong for fucking me without his permission first."

Cora's brows shot up higher.

"So, things are a little tense until my dad comes back." Katrina pursed her lips. "You haven't heard from him, have you?"

Cora shook her head. "I've called him a few times since he left, but he hasn't answered my calls. He never answers, so I leave messages."

"Yeah, he's like that."

The coffee in front of Cora remained untouched. "Can I ask you something?"

"Shoot."

"Do you think Ruger has a problem with you being with Jagger because of the age difference?" Cora lowered her voice. "He is a lot older than you."

"Maybe." She shrugged. "Jagger thinks it's because he never asked permission to touch me first, but I'm not sure my dad would've given him the okay because he probably has some stuck-up view about older men being with younger girls—but shit, over half the bikers are involved with women half their age."

"Maybe it'll help if you know more about your grandparents. Your dad's parents," said Cora.

"How will that help?"

"I can see you don't know." Cora smiled, scooting out of the chair. "Hang on."

Her aunt went into the back room and returned, holding her phone. She set the cell in front of Katrina.

"Look at the pictures." Cora sat down across from her.

She glanced down. There was an older man with his arm around a blonde-haired woman in a pantsuit.

"Who are they?" she asked.

"My parents. Your grandparents." Cora pointed. "Your grandpa was eighty years old in that picture. Your grandma was sixty. But at one time, she was eighteen years old, and he was thirty two, fighting against societies weirdness about age-gap relationships, and they made it work."

A snort of laughter came out of her. That was the last thing she'd expected to hear.

Despite her vow that she didn't need an aunt in her life or need any information about the people who were blood-related to her, she studied the picture more closely. The two obviously loved each other. You could tell by the way they stood. He held her close. She leaned into him. Both of them had smiles on their faces.

"Go ahead and scroll through the pictures. I made a file of pictures I thought Ruger would like to see when I set out to find him, but I've never had a chance to show him." Cora sighed. "He always seems disinterested when I talk about my—our parents."

"Yeah, well, can't blame him. Where have they been all these years?" She glanced at her aunt. "Or are they too embarrassed to have a murderer in the family?"

She pushed the phone across the table. This was exactly why she wanted to come to Seaglass Cove. She wanted to see the person who called herself a blood relative and then forget about the relationship.

If she and her dad weren't good enough to include in their lives, then she wanted nothing to do with them, including her aunt. For her, she had a family. Mama Sue

was gone now, but she claimed the Havlin bikers. None of them would ever turn their back on her because her dad served time in prison.

"That was a bitchy thing to say." Cora stood and pocketed her phone. "You're big on assuming things about people you don't even know. You're a lot like your dad. Why won't you give me a chance to get to know you?"

She blew out her breath. "Why should I?"

"Because I'm your aunt."

Katrina looked out the window and then back at Cora. "I wasn't raised like you."

"No, but from what I understand, you love the same club that my ol' man loves, and that means we should get along fine, don't you think?" Cora sat back down and motioned for Katrina to sit. "Stop being sus. I'll tell you the truth."

"Finally." Katrina sat back in the chair. "I'm tired of talking."

"My parents died almost two years ago in a car accident." Cora lifted her chin. "There was a year that I didn't have any family. No friends, no relatives, no one. Then, I met Wire."

"But you knew you had a brother," said Katrina.

Cora nodded. "I'm not making excuses for my parents. I don't agree with them letting Ruger walk away from the family and not trying to find him. But as soon as I turned eighteen, I started searching for him. Don't blame me for not being in your life. I was a child at the same time you were a child."

Shit.

Double shit.

Katrina picked up her coffee, now cold, and took a drink. Cora was younger than her by a couple of years. Of course, she couldn't have done anything to find her lost brother. Having lost Mama Sue, she could also understand the feeling of being all alone.

"Can I see the pictures on your phone again?" she asked.

Cora exhaled in relief and handed over her cell. "Does this mean you're not going to push me away?"

Katrina couldn't help but laugh at the stupid grin on Cora's face. The differences between them were right there for anyone to see. Cora was soft and sweet. Katrina was hard and temperamental.

Two blood relatives raised in two completely different lifestyles.

But they had two things in common. Katrina's dad and they both loved a Havlin Motorcycle Club member.

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DIO TOSSED A BAG ON the table. Jagger unzipped the duffle and inspected the bundles of cash.

"Any problem?" he asked.

"They weren't even aware of the exchange. Rush went in, like normal, and put the money in the safe. It was easy enough for him to change the amounts on the records." Dio held up four fingers. "We completed one bag in less than a week. If we can keep that rate up, we'll completely cycle through what Moroad gave us within the month."

"That's if no one suspects we're laundering money." He zipped up the bag. "Stick to the plan and change pot shops daily."

"Will do. We lucked out that we already had our hands in the pot shops before taking on Moroad." Dio picked up the bag and carried it down the hallway to put it with the others.

Jagger nodded at Cord to unlock the door. While the club understood what they were doing, some members weren't involved. The less they knew, the better. Around here, loyalty was earned, not given.

He turned to Bane. "Anything on Ruger yet?"

"No." Bane checked his phone. "I checked in with the mother chapter earlier, and no one has seen him yet."

"Are they looking for him?"

"They weren't until we became concerned. Hatchet has a crew out riding and has contacted those inside the prisons to see if they would know where he went. The search came up empty."

Jagger stood from the table. "Put Brett, Maverick, and Cord on the search. I'll have Camhead and Link run the shop. That fucker has to be around here somewhere."

He was tired of waking up each day, wondering if Ruger would show up ready to extract punishment on him, and in the end, he'd lose Katrina. The days of waiting only fed his need to stay alive. Somehow, he needed to make Ruger see logic.

Katrina was an adult. She could make her own decisions. If she wanted to be with him, Ruger had to step back or risk losing his daughter. He knew her better than anyone, and if she lost him, all hell would break loose.

"Where's Katrina?" he asked.

"Outside talking to Rodriguez and the others." Bane slipped his phone in his vest pocket. "I'm going to put Maverick in charge of the search party."

Jagger turned around and headed toward the door. Katrina mentioned going to the coffee shop. He expected her to be there, not talking with the men.

Outside, he searched the area and found her leaning against the building while Rodriguez, Gerry, and Slacker included her in their conversation. He took in the way she laughed and joined in without any hesitation. She was less secure around other women. With the men, she was comfortable. She knew what to expect.

He approached the group. The men fell silent. He stepped between them and gathered Katrina. As he walked her away, he stopped and pointed at Rodriguez. "She's mine. Better spread the word around."

"Yes, Prez."

He looped his arm over her shoulders and walked toward the clubhouse. The men needed to know they couldn't touch her.

She swung her body, hip-checking him. "Now I can't talk to the guys?"

"Talk all you want." He hip-checked her back. "But if one of them talks back, I'll kill him."

She frowned. He raised his brows, driving the point home. She understood that was exactly why Ruger was going to come after him. She had two men threatening everyone around to keep her safe. She knew the rules.

It was one of the reasons why he couldn't fault Ruger for wanting to kill him as punishment for touching Katrina. He would do the same thing to any man who touched her.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

KATRINA SLID A BEER bottle across the counter to Rush and turned to Dio. "What are you drinking?"

"Depends. Are you making it?"

"I'm here, aren't I?" She backed up and pointed to the counter behind her, where she'd straightened all the bottles. "Pick your poison."

"All right. All right." Dio laughed and then cocked an eyebrow. "Give me an Adios, Motherfucker."

"Boy." She scoffed. "Sit down. You aren't even making me work, brah."

The men standing around cheered, egging her on. She pulled out her imaginary dress and curtsied. It was easy to entertain the men. They all loved to tease and enjoyed the banter she gave them.

"Ah, shit. Dio is going down. She knows what she's doing." Link tipped back his bottle. "Give him a half hour, and one of us is going to be carrying his ass out of here."

Katrina enjoyed the conversation. It was the way men communicated. The drunker they got, the more vulgar they became.

She pulled the vodka and gin out of the collection, searching for tequila and rum. As she gathered everything, she pulled the last bottle.

"You'll get Triple Sec—straight orange because it doesn't look like Jagger carries blue cura?ao." She grinned, knowing she'd won the challenge.

Lastly, she added some 7-up and set the drink in front of Dio. "Don't blame me in the morning, darling."

Dio held up the glass and drank it all to the chants from his MC brothers. Katrina shook her head in amusement. She could never understand drinking to excess so fast. Sometimes, she believed the bikers weren't imbibing for fun but to escape. The quicker they got out of their heads, the happier they were.

It saddened her to believe most of them came with a past that would break an average person. Bikers were hard men, but each had a soft spot. It was hard to see, but it was there.

Jagger parted the crowd in front of the counter and approached her. Reaching behind her, she grabbed an unopened bottle of Jack, knowing that was his preferred drink.

He walked around the bar. She recognized the devilish look in his eyes and sat the bottle down before he pressed her against the counter.

A hush swept through the clubhouse, making the butterflies in her stomach even more powerful. He grabbed the front of her throat. She fisted the front of his vest to keep from losing her balance, and he held her in front of her, capturing her mouth.

Jagger swallowed her scream of pure joy at the attention. Getting affection in front of others was exciting and new.

His tongue dove deep. She sucked and mingled, tasting the heat of him.

Chaos reigned inside the clubhouse. Some of these men she'd known her whole life.

Others were new to her. But she was familiar with how they celebrated life, taking in all the pleasure they could find. Caught up in Jagger and the public announcement that she was the president's ol' lady, she laughed in happiness.

Jagger let go of her neck and eased back, licking his wet lips. She stared into his eyes.

"Mine, Kat. You've always been mine."

She raked her top teeth over her bottom lip. He'd claimed her in front of everyone. A dream she always thought impossible. For a moment, she accepted what it was and stopped worrying about what tomorrow would bring.

Mama Sue would be happy for them.

"I love you." She kissed him softly. "Forever."

The men manhandled Jagger away from her, slapping his back and pushing him. His gaze intensified, and he pointed at her.

She beamed, feeling the love she'd always dreamed about cover her.

He was rough, stubborn, strict, and sometimes an asshole, but nobody saw the tenderness, the possessiveness, the commitment, and the love that she received throughout the years.

Jagger pushed away from the others and returned to her.

The music outplayed the cheers as the others returned to what they were doing. She looped her arms around Jagger's neck and swayed in front of him. She'd had years of practice to know what he liked and felt comfortable stepping up and having the eyes of the club on her.

"Who put you behind the counter?" Jagger palmed her ass.

"No one." She reached over and picked up the whiskey bottle without leaving his arms. "I got tired of waiting for you to return and decided to organize the drinks. That led to serving the men."

"Kat." He frowned.

"I made two hundred dollars for an hour's worth of work." She grinned. "Havlin members are generous."

She'd socked away most of the money she'd earned since she was sixteen. Whether she was in Beaverton or Seaglass Cove, members took care of family, including her. She had no need to worry about money.

"You don't have to work." He smoothed the hair off her cheek. "Not now or afterward."

"Don't." She looked away.

Every moment was ruined by the threat of her father returning and seeking punishment. She refused to imagine what would happen.

"You need to know some things." He held her close and put his lips near her ear. "Mom's house is paid for and in your name. It's yours."

She pushed against him, trying to get away from the truth.

"All my money is yours." He inhaled. "Bane has everything you'll need in case I'm not here. You can trust him."

Her eyes burned, and her vision blurred. The only reason he wouldn't be here was if her dad killed him. In her heart, she knew Jagger would never willingly leave Havlin Motorcycle Club.

There was nothing to say. She'd argued with him about how to handle her dad. He wasn't going to budge. He believed in the Havlin bylaws and would willingly take the punishment at the cost of losing everything they had together.

She met his gaze and spoke her truth. "What if he doesn't return?"

Jagger frowned. "Why wouldn't he?"

"He left me once for eighteen years."

"Kat." He leaned his forehead against her forehead. "He didn't willingly leave. He was arrested."

"Maybe he got arrested again." She closed her eyes, shutting out the intrusive thoughts.

Pulled in two different directions, she would never want her dad to go to prison again. But she had no other solution to save Jagger, who'd been a part of her life longer than her dad.

She was no longer a child. Past the age of needing anyone to take care of her, she had to find a way for the two men in her life to get along. Her dad needed to accept she loved Jagger and wanted to spend the rest of her life with him.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

THE UPS DRIVER WAVED and pushed the dolly out the door of Havlin Motorcycle Parts shop. Jagger glanced over the invoice and grabbed the tape dispenser. Sticking the paper on the closest shelving unit behind the counter, he checked the time.

As he slid his phone back into his pocket, Bane and Dio walked in from the clubhouse. He lifted his chin. "Just in time."

"I saw the truck head down to the coffee shop." Bane walked over to the stack of boxes. "Sweet. The mufflers from Alport came in."

"Are you switching over?" Dio removed the top box from the stack.

"Yeah. You?"

"Not yet." Dio chuckled. "I've sunk enough money into my ride. I'm thinking about upgrading."

Bane whistled. "Wrong time of the year, bro."

"It's always the wrong time."

Jagger walked over to the door, stuck his head out, and looked down the sidewalk. Katrina had gone to the coffee shop to grab two drinks a half hour ago. Five minutes after she'd left, she'd texted him that she was talking to Cora during her break and would get their coffee when she finished.

Not a woman who gabbed or hung out with other girls, he wondered if everything was okay. Katrina had an attitude about her father's side of the family, considering they had nothing to do with her growing up.

Deep down, he suspected she feared being judged. She associated flaws with imperfections and had the belief there was a defect about her that kept people from loving her.

She was good at keeping shallow relationships. All the bikers back in Beaverton bent over backward to include her, but she had a way of sabotaging any friendship as a knee-jerk response to fear.

Fear of losing others.

"Maverick's here," yelled Dio.

Jagger shut the door. "The invoice is taped on the shelf. Go ahead and get the orders reboxed and ready to ship out. Make sure each one has been charged. The damn prospects keep putting the charges down as being billed."

Maverick cleared his throat. "Katrina's at the coffee shop."

"Yeah. She texted me." He lugged a box into the back. "Where's Wire?"

"He's on the crew out searching for Ruger." Dio cut the tape on the cardboard. "So is Rush and Cord."

"I need to pick up Skye at school in fifteen minutes." Maverick ripped off a piece of paper and wrote on it before putting it in the box. "I'll be back and help you finish up afterward."

"Did Skye tell you she called me yesterday," asked Dio.

Maverick never stopped packing. "Why the hell would she do that?"

"Don't know. She asked me a bunch of questions and then disconnected the call."

Maverick looked at Dio. "What questions?"

"I had to name four places to live, four cars, name four girls and pick a number between one and ten. Then she told me to say stop when I felt like it." Dio shrugged. "Crazy convo."

"MASH," muttered Jagger.

"What?" Dio dropped the box at his feet.

"That's why Skye was asking you those questions." He sat on the stool. "It's a little girl's game they play at school—Mansion, Apartment, Shack, House. Then they find out who they're going to marry, where they'll live, what do you drive, and what kind of job they'll have."

"What did the fucking numbers mean?" asked Dio.

"How many kids you'll have."

Bane laughed. Maverick shook his head. Dio frowned.

Jagger held it together in front of the others, remembering the day Katrina came home from school and asked him all the questions—except after asking him the questions several times, her name was never chosen. She threw the notepad on the ground and tipped over the chair in her rush to run out of the clubhouse, heartbroken.

He had picked up her notepad and played the game by himself. Except he'd cheated.

He circled the following words.

House. Oregon. Katrina. Two. Biker. Harley

The next day, when she found the note, she ran out of Mama Sue's house and almost mowed him down as he walked to his motorcycle. She'd dropped the piece of paper in her wild dash of excitement. He still carried the game's results a decade later in his wallet.

The door chimed. He raised his gaze and soaked in Katrina, walking toward him and carrying two cold coffees.

"Hey, guys." She put the drinks on the counter, leaned over, and puckered her lips in Jagger's direction.

He cocked his brow and made no move to kiss her. She slapped his chest and then fisted his vest, pulling herself over the counter and stealing a kiss.

"Why are you in a bad mood?" She jumped off the counter.

He walked around the counter, took her hand, and led her out of the shop. On the sidewalk, he backed her up against the building.

Then, he buried his face into her neck. "I don't want you away from my side that long again."

Anything could've happened. Ruger could've come back and taken her away from him.

Katrina's small hand slid over his neck, holding him to her. "Nothing, and nobody will ever take me from you."

He shuddered. Every fucking second waiting for Ruger was filled with dread. He'd prepared, planned, and even looked forward to the punishment headed his way. But he still couldn't wrap his head around the possibility of losing her.

Something had to give. He wouldn't last much longer.

"It'll be okay," she whispered.

He straightened, squeezing the back of her neck. Around the others, he hid his weaknesses. If his enemies discovered that one woman could bring him to his knees, they would find a way to use Kat against him.

Even his own men could use the information to take away the president's seat within the club.

As loyal and strong Havlin Motorcycle club was, they were still men looking out for themselves. He had no time to rest or second guess himself.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

JAGGER WALKED INTO the Whale's Tail Coffee Shop, followed by Maverick and Wire. Katrina waved him over to the table. She'd spent the afternoon trying to hunt down her dad through all his usual contacts. Nobody had seen or heard from him for almost a month.

Jagger leaned down and kissed her before sliding into the booth beside her. "Anything yet?"

"No." She leaned against him, comforted by the size of him.

His leather vest was warmed from the sun. She sighed in failure. That morning, she'd set out to use the coffee shop as her headquarters and go through every contact she'd kept on her phone. No one had seen her dad.

"I don't understand how he could disappear again." She lowered her voice. "I even called the prison to see if he was locked up. Is there another prison or maybe a county jail I can call? If he was out riding, he could be anywhere, I suppose."

"I've thought of that and had Bane call the county jails. He's not locked up." He put his arm around her. "Did you get something to eat?"

"I had one of their pre-made sandwiches with coffee." She rubbed his stomach. "Do you want me to order you something?"

He shook his head. "We stopped on the way back and got a burger and beer."

Cora slid into the booth across from them. "I have an idea. Hear me out before you

say no, okay?"

Katrina nodded.

"Let me hire a private detective—"

"No," said Jagger.

Cora jerked her gaze to Wire, looking for support. Katrina squeezed Jagger's thigh under the table to soften his approach. Cora wasn't used to Jagger's sternness directed at her.

"She's worried about my dad, too," whispered Katrina.

"Havlin's taking care of all searches. There are men in Seaglass Cove looking, and Hatchet has a crew in Beaverton looking for Ruger." Jagger paused. "Everyone needs to remember Ruger hasn't done anything. He's a free man. He can come and go as he pleases. He wasn't happy about Katrina and me being together when he left. Maybe he needed to take a ride."

"For a month?" Katrina pursed her lips and shook her head. "He wouldn't stay away from me that long without answering my calls."

"Phones break all the time," said Maverick.

Surprised to hear the big guy talk, she shook her head. She had a feeling something was wrong.

"Even if that happened, there are phones everywhere. He can buy a new one. He knows my number by heart." Katrina raised her brows. "Something is wrong."

"We'll broaden our search." Jagger rubbed the back of Katrina's neck. "We'll find him."

Cora slid out of the booth and stood by Wire. "I don't understand why I can't pay for a detective."

Wire led her aunt to the other side of the shop. Katrina sagged in her seat. She might not be buddy-buddy with Cora, but her aunt was trying to help. Her concern was real.

"Put the search away for a bit. I want to take you for a ride." Jagger slid out of the booth and stood.

As she gathered her notes and slipped them into her back pocket, she caught Cora's gaze. There was no mistaking the worry. On impulse, she went to her aunt.

"I'll keep looking and making phone calls." She lowered her voice. "If he doesn't show up by the end of the week, I'll drive back to Beaverton."

"I can go with you."

She glanced back at Jagger. He would never let her go alone. Not now that he claimed her.

"Let's think positive that he'll show up." She swallowed hard. "It's not the first time he's taken off."

Cora hugged Katrina. With her arms trapped to her sides, she let her aunt show her affection in her own way.

"Kat?"

"Coming." She pulled back. "I'll talk to you later."

"Call if you find him."

"I will." She walked to the door, threw the peace sign to the others, and stepped out onto the sidewalk with Jagger. "Where are we going?"

"For a ride." He stepped off the sidewalk, grabbed the extra helmet on the back of his Harley, and handed it to Katrina.

"Where?"

"Does it matter?" He put on his skull bucket and straddled the motorcycle.

She studied him as she got ready to ride. He was in a mood.

Her mood had already plummeted the more she searched and talked about her dad. Maybe a ride would help them both.

She climbed behind him and hugged his waist. It was a gray day with low clouds. She wore jeans and a T-shirt. From her time in Seaglass Cove, she knew the nights could get cold.

"Do I need a jacket?" she asked.

"Nah, you're good."

Jagger rode away from the coffee shop. Gazing over his right shoulder, she let the wind relax her. Despite growing up in a motorcycle club, she never had any desire to ride a motorcycle herself. She liked being Jagger's backpack—a term he hated. He was old-fashioned and called it riding two-up.

He rode across the highway and toward the water. Less than five miles from the clubhouse, he pulled onto another road, followed a channel inland, and stopped at a boat dock.

She hopped off the Harley and removed her helmet. Jagger took her hand and led her to the water. There were at least twenty boats tied to the six-finger dock.

"Watch your step." He led her onto the floating pier.

She held on tightly to his hand. Once she got used to the boards moving under her feet and the rocking of the current, she raised her gaze to the boats and the water. The sun was on its way down. The light reflected on the choppy water, making her squint.

The cry of a seagull overhead had her looking up. The bird swooped down in front of them before skimming the water.

Jagger took her to the end of the pier. "Let's sit."

She lowered herself to the dock and let her feet hang off the side. The water was still a good foot or more below her toes.

Jagger sat beside her, dropping his booted feet over the side.

"It's beautiful here." She pointed. "Does the channel go out to the ocean?"

He moved his hand to the right. "It follows the route through there and keeps going until you reach town, where it meets the Pacific Ocean."

"This reminds me of the Columbia River back home." She scooted closer to him.

Jagger put his arm around her. "I brought you out here because I'm going to take off

in the morning and visit Beaverton."

"Oh, I'm glad." She exhaled in relief. "I was thinking I'd wait until the end of the week and go back home to see if I could find my dad, but tomorrow is even better—"

"You're not going, Kat."

Her spine straightened. "Why can't I go?"

"I'll be going places you're not allowed to go." He put his arm around her and made her stay beside him. "It'll be faster if I go alone."

"What happens if you find him?" She lifted her feet, trying to stand, and he stopped her.

"Then, it's best if you're not there." He pushed her legs back down, forcing her to stay on the pier and listen. "Dio's riding with me. Give me two days. If I'm not back by then, I promise Dio will have news of what's keeping me. Regardless, you'll find out about your dad."

Her chest squeezed, compressing her lungs. She stared at the water. If she wasn't there when Jagger found her dad, who would stop him from going too far in his punishment?

Regardless of what Jagger believed, she hoped her dad would listen to her. If it came down to choosing having her in his life or her walking away with Jagger, she believed her dad would choose her—that alone would protect Jagger.

"Will you call me every few hours when you're gone?" She leaned her head on him. "Please."

He kissed her temple. "As long as you stay in the clubhouse."

"You won't know where I am because you'll be gone."

"I'll know."

It was only two days. She could stay inside and wait if that meant he returned with her dad, and both of them were safe.

"I was reminded of something today." He stroked her back.

"Hm."

He picked up her leg, bringing her foot onto his lap. "I remembered the day I got a call that you'd walked into Pete's Tattoo and wanted some ink. Pete knew better than to touch you."

"I was sixteen."

"A hellion." He chuckled. "I rode over, hellbent on spanking your ass, because you knew Mama Sue would raise hell if you came home all tatted up."

"She was old-school and believed tattoos were what set apart ol' ladies from biker bitches. That's why I wanted to do the bottom of my big toe. I figured she'd never see it." Her stomach warmed. "I talked you into letting me do it, though."

He slipped off her shoe and turned her foot.

She looked at the odd-shaped tattoo. "Pete sucked at tattoos. It doesn't even look like a heart."

"No. Pete's one of the best." He caressed the bottom of her toe with the pad of his thumb. "It's not a heart."

"Yes, it is."

He locked his gaze on her. "It's a scale off my dragon."

"Wha...?" She grabbed her foot and looked at the deformed heart.

Jagger pulled up the front of his shirt to where his dragon tattoo was inked on his chest, over his heart. She studied his chest, his shoulder. Most Havlin members had the solid black-inked dragon tattoo in some shape or form, but Jagger's dragon was more complex with scales.

"Look closely," he said. "Over the dragon's chest."

Her gaze zeroed in. She leaned closer, not believing what she was seeing. Not once in the past had the tattoo caught her attention. Only when Jagger pointed it out could she see a heart-shaped scale over the dragon's chest.

He pulled his shirt down and grabbed her foot again. "I claimed you long ago, Kat. You were only sixteen, and I knew you were my ol' lady. I didn't know how I'd make it possible because of your dad, and even if life got fucked up along the way and I never was able to have you, you were part of my heart. Nobody else gets that. Only you. You got the Havlin dragon scale, and I..." He patted his chest. "Got your heart."

She put her foot down and threw herself at him. For once, she was at a loss for words.

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HATCHET WALKED OUT of the meeting room. Jagger lifted his chin. He was ready to get the search done and return to Seaglass Cove.

"You're early." Hatchet shook Jagger's hand. "How were the roads?"

"Not too bad. We missed the morning commute."

Hatchet greeted Dio. "Long time no see, brother."

"Good to be back." Dio hitched his thumb over his shoulder. "Is the bar open?"

"Self-serve. Our bartender ran off." Hatchet grinned and looked at Jagger. "Speaking of Katrina, how is she?"

"Worried about her dad." Jagger walked over to the table with Hatchet while Dio shook the road dust off. "We've hit a dead-end."

"Us, too." Hatchet exhaled heavily. "You know him better than me, but I have to say, most of our members who spent more than a couple of years in prison usually take off periodically. Confinement gets to them, whether behind bars or within the club. I think Ruger got an itch and had to get out of here—considering he's got a punishment to dish out. He could be fighting demons we don't know about."

Having informed Hatchet of his relationship with Katrina and why Ruger was missing, he wasn't surprised by Hatchet's opinion. But he needed to know how long Ruger expected to be gone. His daughter needed him.

"I'm going to check out a few places in town." Jagger ran his hands through his hair, catching his fingers on the snares made by the wind. "Someone has got to remember seeing him."

"Feel free to take some of my men if needed."

"Appreciate it." He stood. "I think I'll join Dio in a drink before we head out."

"There's a couple of rooms in the back you can use if you plan on staying."

He nodded and made his way to the bar. Grabbing a beer, he popped the top and took a long drink. They'd made the one-hundred-thirty-mile trip without stopping. All he wanted was a drink and to take a piss.

Dio was deep in a conversation with Matrix, an old Havlin member from back in Jagger's father's day. He finished his beer and used the restroom. They needed to hit the road if they planned on hitting each place he wanted to check out.

Carla, a Havlin bitch, stopped him in the hallway. "Look at you, sexy. I haven't seen you in years."

She wound her arms around his waist. He grabbed her wrists and untwined himself from her grasp. At one time, she'd entertained him. But Katrina was now old enough and a permanent fixture in his life. He had no use for any of the bitches.

"Good to see you." He stepped away.

Carla had aged as women who partied hard and lived a rough life often do. He stepped away from her and returned to Dio.

"Ready to hit the road?" He took a cigarette from the pack and put it in his mouth.

Dio dropped his empty bottle into the trash and walked with him outside. At the motorcycles, he lit a cigarette.

"Did you hear anything from the others?" he asked.

"Greer mentioned Rugger used to shoot pool over on Carson and Sixth. The place is called Vinny's." Dio sat on his motorcycle and held his helmet on his lap. "Besides that, everyone is under the impression Ruger is unstable. Moody, keeps to himself, and has a temper. Sounds like he never adapted well to life outside the bars."

Jagger grunted. Ruger, to some degree, was always like that to others. Except with Jagger. But that was before Ruger took the fall for Jagger's crime.

"Let's head over there." He took another hit off his cigarette and put it out.

He knew the city of Beaverton like the back of his hand. It was a populated area with almost a hundred thousand people. There were heavily populated cities around them, but the biggest was Portland. Ruger could be anywhere.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

KATRINA CRUMBLER THE list she'd made yesterday and tossed the paper into the trash can in Jagger's room at the clubhouse. Yesterday, Jagger asked her for a list of items she wanted from Mama Sue's house.

The members of Havlin had moved Mama Sue's belongings into storage, and the only thing remaining in the house belonged to her. They'd left her bedroom untouched.

For now, her belongings could go into storage, too. But she needed more clothes.

Jagger promised to grab the items she wanted and have them shipped to Seaglass Cove.

She plopped onto the couch and let her head fall back on the cushion. She was in no hurry to visit Beaverton. There were too many memories there. The heartache of missing Mama Sue would multiply the moment she entered the vacant house when Mama Sue wasn't there to greet her.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

She gazed at the door. Everyone knew Jagger was gone.

The knocking grew louder. She got up and crossed the room.

"Who is it?" she yelled.

"Cora."

She unlocked the door and opened it. "What's up?"

"Wire's got two calls he's going on this afternoon, so I thought I'd come over and see what you're doing."

Katrina swung her arm. "Come on in."

"Feels weird." Cora glanced around. "Is Jagger going to kick my ass when he finds out I'm here?"

"Probably."

Cora whipped around and gawked at her. She rolled her eyes. Jagger would be happy she had company and obeyed him about staying inside the clubhouse while he was gone.

"Do you ever wonder what's in our DNA that makes the females in our family go for older men?" Cora walked around the room. "Watching my parents, age never really mattered to me. But seeing you with Jagger is strange. You're savage but simp with him."

"Oh, and you're slaying your ship?"

"I don't flex." Cora scowled. "It's you who walks around like you're the GOAT."

Tired of the pissing contest, Katrina snorted. "You're younger than me."

"Right." Cora frowned. "I bet everyone looks at us weird."

"Who cares what other people think?"

Her aunt shrugged. "I don't care. Maybe I'm having an epiphany or seeing myself through other people's eyes."

Katrina had nothing to say. She'd spent a lifetime loving Jagger. There was nothing she would change except to love him openly for the rest of her life.

"So, here's the truth." Cora sat down beside her. "I overheard my parents talking about Jeff...your dad—"

"I know his real name."

"Right." Cora inhaled. "I was probably twelve years old at the time. They were discussing how he'd run away from home with his girlfriend. A girlfriend who told her she was pregnant. My parents...I don't know if they believed her or if they were against my brother having a kid at the age of eighteen—I have no idea because I wasn't even born. But I hate to think they wouldn't help him. Obvi, I wasn't there when it all went down."

"Why are you telling me this," said Katrina.

"Because I would hate for you to think I knew about you and didn't find you before now."

"That's ridiculous. I haven't even thought of you because I didn't know any relatives were out there. Dad never spoke of his parents. Though, he was in prison by the time I was four years old. We didn't have many heart-to-heart conversations in the penitentiary. Most often, we played Hangman with the pencil and paper they gave us during visitations."

"So, you're not mad?"

"Girl—Aunt, whatever you want to be called, you need to stop worrying so much." Katrina put her feet up on the coffee table. "What did you think would happen if I found out you overheard a conversation as a kid that had nothing to do with you?"

"You'd never forgive me."

"Cray." Katrina shook her head, unable to understand Cora's reasoning. But she was curious. "Why's it so important to you for me to like you?"

Cora frowned. "We're very different."

"You can say that again." Katrina snorted. "I bet you never thought you'd have a niece who grew up in a motorcycle club."

"I bet you never thought you'd have an aunt younger than you who inherited everything her parents left behind when they died, and I have more money than I can spend myself."

Cora's eyes widened in disbelief that she'd spoken her thoughts out loud and shook her head. A few seconds later, she laughed.

Seeing the humor in the conversation and considering Cora married a biker, Katrina gave her aunt a genuine smile. Maybe they had more in common than she'd thought.

"You know what I want to do?" Katrina stood. "Let's go have a drink."

"Alcohol?"

"Duh."

Cora hurried to keep up with her. "I'm not a big drinker."

"Neither am I, but I'm tired of waiting for Jagger to call with news about my dad." She walked straight to the counter at the side of the clubhouse. "And since Jagger wouldn't like it if I drank with the bikers, I'll drink with you."

"Don't I feel special," muttered Cora.

As she started looking through the assortment of bottles, the Havlin members loitering around the club migrated in her direction. She shooed them away. They could get their own damn drinks today.

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Cora and Katrina had their backs to the door of the clubhouse. Behind them, several bikers stood, waiting to get a drink from the bar.

They each held a half-full cup of a mysterious amber-looking concoction. Jagger glanced around, found Wire, and motioned with his chin at the women in question.

Wire held up his hand, tipped an imaginary drink, and then shrugged. He could tell they'd been drinking. He wanted to know why he returned and found his ol' lady half-looped.

Katrina held up her hand. Cora put her hand up. Together, they formed a heart with their fingers. A sloppy heart, but it was recognizable.

Over the music, Katrina yelled, "Not that way. Cross your arms, then turn."

Katrina swung her hips and crossed her arms.

"No, you turn. In the TikTok video, they both turn in the same direction. My way." Cora moved to the side, flapping her arms in all directions.

The men lost interest in the women's dance moves and stepped around them to get to the bar.

Katrina planted her hands on her hips and studied Cora's moves. Jagger moved. It'd been a long two days.

She spotted him before he reached her. Slapping Cora's arm excitedly, Katrina ran the

few yards separating them and jumped into his arms.

Her forehead skimmed his cheekbone. "Ow."

He carried her down the hallway and straight to the bedroom. What he had to say was nobody else's business.

In the bedroom, he set her on her feet. She swayed, holding on to him to keep her balance. He led her to the couch and sat beside her, needing to touch her.

"My dad?" She looked at him hopefully. "You found him?"

Her good mood would disappear when he told her he came up empty. Even reviewing security tapes at several locations around Beaverton hadn't brought any sign of her dad.

"It looks more and more like he's taken off." He smoothed her hair off her face. "After dealing with the news that I'm involved with his daughter, he probably needs time to wrap his head around what to do."

"I really thought you'd find him." She sagged against the couch. "Do you think he's dead?"

"No."

"Good." She gazed at him through starry eyes. "I can't lose him." She grabbed his hand and brought it to her chest. "I can't lose you, either."

"You're not going to." He quit in case he had to go back on his word. "We'll just have to wait for your dad to come out of hiding."

She put his hand on her breast and sighed. Even after the long road trip, the busy forty-eight hours, and tired enough to fall into bed and sleep, his cock hardened.

"I missed you." She let her head fall back on the cushion. "Let's fuck."

She had the most adorable smile. He kissed her lips.

"I need to knock the road dust off." He stood, pulling her off the couch. "Strip down and crawl into bed. I'll make it quick."

She walked out of her shorts. He put his pistol, wallet, and phone on the dresser. While he folded his vest in half, he watched Katrina shimmy her panties down over her hips. His balls ached from not having her the last couple of days.

He slipped into the bathroom, stepped under the spray, and washed himself clean without letting the water heat up. Barely taking the time to towel off, he walked into the room naked.

Katrina was curled on her side, mouth slightly open, and sleeping the sleep of someone who imbibed too much. He looked down at his cock and shook his head. There was going to be no fucking tonight. When he had his woman, he wanted her awake and aware of what he was doing to her.

He pulled the comforter out from under her and crawled into bed, covering them both. He spooned her, wrapping his arm around her waist.

The warmth coming off her relaxed his road-weary body. He was getting too fucking old to run hard for two days straight.

He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes. Tomorrow, Katrina would have a million questions for him, and he had no answers for her.

At this point, he started worrying about Ruger despite the punishment hanging over his head.

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JAGGER'S COCK PULSED inside of Katrina. She arched, trying to hold her orgasm off, but he ground against her pussy. Her body uncoiled, and pleasure flowed through her.

He grunted, planting himself deep inside of her. She quivered as her legs weakened and fell off his hips.

Jagger went down on his elbows. She moaned under his weight as he rolled to his side, taking her with him. She flung her leg over his thigh and caught her breath as her heart slowed to normal.

"How are you feeling?" He rubbed her back.

"Surprisingly, okay." She put her head in the crook of his arm. "I don't think we had too much to drink."

He chuckled. "You were looped."

She sighed, remembering enough to know that Jagger's trip to Beaverton had brought no results in finding her dad. Because of her dad's past and his membership with Havlin, she couldn't go to the police and file a missing person report. However, taking Cora up on her offer to hire a detective appealed to her.

Her dad would never forgive her if she got someone outside the family involved. She knew the rules.

That doesn't mean she liked following the rules.

"Your clothes should arrive by the end of the week." He pushed himself up, crawled over her, and left the bed. "Have you thought of what you want to do with the house?"

A pang of sadness hit her. She wasn't ready to deal with Mama Sue's death.

"The house should belong to you," she whispered. "You're her son."

"You were her daughter. It doesn't matter if your blood doesn't match."

Mama Sue gave her all the love she needed growing up. She couldn't ask for a better mother and grandmother figure rolled into one.

"Rent the house out. There are always Havlin members who need a place to stay, and with the location, the house would always be full." He pulled on a pair of jeans. "Hell, hike the rent because you know more than one asshole will crash there."

"Will you handle that for me?"

He nodded. "Her things are in storage. The units the club owns, so no hurry going through her things. If you ever want anything, contact Hatcher."

"Don't you want some of her belongings?"

He shook his head. "There's nothing I need."

"There are pictures."

"Got a drawer full that mom sent me a few months after I moved here."

"Oh." She sat up in bed. "What are you doing today?"

"I need to work in the parts shop. There's a club meeting at four o'clock."

She walked across the room and hugged him from behind. "I've missed you."

He turned in her arm and held her against his chest. "Want to help in the shop?"

"Sure." She headed toward the shower. "Do you have time for me to make breakfast?"

"Nope." He opened the door. "I'll run down to the coffee shop—"

"I'll grab us drinks and a cinnamon roll. Go ahead and go to work." She gathered her hair on the top of her head. "I want to check on Cora."

"Everything okay between you and her?" He stood in the doorway. "You looked like you were getting along last night."

She nodded. "She's pretty cool."

Jagger's gaze wandered down Katrina's body. "You better shower before I change my mind about working today."

"Well..." She turned and wiggled her ass. "Come and get it."

He groaned and walked out the door. She smiled, turning on the water. A motorcycle club president always had something he had to do around the clubhouse. It made the time she had with him more precious.

A half-hour later, she walked to Whale's Tail Coffee Shop with a gnawing stomach, telling her she could eat two cinnamon rolls.

The driftwood on the door rattled as she walked inside. She waved at Cora behind the counter.

Her aunt groaned. "Why do you look so happy this morning?"

"I take it you have a hangover."

"Headache, nausea, and regrets. I'm never drinking again." Cora grimaced. "Why aren't you suffering?"

She shrugged. "Lucky, I guess."

"Did you come to order coffee or to torment me?"

"Honestly?" She laughed. "Both."

"What can I get you?"

"Two American coffees and two rolls." She pointed to the glass case. "Make that three."

As Cora placed the food in a box, she said, "Wire told me Jagger was unsuccessful finding Ruger."

"Yeah."

"What happens now?"

"I don't know." She took out her debit card. "All we can do is wait to see if he returns."

Cora handed her a cup of coffee before preparing the second one. "I'm sorry. I wish there were something I could do."

She had to admit it was nice that Cora was concerned. Inhaling the steam coming through the hole on the top of the lid, she stepped over to the cash register, where Cora took her payment.

"Hopefully, your head will start feeling better soon," she said.

"I hope." Cora mustered a smile. "I'll see you later."

She walked the block back to the building and entered through the front door of the parts shop. Having been there several times since arriving in Seaglass Cove, she knew the layout.

Maverick dipped his chin in her direction. She sat the box and drinks on the counter.

"Do you or any of the other guys working here today want me to run and get drinks?" she asked.

"Nah, I'm good." Maverick coughed. "Already had my cup."

Jagger walked out from one of the aisles in the back. She held up a cup and motioned him over.

Without saying a word, he took a sip of the coffee and exhaled loudly in appreciation. She loved that she could do something for him, even as simple as getting him a coffee.

Dio strolled in and spotted her. "Great, we have more help."

"I don't know how much help I'll be, but I'll try." She put her hands on her hips.
"Point me to what I'm supposed to do."

Five minutes later, she was searching for parts to fill orders. She'd learned how to decode their inventory records. Best of all, she got to hang with Jagger all morning, and that helped keep her mind off her dad.

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JAGGER LEANED AGAINST the pool table, talking with Bane and Maverick. Katrina sat beside him on the edge of the pool table with her finger hooked in his back pocket. Some of the guys had fired up the grill outside, and burgers and hotdogs were passed around until everyone had a plate.

Daisy stepped closer. "Cora mentioned you're staying in Seaglass Cove with Jagger."

"That's the plan."

"That's exciting." Daisy leaned against the pool table beside her. "If you need anything, feel free to call me or run over to the pool. I'm there Monday through Friday, most of the time. Otherwise, I'm home."

As the president's woman, all other ol' ladies would look toward her for guidance within the club. She would oversee organizing get-togethers, making sure every family had enough money to support themselves and to see after the children of Havlin. No one would go without the bare necessities and have moral and financial support.

Until now, Daisy would've assumed that position as the ol' lady to the vice president.

Mama Sue had taught her by example. She'd witnessed how a true president's woman should act over the years, even though Baller was gone. Every member respected her position, even though her husband no longer sat in the seat.

While she had a temper and rarely had control of her emotions when it came to Jagger, she knew what was expected of her. The other women would never respect

her if she failed to step up and take responsibility for them all.

"I appreciate that." She slid her hand up the back of Jagger's shirt. "Have you got something to eat yet?"

After getting wind of the barbecue, she'd made a couple of calls and had the deli prepare enough potato salad and chips for the get-together after Jagger gave her a number of how many people to expect, counting kids.

"I did." Daisy smiled. "Brooke and Cora are outside. They stopped me before I could come inside and find Bane."

It was always awkward getting to know other women. While she'd met Daisy before, it was before the fight at the pool—and she probably made a fool of herself.

"Do you know if Bane has eaten?" asked Daisy.

"I don't think so. He rode in with Jagger about twenty minutes ago, and they've been together ever since."

"I'll go get him a plate while he talks. Do you want anything while I'm out there?"

She shook her head. "I'm good. Thanks."

Left alone with the men, she tuned out their conversation as soon as she recognized the discussion centered around motorcycles. She curled her fingers and scratched her nails against Jagger's back.

He dropped one of his hands between her knees and grabbed the inside of her thigh. It was a nice time with the others. The mild temperature made for a perfect summer evening.

The door opened, and a loud whistle swept through the room. Katrina looked across the clubhouse.

"Rider incoming," yelled Link.

Dio rushed through the door, carrying Skye, Maverick, and Brooke's young girl. "Maverick."

Maverick turned. "Here."

Dio jogged over and set Skye down, speaking softly to her. Before she could see what was happening, Jagger told her to round up the kids and put them in the spare room with the toys and game systems available for the children to play. Brooke, Daisy, and Cora quickly joined her.

Brooke approached Katrina in the room. "I'll stay with the kids."

She squeezed the other woman's arm in thanks and hurried out to see what was going on. Usually when someone yelled, announcing a rider coming in, it meant someone was hurt.

Not finding Jagger inside, she went out the door and stopped. Her gaze followed the crowd. Her heart raced, seeing that it was her dad riding in.

A wave of relief that he was alive left her shaking. Then, the reality of the situation hit her. The members were warning Jagger about trouble coming his way. Her dad had returned to name his punishment against him.

She pushed through the crowd, needing to intercept her dad before he started something she couldn't stop. Her skull pounded. If only they could all sit down and discuss what was happening. Her dad had to understand that she'd made an adult

choice to be with Jagger.

Her dad toed the kickstand. She reached his motorcycle and came to a stop in front of him.

Jagger grabbed her arm, pulling her back. She pulled against the restraint, but he never let go.

Her dad removed his helmet. Shocked at his appearance, she cried out. His eyelids were swollen and closed. There were dark purple bruises on his jaw and cheek bones. She had to look at his motorcycle again to make sure it was him because his face was unrecognizable.

"Jesus Christ." Jagger moved forward, catching her dad before he could fall off the bike. "Someone untie her."

Several men rushed forward. Katrina stepped out of their way. That's when she noticed her dad wasn't alone.

There was a woman on the back of his motorcycle. At least, going by the long, black hair and small frame, it appeared to be a woman.

As the helmet came off her, the men grew silent. The woman was in no better shape. Dried blood coated her face. Her lips were swollen and bruised.

The moment Jagger got the rope untied that was holding the woman to her dad's back, a scream froze them all in place. Katrina gasped, looking to her dad for an explanation. But he only held up his hand for everyone to back off.

Once the crowd stepped away, Ruger quietly spoke to the woman, calming her down. Several minutes later, the woman slid off the motorcycle and crumbled to the ground.

Katrina covered her mouth in horror. The woman wore men's ripped clothes that hung off her slim body.

"Katrina?"

She hurried forward. "I'm here."

"Take her inside, baby." He slumped forward on the motorcycle. "She knows about you. She'll trust you."

She reached out but was afraid of touching her dad in case she caused him more pain. "You need a doctor."

"I'll be fine." He looked at the woman on the ground. "Get her inside."

She approached the woman and knelt beside her. Aware of the others watching, waiting, she softened her voice. "I'm Katrina. Ruger's daughter. I'm going to help get you inside."

"Safe?" mumbled the woman.

"You'll be safe here." She put her hand on the woman's arm, testing to see if it would cause her pain, and then helped her to her feet.

The crowd parted for them. She walked slowly, practically holding the woman up. She looked over her shoulder at the door and caught her dad stumbling off the motorcycle before Jagger and two other bikers caught him.

She wanted to help her dad but knew he would want her to help the woman first.

She took the woman to the first bedroom on the right in the clubhouse, away from

where the children were kept. There was also a bathroom in that bedroom where she could clean up.

She shut the door and led her to a chair. "Are you able to sit?"

The woman lowered herself down on a moan. Katrina stood back. She had no idea what to do first. There were injuries.

"Where does it hurt the most?" she asked.

The woman reached up to her head and stopped before making contact. Katrina looked all over the woman's scalp but couldn't see where the blood came from. It looked as if she'd had a bloody nose. But if her head hurts, she could have a concussion.

She walked into the bathroom and wet several washcloths under the faucet before returning to the woman. "Did you and my dad have an accident?"

The woman never answered. She offered the washcloth, and the woman held it in both hands, scrubbing at her fingers. There was dirt and grime under the woman's short fingernails.

"I'm going to wash your face to see where you're bleeding." She gently patted her cheeks. "I'll try not to hurt you."

"Ruger?"

"He's getting help." Katrina swallowed. "He's hurt, too."

As she made progress on her face and could see that someone had hit the woman, causing her to have swollen lips and a bruise all along her cheekbone and jaw, she

started to wonder who had hurt her. Who had hurt her dad?

They weren't in an accident. There was no road rash, and the motorcycle wasn't damaged.

"Ruger?" She pulled away from Katrina's touch. "I must go."

"You need to stay here."

The woman stood with surprising strength, frantically looking around the room. "No."

"Please, sit." Katrina motioned toward the chair. "I'm trying to help you. We need to find out where you're hurt."

The woman dashed to the other side of the room, opened the door, and hurried out of the room. Katrina threw the washcloth to the floor and ran after her. If the chick didn't want to be here, there was no reason to keep her.

She was more concerned about her dad.

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"CLEAR OUT," SHOUTED Jagger.

"The children are sequestered in the back room." Maverick dropped Ruger in the chair at the table.

"Have the women escort them out the rear door. The party is over." Jagger looked behind him. "Someone get Cord."

"I'm here, Prez." Cord tossed a duffle bag on the table. "Are you shot?"

"No." Ruger motioned toward his eyes. "Cut them, so I can fucking see."

Jagger stood back, assessing Ruger's condition. Bikers got roughed up a lot—most of them when they were drunk and having a good time. Wherever Ruger had been over the last six weeks, he wasn't partying.

Cord removed a sterile razor blade from the kit he carried in his bag. "I'll need some towels and water."

"On it." Brett jogged down the hallway.

Regardless of the situation, Jagger needed to know what the fuck was going on. He had to prepare his men in case others were coming after Ruger and headed their way.

Jagger leaned against the table across from Ruger. "Who did this to you?"

"Nobody important."

"Are you being followed?" he asked.

"If I was, why the fuck would I bring them straight to the clubhouse?" Ruger tilted his head back.

Cord made a small slice in Ruger's eyelid. Blood gushed down his face.

Jagger pushed away from the table in frustration and spotted the woman who came with Ruger running out of the hallway. "Catch her."

He moved toward the hallway to find Katrina, knowing she was caring for the girl, and almost ran into her.

"Are you okay?" He held her arms, looking her over.

"Yeah." She blew out her breath. "She just took off."

"Stay the fuck away from her."

Jagger turned to find Ruger standing up, blood running down his face, and limping toward the woman. He glanced at Katrina in question. She shrugged. No one seemed to know what the hell was going on.

He palmed the back of Katrina's neck and brought her closer. "I need you to talk to your dad and find out why he came here in that condition."

"He won't tell you?"

If he pressured Ruger, the confrontation would become physical. Katrina's dad was already in rough shape but that wouldn't stop him from swinging.

"He's not saying much." He watched the activity on the other side of the room. "Did the girl say anything?"

"Nothing." Katrina lowered her voice. "Something freaked her out in the room, and she bolted. I'm surprised she can walk. She's hurt all over, Jagger."

Ruger held the woman against his chest, cradling her head in his hand, hiding her from the others. Jagger recognized the protective pose.

"Oh, my God," mumbled Katrina.

Before he could stop her, Katrina went to her dad's side. "You're bleeding all over. Sit down and let Cord help you."

Ruger returned to the chair and put the woman on his lap, shielding her face against his chest. "Get at it."

Cord moved forward, cleaning up the eye that continued to drain. Jagger pulled Katrina back, giving them room.

"You can see your dad after Cord is done with him," he whispered in her ear. "Let's get them both settled first. Then, we'll figure out what's going on."

"The police aren't after him, are they?" she whispered back.

"Doesn't look like it."

The first thing he'd done was send a crew out to ride a perimeter around the clubhouse. No one would get past them.

"Get them out of here." Ruger flinched from Cord's touch. "God damnit. I'm going to

start fucking blowing heads—"

"Everyone out," said Jagger quietly. "Cord. You stay and patch them up."

Katrina lifted her chin. "Please, Dad. Let Cord help you."

A look passed between father and daughter. Luckily, the silent exchange quieted Ruger.

When the others left, and Ruger calmed enough to let Cord stitch his eye, Jagger pulled out a chair and motioned for Katrina to sit. She was pale and shaking. The whole ordeal was taking a lot out of her.

"Do you have any injuries on your body?" asked Cord.

"Broken ribs."

Cord dropped the bloody rag on a towel. "Pull up your shirt, and I'll have a look."

"No."

Katrina gasped. "Dad."

"Give me a bottle of pills." Ruger looked at Jagger. "For her."

Ruger had him up against the wall. He knew Jagger would do everything possible to help him. He owed him that much and more.

He motioned at Cord to do what Ruger wanted. Cord handed over a pill bottle, picked up his supplies, and walked out of the clubhouse.

Ruger met Jagger's gaze. "Are we alone?"

Katrina put her hand on Jagger's thigh. He nodded.

"I need somewhere to stay for a while." Ruger paused. "For both of us to stay."

"Is someone after you?"

Ruger remained silent, finally shaking his head as an answer to the question. He wouldn't put his men in danger without knowing the whole story. Not even for Ruger.

Katrina scooted to the edge of her chair. "Dad, you have to tell us what's going on. We've been looking for you this whole time. Jagger has had men out riding every day. Hatchet has men out looking."

Ruger inhaled deeply, bent his neck, and put his lips on the top of the woman's head. "I got a call from a guy in prison, who I owed a favor. He wanted me to save his sister. She was stolen by those who work for the cartel."

"Fuck," muttered Jagger. "I take it the cartel has a name we both know."

Ruger dipped his chin. Jagger rubbed his jaw. He wanted no involvement with Los Li. Like a bad fucking penny, they always seemed to pop up when he least expected them.

"How did you get her away," he asked.

Ruger looked at Katrina and shook his head. Jagger gritted his teeth. He wouldn't say how he'd escaped with his daughter in the room.

Katrina scooted her chair out and walked around the table. She picked up a clean

towel and held it to her dad's face, where his eye continued to ooze blood. Though the swelling was down enough that he could see out of it.

She looked across the table at Jagger. "Can they stay here, or should I contact Hatcher for help?"

"Kat." He gritted his teeth.

Katrina tilted her head and raised her brows, challenging him. She'd go to war for her dad, even if she had to go up against the president of Havlin. It was one of the things he admired about her. But he had to think of everyone in the club.

"I need a smoke." He walked away from the table and stepped outside.

It was impossible to deny Katrina anything, but to bring Ruger under his roof and welcome retaliation from Los Li was asking too much. He lit the end of the cigarette and held his hand up, keeping the others away from him while he ran through every scenario in his head.

He would do anything for Ruger except give up Katrina.

Inhaling deeply, he closed his eyes. He knew what he'd do, and so had Ruger when he decided to pull up to the clubhouse instead of going to the mother chapter.

Opening his eyes, he looked at the men lingering outside. In the blink of an eye, the party ended. Children were taken home. Half the club split. Those that hung around looked at him, ready for any sign that he needed something.

He stubbed out his cigarette and reentered the clubhouse. Kat and Ruger still sat at the table. The woman appeared asleep in Ruger's arms.

He sat beside Katrina. "You can stay at the clubhouse on one condition."

Ruger looked away, irritated that he'd ask more from him. But he wouldn't be president if he let his guard down.

"Tell me what happened?" he asked.

"I went in to rescue her and got caught. They kept me chained to a pipe in the basement of some fucking house. Once a day, they came in and beat the shit out of me, probably to see if I was still alive." Ruger met his gaze. "She was tied to the same pipe."

Katrina grabbed his thigh. Jagger knew without being told what his MC brother would go through to protect the woman. Every hit. Every kick. Every second of pain Ruger received was a second the woman wouldn't feel the pain.

He would do the same thing if it were Katrina.

"What kind of defense are we looking at?" He cleared his throat. "How many will be coming for you?"

Ruger's gaze steeled, and several seconds later, he gave his answer. "None."

Ruger slipped his hand over Katrina's and kept her from reacting. They both knew that however many men were involved, they were now dead.

It was information he would've preferred to keep from Katrina.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

TWO DAYS AFTER KATRINA'S dad returned in bad condition, leaving her fearing for his life, she stood in the hallway of the clubhouse, ready to kill him.

"You've got to be kidding me?" She crossed her arms.

"Baby, she needs another woman to help her with some things." Her dad looked over his shoulder into the bedroom where the woman he'd brought back with him slept. "When I was there, I talked about you. I told her how strong you were and what a fighter you'd become because you had a shit life—"

"No, Mama Sue gave me a good life," she argued.

"I wasn't talking about—it was about what I did to you, damnit." Her dad lowered his voice. "Rachel grew stronger hearing about how you made something of your life. It gave her hope. Now she needs help."

She shook her head in disbelief. "How is she your problem? You saved her life. You paid back your debt. Send her home."

The thought that he was emotionally involved with a woman involved with men who had hurt her dad soured her stomach. She looked away from him, unable to think about someone else in her dad's life.

She hadn't had enough time with him.

"Baby?"

She exhaled. Backed against the wall, she had no way to turn him down.

"I'm not good with other women," she muttered.

Her dad hooked her neck, bringing her closer and making her look at him. "You're good."

With the way her dad arrived and the following aftermath, finding out what happened, nothing had been said about Jagger's punishment. It was too easy to believe her dad would forget. She knew him better than that.

"If I help you with her." Her upper lip quivered. "Forget about the punishment toward Jagger."

"No."

Heartbroken, she couldn't stop the tears from building. She blinked hard, refusing to show him how much his stubbornness hurt her. He was punishing the man she loved. She'd rather be the one punished.

"I'm not going to help you." She swallowed, refusing to look at him and see disappointment.

Cora entered the hallway. Katrina took that opportunity to escape. She walked toward her aunt, grabbed her hand, and pulled her into the main room of the clubhouse.

"Whoa." Cora tugged on her hand. "What's wrong?"

"My dad's an asshole."

"What happened?"

"He's disappointed me. Again," she yelled, shocking herself.

She hugged her middle, having never said anything bad about her dad to others. When he was in prison, she'd violently defended him. She'd gotten into more fights, physically and verbally, at school with anyone who dared make a crack about having a dad living in prison for murder.

When he walked out of prison, she made room in her life and forgave him for missing out on every special moment she'd had growing up. Moments that Jagger was there to share with her.

Not once had he ever thanked Jagger for taking care of her. Instead, he drove them apart.

She flung her arms down to her sides and fisted her hands. "I'm done."

Marching across the clubhouse, she headed to the hallway to give her dad a piece of her mind when an arm wrapped around her waist, picking her up and keeping her from reaching the room.

She swung out.

"Calm down, Kat." Jagger captured her arms, pinning them to her side. "What happened?"

"After everything you've done, he's still got it in his stupid head to punish you." Boiling inside, she pushed against Jagger. "And now he wants me to help that bitch—"

"Katrina," snapped her dad.

Jagger let her go. She whirled around and faced her dad. "You know I'm right."

Her dad shook her head.

"How can you stand there and lie to me." She pointed at Jagger. "He's loved me my whole life. He stayed with me my whole life—"

"Kat," interrupted Jagger.

"No." She put her hand up to Jagger and a hand up to her dad. "No. Just no."

She ran toward the door, pushing outside, gulping for air. Her head was going to explode. She couldn't go on like this. Love wasn't supposed to hurt. Dads were never supposed to leave. People she loved didn't kill people.

To hell with the club. She wanted Jagger, and she was tired of playing a game so that they could love each other when it was her dad who gave custody of her to Jagger.

She kept walking away from the clubhouse. All she wanted to do was get away from everyone. Her dad pulled her in one direction. Jagger pulled her in a different direction. Even her aunt was taking a piece of her.

She was losing herself.

Blinded by her tears, she angrily dashed them away. She followed the sidewalk, weaving around any obstacle in her way.

She was running away.

Maybe she was more like her dad than she'd thought.

But if she stayed around her dad, she was going to explode. She'd already said too much.

The fears that dwelled inside of her as a child reared their ugly heads. She was still afraid of upsetting him, of telling him how his prison sentence had changed the course of her life, and she had no say in the changes. She had never had any say in her life.

And the one time she stood up to her dad declaring her love for Jagger, he shot her down. He wouldn't listen. Even Jagger wouldn't listen and moved three hours away.

Her chest ached. The farther she got from the clubhouse, the more she regretted her outburst. But she was tired. So tired of other people telling her who she could love.

Her body vibrated. She pressed her hand to her chest. It wasn't sobs racking her body. It was the rumble of a Harley.

Jagger pulled up beside her. "Get on."

He held a helmet out to her. Unstoppable tears fell down her cheeks. She put on the skull cap and climbed behind him. Wrapping her legs and arms around him, she closed her eyes and struggled to catch her breath.

Underneath her, the motorcycle roared to life, taking her away from her problems. Her pain. Her regrets.

She held on to Jagger. It wasn't the first time she clung to him, hopeless and full of pain. He was the only one who was there every single time she needed him—whether she understood she needed him or not at the time. It was always him.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

THE DUNE BLOCKED THE view of the ocean, protecting them from the breeze whipping off the water. He'd parked his Harley and brought Katrina in front of him and held her until the tears stopped and her body calmed.

Worn out, she slumped against him. Her legs draped over his thighs, and her head rested on his shoulder.

Through the years, she'd grown. She'd fought. She'd cried. She'd argued. She'd punch. But he could count how many times she lost control of those emotions on his one hand with him. Each time was branded on his soul.

He rubbed her back, knowing he had the power to ease her hurt. Yet, knowing if he told her the reasons why her dad was adamant about punishing him, he could lose her.

She'd hate him for not telling her the truth.

But he knew the moment he claimed her in front of the club, he would have to tell her. Because he wouldn't let her relationship with her dad dissolve into hatred. There were reasons why Ruger wanted to keep him away from her.

"Kat?" He kissed the side of her head. "I need to talk to you about your dad."

"I don't want to talk about him."

He pried her head off his shoulder and looked into her red-rimmed eyes. "Then, let me talk about me."

"I think the best thing you could do is send him back to Beaverton. Have Hatchet order him back." Her chin trembled. "It'll be better for both of us."

Fuck, she was brave. She had a deep need to have a relationship with her father—a relationship denied to her growing up. For how much she claimed it would be better if he were out of her life, she was lying to herself.

She wanted her dad. She wanted Jagger.

He wasn't sure she could have both of them.

Stroking her cheeks, he dried her face. It pained him more when she lost control. Instead of yelling, swinging, and kicking, she got quiet and internalized everything.

"I must tell you the story about your dad and me." He gathered her hands in his and held them.

"I know what you're going to say. You've been MC brothers since he patched into Havlin," she mumbled.

"Mm." He looked down at their entwined hands. "He was the blood brother I never had. Baller and Mama Sue took him in as a prospect. Him and your mom," he added.

He'd told her the story before. It was nothing new.

"Mama Sue watched you during the day when Ruger was riding for the club." He sighed. "I respected—I respect the hell out of Ruger."

"How can you say that?"

He shushed her and met her gaze. "There is nothing I wouldn't do for your dad. When

Baller was killed, you were too young—"

"I remember him. He let me use his empty cigarette packs to hold the change I'd find on the clubhouse floor after a party," she said.

He nodded. She was barely four years old when his dad was killed.

"It wasn't long after Baller was murdered, and I found out who killed him. I rode off to seek vengeance. Ruger wouldn't let me go alone." He exhaled harshly. "If I could go back...I never would've let him come."

Katrina tilted her head and frowned. "Is this when he killed a man?"

He looked into Katrina's eyes. "Your dad never killed the man. I did. I was the one who shot him. The cops came, and your dad took the pistol out of my hand. My need to retaliate had caused me to freeze. Your dad was trying to get me out of the alley and was the one arrested because he took my pistol."

"That's not true. He killed someone." She shook her head. "He spent eighteen years in prison."

"Kat. Listen to me." He held onto her hands when she pulled away. "He was convicted of the crime. I never asked him to cover for me, but he did, and I can't change that."

"You let him take the fall?" she whispered.

Her words stabbed him in the chest. As president, he took responsibility for each member. But he wasn't president back then. He was reeling, knowing someone had killed his dad. He had no one to blame but himself.

"The last thing Ruger said to me when they slapped handcuffs on him, he asked me to protect you. I gave him my word, but over the years..." He swallowed the guilt. "You know that my role as guardian and protector crossed the line."

She pushed away from him and slid off the motorcycle. He stayed on the Harley, letting her go.

Katrina climbed up the dune, struggling to gain footing and get away from him. She ran toward the ocean—the same ocean that hid his secrets. Where more than a few men have perished or been swept out to sea.

A few minutes after she dropped out of sight, he climbed the dune and stood at the top to protect her from a distance.

He'd held that secret for twenty years. There should be relief.

But all he felt was vulnerable and heartbroken that he wasn't the man Katrina thought him to be.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

RUSH PICKED UP A BEER bottle from the end of the counter. Katrina slid down a bottle to Dio. She'd kept herself busy throughout the day, staying away from her dad, who had closed himself in his room, and away from the parts shop where Jagger spent most of the day.

She looked at the clock. Jagger would come storming in, expecting her to be available to him, and she needed time. Time to understand what went down all those years ago that shaped everyone's life.

"That's it, boys." Katrina brushed her hands off. "You're on your own tonight."

"You're not staying?" Dio raised his drink to his lips.

"What would make you think I'd want to hang around with bikers?" She laughed. "Even I need a break."

She wouldn't allow them to see how much she hurt or how much chaos was going on in their president's life. Mama Sue taught her well.

A girlish scream pierced the room.

"Dio!" Skye, Maverick's daughter, ran through the room and collided with Dio, hiding behind him. "Don't let him find me."

"Who?" Dio widened his stance to hide the girl.

"Brett," Skye mumbled.

Dio shared a wink of amusement with Katrina and said, "What did you do?"

"Nothing."

"Skye." Dio growled.

The young girl crouched down behind him. "Nothing bad."

"Better confess, they're heading this way," he said.

"I didn't mean to hit him with a water balloon." Skye plastered herself on the back of Dio's legs. "I was aiming for my dad." The young girl giggled. "He walked right in front of my dad, and I got him in the face."

Katrina looked across the room and found Brett. She covered her mouth, unable to keep her amusement in check. The biker's hair hung wet around his shoulders, and his t-shirt was soaked.

She leaned over and put her hand out. Skye gave her a high five. There was nothing better than playing with bikers. It was how she was raised. Skye was blessed to be surrounded by family.

"Hop on, sweetheart." Dio squatted. "I'll protect you."

Skye jumped onto his back. Dio skirted the room, keeping Brett from seeing the girl clinging to him like a monkey. As Katrina witnessed the shenanigans, she couldn't help smiling at how Dio catered to the child.

At one time, Jagger had done the same to her. Always saving her ass or looking the other way. He was always the one she ran to, no matter how minor her problem was.

She grabbed her phone and car keys off the counter and slipped outside. Once in her car, she drove through town to Cora and Wire's house. She wanted to catch them before they headed toward the clubhouse.

Luck was on her side. As she pulled into the driveway, her aunt walked out of the house carrying a helmet. She parked to the side so Wire could get out with his motorcycle.

Cora waved, tossing the helmet to Wire, and walked to the car. "Hey, what's up? I thought you'd be at the clubhouse."

"I was." She gathered her bravery and said, "I was wondering if it was okay to crash in your van for the night?"

Cora glanced at Wire and then leaned closer. "Is everything okay?"

As the president's woman, she couldn't discuss her problems with others in the club. She swallowed hard. It was impossible to hide the emotions that were hovering below the surface.

"Are you asking as an ol' lady or my aunt?" she whispered.

Cora's hand went to her chest, and she leaned down into the opening of the car. "Your aunt."

"I'm not okay." She looked through the windshield. "I need some time alone without Jagger or my dad bothering me."

Cora reached in and placed her hand over her hand on the steering wheel. "I won't say anything about you being here, and you're free to use the van whenever you need, but I can't promise that Wire won't mention seeing you here. He's loyal to his club."

She knew that.

She respected that.

"The code for the door is five-five-zero-four-one. Wait ten seconds, and then push six, three, one."

"Six, three, one," she repeated. "Thanks. I owe you."

"We're family. You don't owe me." Cora leaned in, kissed Katrina's cheek, and hurried to Wire's side.

Her aunt climbed on the motorcycle, put her helmet on, and gave Katrina the peace sign as Wire rode away. To her surprise, having Cora's support meant more to her than she expected.

She grabbed the bag she'd packed out of the backseat and walked over to the van. After the second try, she got the code right and opened the door.

The air was stuffy inside, so she left the vehicle open. The van was left exactly like it was when she and Jagger returned from Beaverton. Even the thank you note she'd left on the counter was there.

She wasn't surprised. Cora and Wire had the house. They wouldn't use the van unless they went on vacation.

She pulled the couch into a bed, laid on her back, and held her breath. If she concentrated, she could hear the ocean. Hoping the sound would lull her into a gentler place and the stress would leave her.

Her phone vibrated. She ignored the incoming call.

If it was Jagger, he could sleep without her tonight. He had a lot of practice.

If it was her dad, he had Rachel to care for—she was young enough to keep him busy. He wouldn't even miss her.

She got up, closed and locked the door, and returned to the bed. With no ambition to change clothes, she kicked her shoes off and tried to let the quietness calm her.

Since Jagger told her why her father was sent to prison, she had the hardest time accepting the truth. She knew him better than anyone, and he wasn't the type of person to allow another to pay for a crime he committed, especially one of his MC brothers.

There had to be more to the story.

It'd taken her whole life to come to accept that the father she loved was a killer. She'd spent hundreds of hours over the years making excuses for what he'd done.

She stared up at the ceiling. Jagger had killed a man. A man who'd shot Baller. It wasn't the act that bothered her because she remembered all the times Mama Sue mourned her husband. She never loved another the way she'd loved Baller. Pictures and memories were packed into the house she was raised in, reminding her that true love existed.

Jagger had killed the man who had killed the love that lived between Mama Sue and Baller. She couldn't blame him. If she were in the same position, she would probably do the same thing.

She would've done anything to make Mama Sue happy.

She rolled over and folded her arms under her head. Now, with all the information,

she understood why Jagger wasn't standing up and fighting against her dad's right to punish him for starting a relationship with her.

He felt he owed her dad.

Her phone vibrated again. She dug it out of her pocket and looked at the screen.

Jagger.

She loved him with all her heart. She accepted his position within the club. But she couldn't forgive him for handing over his life to her father—to let him punish him for their relationship.

While they could've done things differently, she went hard for him. She refused to take no for an answer every time he pushed her away. She threw herself at him by the time she was sixteen years old and never let up.

She knew what her heart wanted and needed.

She was just as guilty as him for their relationship.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

IN THE PRIVACY OF HIS room at the clubhouse, Jagger sat on the couch with his phone in his hand. He'd read the note Katrina left.

He ran his hand over his face, tugging his beard. She claimed to need time by herself. That was bullshit.

Never before had she stayed away from him. She always ran to him when she was troubled.

He rechecked his phone. His inbox was full of messages from Katrina that he'd kept through the years. But no new ones. That worried him more than her spending the night away from him.

He called her again. Two rings, and the call went to voicemail.

"Kat." He looked up at the ceiling. "I need to know you're okay. That you're safe."

He closed his eyes. She'd taken her car. For all he knew, she was halfway back to Beaverton.

"I'm in the room—in case you're wondering. There's no one else here." He opened his eyes. "I'm thinking about you, wishing you were here."

He tried to remember everything she'd ask or accuse him of over the phone when she couldn't get ahold of him.

"There's not a damn minute that you're not on my mind, Kat. I'm not big on pretty

words, but I want you to know I wouldn't change a thing, except I would've let myself love you sooner." He exhaled loudly. "I feel like I'm running out of time. Time I could've been with you. Time I want to spend with you. I blame myself. For everything. I should've protected you from all of this. Instead, you're hurting because of me. That kills me. I wish..." He leaned forward, braced his elbows on his knees, and let his chin fall to his chest. "I love you, Kat. I love you so fucking much."

Bang. Bang. Bang.

The knock at the door ended the call. He sniffed hard and walked across the room. Opening the door, he was greeted by Wire.

"Bane mentioned you were looking for Katrina." Wire placed his hand on the doorframe. "She's at my place, staying in the van."

He pocketed his phone, ready to ride out and get her.

"We're heading home now. Cora wants to check in on Katrina before we settle down for the night." Wire lowered his hand. "I would've told you sooner but assumed you knew she was there."

"Appreciate it." He met Wire's gaze. "Keep her safe, huh?"

"Sure thing, Prez." Wire clasped Jagger's hand. "Night."

He shut the door, instantly called Katrina's phone, and let the call go to voicemail. "You want the truth? I need you, Kat. I keep looking at the door, thinking you're going to walk in. The only time I can sleep in bed is when you're here. That's why I sleep on the damn couch. You're mine, damnit. Come home."

He disconnected the call.

In a few hours, the delivery from Moroad Motorcycle Club would arrive. The money would need to be split up and given to three different crews to get laundered at the pot shops.

Sitting on the couch, he stretched out with his boots on. As soon as he finished club business, he would seek out Ruger.

Katrina was safe, away from the clubhouse.

It was time to pay the price of his crime.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

A NEW DAWN brOUGHT clarity. After a fitful sleep, Katrina had breakfast with Cora at the house while Wire rode to the clubhouse. Somehow, through the long hours of the night, she found the strength to fight for what she wanted.

Being by herself last night allowed her to see all sides, and she woke up that morning knowing the only person who had to change was her dad's opinion on continuing to punish Jagger.

She loved her dad, but he was wrong.

The Havlin members lived by the laws of the club, not society's laws, not man's law. In most cases, she understood why they were in place. Bikers were wild and predatory, selfish and reckless. They lived one day at a time. The only thing keeping them civilized were the bylaws they swore their life upon when getting patched in. Their patch meant everything.

But love trumped the patch. It was the motivator behind the bylaws. It was family. It was protecting your brother. It was putting yourself in front of another to save their life.

Her dad had to see that Jagger had no way to stop the love that grew between them, and in the end, hadn't he protected her?

Hadn't her dad protected Jagger by taking the gun and trying to help him get away from the cops? He'd done what the bylaws stated. He had his brother's back.

Now, he needed to step up and admit that Jagger had her back all those years her dad

was gone.

She parked her car behind the clubhouse, surprised to find the only Havlin member outside was Camhead, who stood by the back door. Checking her phone, she found several messages in her voicemail. All of them came from Jagger.

Glancing at the clubhouse, her heart raced. Had something happened? She never thought to check her voicemail because Jagger never left messages. Ever.

Her thoughts went instantly to her dad and his safety after getting beaten.

She sat in the driver's seat and listened to the first message. Her pulse pounded at the sound of Jagger's voice, hanging on to every word. As soon as the first message ended, she started the second and then the third, fourth, and fifth.

Grabbing her keys and bag, she hurried out of the car and ran across the parking area to the back door.

Camhead stepped in front of her, barring the door. "Sorry, the clubhouse is closed."

"Why?" she asked.

"Club business."

She exhaled impatiently. "For how long?"

"When they tell me I can open the door."

She dropped her bag to the ground and tapped Jagger's number on her phone. The call went to voicemail. She disconnected without leaving a message. There was nothing she could do until they were done.

Picking up her bag, she walked to the shady spot next to the building and sat on her duffle. She vibrated from the messages left on her phone. Now she understood how much Jagger had held back. He'd never declared his love in such a way it filled her with confidence about their relationship.

He'd fought his feelings for so long. He'd hidden them from everyone but her. It'd taken him the courage to put it all out there for her to hear and accept.

She never thought he'd express himself to her that way. An inkling of doubt crept in. Why would he spill his feelings out on the phone?

She looked at the clubhouse door and shook her head. Jagger wouldn't—dread punched her in the gut, and she scrambled to her feet, running toward the clubhouse.

There was only one reason why Jagger would leave her messages. He was going to approach her dad and take his punishment, and he feared never talking to her again.

Camhead caught her before she reached the door handle. She swung wildly, aiming at his face.

"Let. Go." She grabbed his hair and shook. "I need my dad."

"I can't—Jesus, woman." Camhead grabbed her wrist. "Jagger ordered—"

She brought up her knee like Jagger had taught her when she was twelve, and Bobby Sandburg kept trying to snap her bra. Camhead doubled over, letting go of her. She lunged for the door and fell into the clubhouse in her hurry. Pushing to her feet, she charged forward, grabbing leather vests as she pulled herself through the crowd.

Making it through the circle of men congregating in the clubhouse, she fell to her knees at the sight of the two men facing each other. Panic swept through her.

"Dad," she screamed.

Her father swung, knocking Jagger backward, but he stayed on his feet. She gasped, reaching out, but one of the Havlin members pulled her out of the way.

"Let me go." She pushed against the man.

The guy thrust her into Bane's arms. "Get her out of here."

"No. No. Please." She flinched as skin slapped skin.

Blood ran from Jagger's face. He wasn't protecting himself against her father. He wasn't fighting.

"Come on," yelled her dad, posed with his fists in front of him. "Hit me back."

Jagger weaved, unsteady on his feet. "Just do it. Kill me."

"No," she screamed, falling to her knees. "Daddy, don't."

Her dad never even looked at her. She looked at Jagger. He stood in front of her dad with his arms at his sides.

The tension between them was palpable, their eyes locked in a way no one around them would understand. Her dad clenched his fists, his knuckles turning white. Jagger held his head up, surrendering for punishment but keeping his dignity as the president. He lived for Havlin Motorcycle Club. He believed in the bylaws. He'd pledged his life to each man watching the punishment.

He was an example.

For him to stand there and take the punishment, he had to have ordered each man to stand down. She looked around, seeking anyone who would help her stop them. But she could see the conflict on their faces. They were bothered by the punishment but knew the rules. They wouldn't go against their president's order.

She swallowed her sobs. Jagger was harder on himself than her father was on him. He truly believed death should be his punishment.

Without any warning, her dad lunged forward, aiming a punch at Jagger's stomach. She gasped, covering her mouth. Jagger went down on his knees, grunted, and regained his footing. A grimace of pain flashed across his swollen face.

Her dad walked around Jagger. Quick movements became a blur of punches and kicks.

Katrina barely recognized her father. He was the man others feared. The man who she visited in prison. The one she believed had murdered before. The one still bruised and swollen from fighting his own war.

With a swift uppercut, her dad sent Jagger sprawling to the floor. He tried to rise, but the fight had taken its toll.

"Stop." She couldn't hear her voice. "Please."

In the back of her consciousness, a scream tore through the room. Her dad looked away from Jagger. She followed his gaze into the crowd. A slim, petite woman fought to get past the men. It took Katrina a moment to recognize Rachel.

Katrina's dad stepped toward the crowd. "Don't touch her."

The men parted, letting Rachel through. Her dad swept his thick arms around her,

wrapping her against the front of him.

Rachel's hands flew over Katrina's dad's face. He spoke, but the rumbling in the room from the Havlin members made it impossible to hear what he told her.

Jagger pushed himself to his knees, and there he stayed, unable to get up. Katrina crawled out to him.

"Kat." Jagger's head rolled on his shoulders. "Someone get her out of here."

"No." She grabbed his vest, holding him up as she looked over her shoulder at her dad. "No more. You're killing him."

Her dad's hardened gaze softened, looking at her. "For you. He lives. The punishment is done."

Jagger toppled over. She couldn't hold him up.

Men came forward, dragging Jagger to his feet. She looked back at her dad, but he was gone.

"Kat?"

She turned to Jagger. "I'm here."

"Looks like you're stuck with me." He coughed, spitting blood. "Get me some Jack."

She spotted Dio and told him to get the alcohol. There was no way she would leave his side, not for a long, long time.

They helped him to the table and dropped him in the president's chair. She kneeled at

his side, afraid to touch him.

"He needs ice and wet towels." She looked around. "Where's Cord?"

Bane stepped forward. "He's grabbing his bag."

Jagger wheezed. He'd closed his eyes.

"Tell him to hurry." She grasped Jagger's hand, probably the only part of his body that wasn't hurting.

"Calm down." He squeezed her hand with more strength than she believed he had left in him. "I'm not going anywhere."

She muttered, "I'll never forgive him for doing this to you."

"He did what had to be done." Jagger groaned, pitching forward. "If you were my daughter, I would've killed..."

"Stop." Her head swirled.

Cord arrived and pushed everyone back. Bane kept the men moving until everyone was out of the clubhouse.

"Where's it hurt?" asked Cord.

"I'm fine."

"He's not breathing right." Katrina stood. "His mouth is bleeding."

Dio returned with a bottle of whiskey. "Here you go, Prez."

Jagger grunted and then lifted the bottle to his mouth. Katrina watched his every move.

He coughed and lowered the bottle. Dio stepped forward and lifted the drink to Jagger's lips. Katrina shook her head. While she agreed that he needed something for the pain, something wasn't right with the way Jagger moved.

Cord leaned over and poked Jagger in the side. He stiffened, turning red in the face. She came up on her toes. He wasn't breathing.

"His ribs are broken." Cord grabbed Jagger's jaw and opened his mouth. "Well, you haven't lost any teeth. Yet." Cord stepped back. "Call me if anything else comes up."

"Wait." She waved her hand over Jagger in the chair. "Do something for his ribs."

"Not much you can do for broken ribs. They'll heal."

"But he can't breathe." She stayed close to him.

"He can breathe." Cord picked up his bag. "It'll just hurt like hell. The whiskey will help. Keep him propped up in bed for a couple of days."

The men stepped away to talk. Katrina returned to her knees and put her hands on his thigh. All she could do was pray the whiskey helped with the pain.

Jagger patted her hand. "Kat?"

"Yes?"

"Lift the bottle for me."

There was not much more he'd allow her to do. Stubborn man.

The punishment was over, but the damage sat in front of her, reminding her of what her father had done to the man she loved.

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FOUR DAYS AFTER THE punishment, Jagger was back on his feet. He couldn't lift any boxes in the parts shop, and he couldn't ride his Harley, but he could order his men around and make sure everyone did their job.

Katrina, needing fresh air, walked into Whale's Tail Coffee Shop. Cora waved from behind the counter. Katrina stayed back while customers received their orders and left.

"Hey, it's good to see you out and about." Cora leaned against the counter. "Does that mean Jagger is doing better?"

She moved closer. "If doing better means he's grouchy and stomping around the clubhouse complaining about everything he can't do, then yes, he's better."

"Sounds like Wire when he gets a head cold." Cora wrinkled her nose. "Are you seeking refuge here for a while?"

She nodded. "I'd love an iced coffee."

"Sure, it'll only take a sec." Cora stepped behind the machine. "Do you have a few minutes? I need a break and would love to catch up."

Katrina pointed toward the table and sat down with her back toward the window. There was no reason to hang out at the clubhouse. Most of the bikers were out or working in the shop. Nobody needed a drink poured, and the other ol' ladies were working or at home.

Skye came out and grabbed her backpack off a nearby chair. Another girl followed her, and they both left out the front door.

"Just a sec." Cora rushed to the door and stuck her head out. "Skye, don't forget to stop in the shop and tell someone you'll be at the pool."

Katrina's aunt returned, gathered the iced coffee, and sat across from her. "When I first started working here, those girls were practically babies. Now they're running loose in town."

"Who's the girl with Skye?" she asked.

"Dania's daughter. Both the girls use the coffee shop as headquarters while they go to all their summer programs." Cora slumped in the chair. "Have you talked to your dad yet?"

"I haven't seen him." She shrugged. "Well, a couple of times, but other people were around us. Besides that, he spends ninety-nine percent of his time in the bedroom with Rachel. Which is fine with me. I'm not exactly in the mood to talk to him after what happened."

"I get it." Cora looked down at her hands before meeting Katrina's gaze. "You were raised in the club, and I'm still getting used to everything. But I don't think I will ever understand some of the things Wire and the members do."

"It's not for us to understand," she said automatically.

For how much she complained about the way punishments were done, she would defend the way of Havlin members until she ran out of breath.

She drank the coffee. "Did you finish painting the room?"

The last time they had a chance to sit down and talk over breakfast, Cora had mentioned redoing one of the spare rooms in the house. She hadn't meant to distance herself from her aunt, but with everything going on, life centered around Jagger lately.

"I did. Wire came home early one day and took the job from me, even though I had all the windows open and a fan in the room." Cora bit down on her lower lip. "I have some news to tell you."

"Hm?" She took another sip of her drink.

"I'm pregnant. You're going to have a cousin." Cora put a hand on her flat stomach. "I'm only a little over two months, so it's soon yet, but I'm excited."

"I'm happy for you." Katrina sighed, smiling. "A cousin. Huh. I've never had one before. Pretty crazy to think that I had no family but my dad for so long, and now it's growing."

"I hope we can stay close," whispered Cora.

She nodded. Her family, which she thought of as just her dad and her, was falling apart. She wasn't sure she would ever have a relationship with him again. Lately, however, she appreciated having Cora in her life. And now the expectations of having a little one in the family.

"I better get back to the clubhouse and save the other guys from Jagger's wrath. Pass my congrats to Wire. I'm happy for you both." She stood, pulled a ten-dollar bill from her pocket, and placed it on the table.

Cora picked up the money and tried to give it back. "It's on me."

"If you don't want it, put it in a piggy bank for my soon-to-be cousin." She smiled and walked out of the coffee shop.

The salty breeze washed over her face. She wondered what her dad would say about having another family member, considering he hadn't accepted Cora yet.

As much as it surprised her, she liked the idea of having more relatives. Her stomach fluttered. Cora was going to have a baby.

She slowed and stopped before she got in front of the Havlin Motorcycle Parts Shop. Katrina pulled out her phone and searched her app, scrolling through the months. Double-checking, she turned and walked in the other direction. Then she stopped again, turned around, and headed toward the clubhouse.

That couldn't be right.

So much had happened lately.

She'd lost track of time.

She was never late.

Jagger had asked her about the implant. Not wanting anything to stop him from being with her, she let him assume she'd gotten a new one.

The one in her arm was only good for three years. It'd been five years.

Her last period was...?

She scrolled through her phone, where she kept track of her period, and her worries doubled. She had her last period the week before she came to Seaglass Cove.

Exhaling harshly, she looked at her stomach. Looked at the clubhouse. And then headed around the building and went straight to her car to go to the store. She needed a pregnancy test.

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KATRINA HURRIED TOWARD him, barely rising on her toes to kiss him, before she walked down the hallway. Jagger frowned. She'd stayed glued to his side since the fight and today, she'd gone to see Cora at the coffee shop and now left him without a word.

"Everything okay?" Bane slung the duffle bag over his shoulder.

"Yeah." He rubbed his side, easing the continual ache. "Make sure Dio and Brett get that last bag in the system."

"Will do." Bane checked his phone. "I'll send them off at three-fifteen."

He made a new schedule each time there was money laundering to do. It wasn't only the pot shops they had to watch out for. They'd got wind that the state was doing inspections once a month, and they wanted to avoid any trouble.

Jagger needed to return to the parts shop, but he turned and walked down the hallway. He wanted to check in with Katrina first.

He turned the door handle and found the room locked. That was never a habit he formed, considering everyone knew to stay out of his room.

Knocking on the door, he looked behind him. There was no one around.

"Kat?" He rapped his knuckles on the wood. "Open the door."

A minute passed. He got out his phone and texted her.

Open the door.

Less than thirty seconds later, she texted him back. Hold on a minute.

What are you doing? He hit send.

Bathroom

He leaned against the wall and slipped his phone back into his pocket. He never put a bathroom door in the room when he bought the old bus garage and turned it into a clubhouse. It was just him. There was no need for privacy.

On the other hand, Kat liked having the bathroom to herself.

A door down the hallway opened, and Ruger stepped out into the hallway. Jagger stayed where he was. One day, he'd talk with Ruger, but he knew his MC brother wouldn't listen until he was ready.

They were even now that the punishment was over, and Ruger chose to let him live. He wouldn't allow Ruger to lift another hand to him. He also wouldn't allow Ruger to come between him and Katrina.

The door opened, and Katrina stood in the doorway, wide-eyed and pale. He stepped forward, taking her deeper into the room, and shut the door with his boot.

"What's wrong?" He held her hips.

"We need to talk." She pressed her hand against her forehead. "I need some water."

He went to the mini-fridge at the side of the room and removed a water bottle, cracking the top. When he returned to her, he could see her shaking.

"Did something happen between you and your dad?" He led her over to the couch.

"No." She took a drink. "He avoids me."

There was more going on in Ruger's life. Knowing how Ruger felt about his daughter, he had an idea the woman he rescued was taking up most of his time.

"Then what's wrong?" he asked.

"I don't want you to think I lied." She inhaled deeply.

"There's not much between us that I don't know about, Kat." He kicked up his feet and put his boots on the coffee table. "Spit it out."

She lifted her arm and pointed to the inside of her bicep. "This is the same one that was put in when you took me to the doctor. I never had a new one put in when this one expired."

At the time, she had no clue about birth control. He'd taken her, hoping a doctor would be a better person to explain everything to her and go over her options. Kat had picked the implant because she was afraid of missing a day taking a pill.

"Cord can't help you with that." He put his feet on the floor. "You'll have to make an appointment at the clinic in the next town. Let me know when, and I'll give you some money."

She put her hand on his arm, stopping him from getting up. "I don't need birth control."

"Yeah, you do."

She got up and went into the bathroom, returning to him with a pregnancy stick in her hand. "I'm pregnant."

He heard her. He understood what she was saying. But the words were still bouncing around, and he was trying to make sense of them.

They'd had a lot of sex. The implant was old.

A kid.

He dropped his gaze to her stomach. She wasn't showing. Just looking at her, he couldn't tell that his child was inside her.

"How far along?" he asked.

"A couple of months, I guess." She shrugged. "With everything going on, today was the first I'd even thought about why I hadn't had my period since coming here."

"You're not just late?"

"Two months, Jagger."

A baby.

She was going to have his kid.

Reality started sinking in. He liked the idea of his child growing inside her. "You'll make a great mom."

"I'm scared," she whispered.

He took her hand and pulled her onto his lap, wrapping his arms around her. "Why are you scared?"

"I thought you'd be mad because I was a smart ass when you asked me about the implant when I first showed up in Seaglass Cove and didn't tell you it had expired."

"You're always a smartass." He chuckled. "That hasn't stopped me from loving you, Kat."

"So, you're not mad?"

He kissed the top of her head. "Shocked. Surprised. But, the idea of you having my baby feels good."

"Yeah?" She smiled up into his face.

"Yeah."

She sobered. "I'm scared I'm going to suck as a mom."

"You'll be great."

"What if I'm like my mom, and I'll want to walk away once I have the baby?"

She'd always wonder why her mom walked away and abandoned her at the hospital, but she had him, her dad, her aunt, and a lot of bikers as her support system. She had family, and no one would let her fall when they were here to catch her.

"I don't think you have that to worry about. You take more after Mama Sue," he whispered.

Damn. He missed his mom. She'd be ecstatic over the news that she was going to be a grandma.

"Yeah?" Katrina smiled again. "I'm going to tell our baby everything about Mama Sue."

Emotions squeezed his chest. He kissed her.

"You need to tell your dad about the baby," he said.

She sat up. "I'm still mad at him."

"Be mad at him." He stroked her cheek. "But tell him."

"Now?"

He tightened his arms around her. He wasn't ready to share her or the news with anyone else.

"Later," he whispered.

All he wanted to do was hold his family in his arms before the crew returned from their ride, and he had to deal with club business again.

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A KNOCK CAME TO THE door. Katrina looked at Jagger and widened her eyes. The time had come. She planned to tell her dad about the baby and let him know how she feels about what went down between him and Jagger.

"I'm only doing this if he comes alone. If that bitch is with him, he can walk right back to his room." She wrung her hands.

Jagger leaned in and kissed her. "No fighting."

She scoffed. He was one to talk about fighting.

Motioning for him to open the door, she sat down on the end of the couch. She pressed a hand to her stomach. The doctor had told her, going by the dating ultrasound, she was now eleven weeks pregnant.

She and Jagger had created a baby the first time they got together after being apart for two years.

Jagger opened the door. Her dad walked in without saying a word. He looked at her, questioning. For two weeks, she'd refused to talk to him, so he was probably curious to know why Jagger asked him into the room.

Instead of anger, only concern showed in his gaze. She swallowed hard. Damnit.

Pregnancy hormones ruled her days lately, to Jagger's amusement. She couldn't imagine her life without her dad—good or bad. That's how it's always been. A fact she loved and hated equally because he wasn't perfect. But she loved him imperfectly.

"Are you okay?" asked Ruger.

She nodded and patted the couch beside her. Once he sat, she reached over and held his hand. The same hand that had hurt Jagger. The conflicting emotions hitting her all at once wasn't lost on her. When he was in prison, it was his hands that fascinated her the most, despite the chain, holding them to the table.

There was a time when those hands comforted and cared for her. But she couldn't remember.

"After talking to Jagger, I want to put what happened behind us." She looked at their linked hands. "While I understand if the situation involved others why the punishment went down but no one, not even you, knows what happened between me and Jagger—and I will always protect what we have."

"I let him live," said her dad. "That was for you."

Her dad was set in his ways. He had a black and white view of the world. She needed to accept him, or she'd lose him, that much she knew.

"I have something else to tell you." She let go of his hand and looked to Jagger for strength. "I'm pregnant."

Her dad's gaze whipped to Jagger. She grabbed his hand again before he reacted.

"I'm twenty four years old, Dad." She swallowed. "This is a happy time for me, and I want you to share it with us. I want you to be a part of my life, my child's life." She looked at Jagger. "I want you to get along with Jagger because he's the father of your grandchild."

Her dad pulled his hand away and pulled on his beard. "You're, okay? The baby isn't

going to hurt you?"

"I imagine the baby is going to hurt me a lot." She laughed. "But, no, I'll be fine. I'm happy. Maybe a little nervous."

"A baby." Her dad blew out his cheeks. "More family."

She smiled. "That's going to make you a grandpa."

Her dad stood and rubbed the back of his neck. She stood with him. For her baby's sake, she wanted the hostility between her dad and Jagger to end. She needed her dad—the father who stepped up when her mom ran off. She knew he had it inside of him to help mend the rift between them.

Her dad palmed the back of her head and pulled her to his chest. "This'll take some getting used to. My baby is having a baby."

His heart raced against her ear. She wrapped her arms around him.

"We have time," she whispered. "At least six months."

Her dad cleared his throat and stepped away. Jagger walked over and opened the door. Her dad paused before going out. The two men spoke. She clasped her hands under her chin, wanting more than ever to rush over there to overhear what they were saying but knowing they both needed that moment, she stayed back.

If anything, she hoped the baby would bring her family together. Her dad only knew about her pregnancy. Cora had yet to tell her older brother that she too was having a baby.

Her dad left. Jagger shut the door. A big sigh of relief left her.

She walked into Jagger's arms and kissed him. Glad to have today over with, she ran her hands down his sides and cupped his ass.

"Do you think he'll grow to accept us being together?" she asked.

He kissed the tip of her nose. "Considering he just asked if he could transfer over from the mother chapter and ride for Seaglass Cove, I'd say he's going to stick around and either kill me or make sure his daughter is taken care of."

She came up on her toes and threw her arms around his neck. It was the most positive move her dad had made in a long time.

"Wait." She pulled back. "What about Rachel?"

She hoped the woman would leave. Her injuries were healed. There was no reason for her to stay in the clubhouse. Bitches weren't allowed. As the president's ol' lady, she wouldn't tolerate her living amongst the bikers.

"For now, she's staying."

"What?" She placed her hands on her hips. "Is he involved with her?"

Jagger shook his head in a non-answer. She scoffed, wanting to know what was going on with her dad.

A knock ended the conversation.

"I need to get out there." Jagger kissed her. "You'll be okay?"

"I'm pregnant, not fragile." She smacked his ass. "Go out and deal with your club. I'm going to the pool for an hour. I told Cora and Brooke, I'd meet them there and we

could cool off in the shallow end while Skye had a swim meet."

"Keep your suit on." He opened the door and slipped out of the room.

She stripped out of her clothes and put her suit on, then pulled on a pair of cutoffs. The button was tight against her stomach. Soon, she'd have to put the shorts aside until after she had the baby.

She left the room with a towel over her shoulder. As she walked through the clubhouse, there were Havlin members already coming in for the meeting. She looked around, making sure Rachel wasn't mingling with the men but it looked as if her dad had her sequestered in the bedroom.

She went through the doorway, leading to the parts shop, and went out the front of the building. From there it was a short walk along the sidewalk to the pool next door. Catching sight of Cora ahead of her, she called her aunt's name.

Cora stopped on the stairs. She hurried to catch up.

"I almost called you to remind you about coming." Cora hugged her. "I'm glad you remembered."

"Yep." She climbed the rest of the stairs. "I also had a talk with my dad."

"No." Cora grabbed Katrina's arm and stopped her from going inside. "Spill the tea."

"He's staying in Seaglass Cove."

Cora's mouth opened and she jumped in place. Katrina held on to her aunt's arms in case she toppled at the top of the stairs.

"He now knows about the baby."

"I'm so glad. This is the best news ever." Cora leaned closer. "Was he happy?"

"Shocked." Katrina shrugged. "But I think he's okay with the idea of being a grandpa."

She kept the way her dad and Jagger had talked to herself. Not knowing what was said or where it was headed, she wasn't going to get her hopes up that they would work out their problems and become best friends again.

Besides, Cora never knew about the punishment. She had only heard that Jagger was involved in a fight at the clubhouse. Wire hadn't shared the news. That wasn't a surprise, since it was club business.

The warmth from the day penetrated her shoulders. She motioned for Cora to walk.

"Katrina!"

She turned around and found Dio jogging up the steps. "Are you coming or going?"

"Coming." She pointed at Cora. "We're going to swim for the next hour. Why?"

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Sure."

He reached behind him and removed a pair of swim goggles out of his back pocket.

"Give these to Skye. Tell her they'll bring her good luck."

"Sure." She took the gift.

"Thanks." Dio jogged back toward the clubhouse.

She walked inside, waved at Daisy, and then headed to the locker room. Having already dressed, she went out to the pool and found Brooke.

Putting her towel on the chair, she turned toward the water. "Has Sky started swimming yet?"

"Nope, you passed her in the locker room." Brooke snorted. "I was kicked out. Apparently, none of the girls want help anymore, including braiding their hair. They have to do each other's hair before the meet."

She held up the goggles. "Dio gave me these to give her."

"Oh, that was sweet of him. She's been eyeing those goggles in the swim magazine. She'll be out any second and you can give them to her." She motioned to the chair. "Sit. Get off your feet. Relax. It's too hot to stand."

Cora joined them. The three of them sat in the corner with a view of the whole pool. The temperature gauge hanging on the wall hovered at eighty-five degrees.

Katrina fanned her face with her hand. The water looked inviting.

"Why are we sitting out here?" She moved to the edge of the pool. "I'm going in."

The kids came out in one large, rowdy group. She grabbed the goggles and called Skye's name. The young girl walked over to her.

"These are from Dio. He wishes you good luck." She handed over the gift.

"Dope." Skye marveled at the goggles. "He remembered. Thanks."

Skye walked around the pool to the deep end where the lanes were set up. Katrina sat on the edge and put her feet in. The cool water instantly comforted her.

"All we're missing is alcohol. I have to say, the pool is more fun when it's closed and only open to Havlin members." Brooke laughed "I never thought I'd say that."

"Count me out on partying for a while." She looked over her shoulder. "I'm pregnant."

"Me, too." Cora moved to the corner of the pool and walked down the three steps. "We're due two weeks apart."

Both had asked the doctor on their separate appointments if their night of drinking before they'd realized they were pregnant was going to affect the baby. The older doctor assured them the babies were fine.

"Are you kidding me?" Brook gawked at them as she got up from her chair and joined them in the water. "Am I the last to know?"

Katrina shook her head and laughed. It felt good to share the news with them.

It felt good to have women surrounding her that would support her. All her life she thought having bikers in her life was enough. But living in Seaglass Cove with Jagger had shown her that there was a place for girlfriends in her life, too.

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AT FOUR MONTHS PREGNANT, Katrina stood outside the clubhouse with her aunt. She held the gender reveal cannon, looking at the top.

Cora read the directions. "You twist the bottom. Make sure you aim it away from you. Confetti will shoot out."

"What if we mixed up the cannons?" Katrina shook the device. "I can't see what color is inside."

"I'm already ahead of you on that." Cora pointed. "I wrote our initials on the side."

"Oh." She pressed her hand to her stomach. "Smart."

They'd each had the gender ultrasound that morning. Knowing she would never be able to keep a secret from Jagger if they were having a boy or a girl, she and Cora decided to have a party and announce the genders together when they got back. The timing was perfect because Jagger and Wire had a club meeting during the ultrasound and were unable to make it.

Cora squeaked in surprise and looked at her phone. "Daisy and Brooke have the cake and drinks set up inside." She laughed. "They also said there are no bitches in sight."

"Good." Katrina inhaled deeply.

She'd seen Rachel exactly once since her dad showed up to the clubhouse beaten with a woman tied to his back, and that was when she'd run out of the room screaming when the punishment was happening. Since then, nothing.

She'd almost think the bitch was gone, except for the odd behavior of her dad. He wouldn't allow anyone in the room, not even Katrina.

Cora looked at her and raised her brows. "Ready?"

"Yeah." The phone in her pocket vibrated. "Oh, hang on."

She took out her cell. It was a text from Brooke with a picture attached. She laughed, handing the phone to Cora.

The picture showed Wire and Jagger standing beside each other, arms crossed, leaning against the wall. They both wore frowns of impatience on their faces.

"Should we go put them out of their misery?" Katrina laughed.

You would think that with age, both men would be calm and easygoing. But Katrina found out that Jagger worried every time she got sick in the morning or woke up in the middle of the night crying because she couldn't figure out how they would raise a baby in one bedroom.

Despite her assuring him that her crazy emotions were all over the place and she'd flip her worries around in a couple of hours to something else, she could see he worried about her.

Cora grabbed her arm, stopping her from opening the door. "Do you think they'll be happy?"

"Who?"

"The men, silly."

"Of course, they'll be amped."

Cora frowned. "I know you don't want to hear this, but I miss my mom and dad. I wish they were here to share the news and celebrate with me."

She swallowed hard. Despite Cora talking about Katrina's mysterious MIA grandparents, it was Mama Sue she missed. Thinking about how Jagger's mom would've been ecstatic knowing she and Baller had a grandchild to carry on Havlin made her feel the loss of her adopted mom even deeper.

"You, me, my dad, two babies, two ol' men..." She held her chin up. "Our family is growing."

Cora grabbed Katrina's hand. Together, they walked into the clubhouse. Knowing where Jagger stood, she zoned in on him against the wall.

He'd stepped forward and stopped. His gaze roamed over her, not for news but to see if she was okay. She smiled. She was better than okay.

Cora waved for Wire to come over. She motioned for Jagger. The men had no idea what gender reveal parties were, and to save them the trouble, they'd let them squirm in anticipation while witnessing the announcement.

Jagger kissed her. His hand went to her stomach. The baby bump was barely visible to others, but he constantly had his hand on the baby, no matter who was around or where they were.

"I love you," she mumbled against his lips.

The others in the room cheered. Most of the bikers were here, having stayed after their meeting. Ol' ladies had come to celebrate with them. The children were scattered

around the room.

Skye whooped while sitting on Dio's shoulders, holding up two signs. A boy and a girl. That's when she noticed others were holding signs, taking bets on the sex of the babies.

She stood on her tiptoes. "Where's my dad?"

"Hallway," said Jagger.

She stepped to the side, seeing him. He raised his chin, letting her know he was there.

"Let's do this." Cora dragged Wire with her to Katrina's side.

She glanced at Jagger. "Ready?"

He patted her ass. "Been ready."

Daisy stepped forward and led the countdown.

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

She glanced at Cora, smiled, and twisted the bottom of the cannon in unison with her.

A cloud of pink and blue confetti filled the room. Amongst the cheers, she turned to Jagger and wrapped her arms around him, kissing him hard in excitement.

Laughter filled her. This was one time when the overload of emotions felt wonderful.

"You were right. We're having a boy." She framed Jagger's face with her hands.
"Bruce Jeffrey Corbin."

His gaze intensified. "Little Baller."

She kissed him quickly and wrapped herself around him as he held her tightly. They'd talked about names. All along, they knew if it was going to be a boy, they'd name him after both of their fathers.

She turned and looked through the crowd. Her dad put his hand on his heart, dipped his chin, and walked back down the hallway out of sight.

She had no time to dwell on his reasons for staying at the edge of the crowd and not fully celebrating with them because the Havlin members moved in, and a Jack Daniels bottle was pushed into Jagger's hand.

It was time to celebrate with family.

Jagger leaned closer. "I need to show you something."

She smiled. "What?"

He set the bottle down, took out his wallet, and removed a piece of paper, handing it to her. She looked at him curiously while unfolding the paper.

"Read it," he said.

She looked down. "House. Oregon. Katrina. Two. Biker. Harley." She looked up. "This is the game MASH you did with me when I was younger."

"You dropped it in your excitement when you found out I picked your name. I've been carrying it around until I could make it all come true for you."

"Well, we're only having one baby." She raised to her toes and kissed him. "And we live at the clubhouse, but I'm much, much, much more excited now than I was when I was twelve."

"I have news for you." He kissed her back. "I bought a house at the edge of town, set back from the road in a grove of trees that'll give us room to have another baby."

She gasped. "When?"

"Last week."

She wrapped her arms around him and kissed him in a way that told him exactly how she felt. "I love you."

"Always have." He cupped her ass. "Always will."

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 9:21 am

DUST FROM THE HAY FLOATED in the sunbeam coming through the barn window. Jade twirled with her hand above her head, disrupting the air and sending the tiny particles floating in new directions.

Copper neighed. She lowered her arm and stepped over to the horse, hugging Copper's neck.

"I love you." She kissed the smooth coat on Copper's jaw, laughing when the pony tossed her head. "I know. I want to go for a ride, too. But momma won't let us until someone can teach me."

Mr. Sweeney gave her Copper on her tenth birthday. She'd only rode the horse during her birthday party. Since then, Mr. Sweeney and her mom told her she couldn't ride until she had lessons.

"I'll save all my money I get for doing chores to buy lessons, Copper. I promise." She smoothed the mane where it always tried to fall between her ears and get in her eyes. "By summertime, we can ride to the creek behind the cottage. Doesn't that sound fun?"

"How will you do that when you're not allowed to ride the beast?" A deep familiar voice startled her.

"I'm going to learn." She grabbed Copper's halter and led the horse toward the stall door, closer to Hank. "I'll be as good as you when you ride Charger."

Hank reached over the wooden door and rubbed Copper between the ears, messing up

her mane again. "I was riding horses before you were born."

She focused on him. "Who taught you?"

He stared at the pony, continuing to stroke her head. Jade thought he wouldn't answer, but then he swallowed, making that lump at the front of his neck move.

"My dad."

"Oh," she whispered.

She'd learned long ago not to ask him about his dad. Thinking about his dad put Hank in a bad mood, and he usually walked away and wouldn't stay and talk to her.

Mr. Sweeney was mean to his son. He not only yelled but hit and kicked Hank, too. He made him bleed.

It made her sad because Mr. Sweeney was nice to her. He'd even bought Copper for her. Though, momma wondered why he'd buy her a gift that cost hundreds and thousands and gazillions of dollars.

Horses were expensive and not toys.

But she'd return Copper to Mr. Sweeney if he stopped hitting Hank. She'd hate to say goodbye to Copper, but someone else would love him if he were given away. Hank had nobody but her.

Mrs. Sweeney never stopped Mr. Sweeney from hurting Hank. Even her momma wouldn't say anything to stop Hank's dad from beating on him when he was angry.

She'd known Hank her whole life. Ever since momma moved into Mr. Sweeney's cottage, back before she could remember.

"Why don't you hop up on the horse?" He patted the board. "Bring her over here, climb up, and slide onto her back. I'll lead you around the paddock."

She glanced back at Copper and bit her lip. She really, really wanted to ride.

A heaviness settled in her chest. She couldn't ask Hank to let her. If anyone found out, Mr. Sweeney would get mad.

"I can't," she mumbled.

"Why not?"

"Mr. Sweeney and momma said I need riding lessons." Her throat tightened in disappointment. "I haven't saved enough money to hire someone. I get two dollars a week. I don't know how much it'll cost, but I'm going to save all my money. I won't even buy ice cream when momma takes me into Whitefish."

"That's bullshit." He opened the stall door, lifted her, and held her until she grabbed Copper's mane. "My dad has more money than anyone in the county. I'll teach you if he won't pay for your damn lessons. Go ahead climb up."

She climbed up to the top rail and threw her leg over the horse. Squeezing her legs, she held on to the mane. Without a saddle, she'd fall. But she wanted to ride more than she worried about falling. Hank would make sure she stayed on Copper's back.

"Relax." He put his hand on her back. "Copper ain't going to let you slide off."

"How do you know?"

"I know." He grabbed the halter and led the horse out of the stall.

Hank stopped in the sunshine and pivoted, taking her behind the barn. The paddock

was in the opposite direction.

Her stomach fluttered. Used to the uncomfortable but exciting way Hank always broke the rules, she sat straighter in anticipation of what he would do. She wasn't worried about getting in trouble for herself. Momma would set Mr. Sweeney right, the way she always had when he came to the cottage in a bad mood.

"Why do you ride your motorcycle so much when you could ride horses everywhere you wanted to go?" She relaxed, riding the bumps as Copper walked. "Horses are quiet. Your motorcycle is loud."

Hank glanced away from her, walked a few more feet, then stopped Copper. "Because the old man can't stop me from riding something I paid for."

"Like Copper was a gift to me, so she's mine to ride whenever I want, right?" She patted the horse's neck.

"Yeah." He looked around the area. "Same thing."

A grove of trees blocked where the creek filled the pond. She'd walked that way with her mom plenty of times. Behind her, the barn blocked the view to the Glacier Crest Ranch, where her mom worked, and Hank lived with his parents.

A clink drew her attention back to Hank. He undid his belt buckle and pulled the leather strap out of the loops on his jeans.

She leaned forward and scratched Copper underneath her neck where she liked to be rubbed. "What are you doing?"

"I'm giving your horse a little freedom to take you on a ride." He studied her. "You're not scared, are you?"

She lifted her chin. "I'm not scared."

She liked being on top of Copper. Even without a saddle, riding was fun. It was her favorite thing to do in the whole world. She never wanted to stop.

Hank looped the end of his leather belt through the halter, then threaded the leather through the buckle, making a long lead. Jade kicked her feet at how smart he was. Copper shot forward, rocking her.

"Whoa." Hank put his hand on Copper. "Mind your feet, Jade. Any time you tap her sides, she's going to walk."

She held on tighter. "I want her to walk."

"Then, let's go for a walk." Hank stepped back, holding the end of the belt in his hand. "When you want her to go, you click your tongue—"

"I don't know how."

He stepped toward her again. "Put the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth." He squinted at her. "Now press the rest of your tongue up there." He paused. "Got it?"

She nodded because she couldn't talk with her tongue pushing up.

Hank reached out and grabbed Copper's halter. "Now, pull down your tongue."

She opened her mouth. Hank chuckled and looked away. "Let's try it a different way. Put your tongue back on the roof of your mouth."

She followed his instructions.

"Without moving your tongue, pretend you're sucking a milkshake up a straw."

She sucked her cheeks in. She held her breath with her tongue on the roof of her mouth.

"Okay, drop your tongue."

A soft click came from her mouth. "I did it."

"Good enough." He stepped back, holding the belt. "Now click again, and at the same time, tap your heels gently against Copper's sides."

Doing exactly what Hank had taught her, the horse shot forward. She tightened her hold on the mane, tottering from side to side. Caught up in the excitement, it took her a moment to realize that Hank was standing in one spot while Copper walked in a circle around him.

She rode for several minutes, around and around. Every time Copper slowed, Hank told her to tap her heels. Each time the horse listened to her, she shared a smile with Hank. He was teaching her how to ride.