



Archangel (Black Reign MC #11)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Archangel is always perfect. In complete control. Which makes him a challenge I can't resist...

Sonya: Just because I put a blow-up doll in the neighbor's holiday yard ornament, or send various embarrassing items up the flagpole occasionally, doesn't mean I'm a bad person. But my father doesn't see things that way. So he sends me to a man he thinks can help me "find my inner self." Otherwise known as get some kind of job. Just my luck, the man he sends me to is the man I've had a crush on forever. Archangel is strong, soft-spoken, always in control, and the most perfectly made man I've ever seen. He's unflappable. I can't resist, even knowing the price I'll pay. I just hope I can slink the walk of shame back home before he knows I'm gone. That might be the only chance I have of protecting my heart.

Archangel:

I don't know what Thorn was thinking when he sent his daughter to me. Sonya has plagued my every filthy fantasy since the first time she came home from college to visit friends at my club. I'd known then I needed to stay away from her. Not only am I way too old for her, but her daddy is the president of their club. Which puts me and Black Reign MC in a delicate position. What I could never have predicted was Sonya taking matters into her own hands. Sonya running isn't a surprising. Kinda expected that. What wasn't on my Bingo card was my forgotten past catching up with me.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 1:02 am

Sonya

“This might be the time we finally push him over the edge.” Caroline was my best friend and partner in crime. Right now, she was looking at the man in question with a wary gaze.

“We taking bets?” I didn’t look at Linnie but kept my eyes on our tormentor, Sheriff Grady Bassett. The frown he gave us said we were in big trouble. Huge trouble. To be fair, we often got into mischief in his county.

Sheriff Bassett didn’t take us to jail this time. Instead, he marched us inside the courthouse and left our asses on a bench outside the courtroom to wait.

“Guess we get preferential treatment, huh?” Linnie wasn’t as comfortable breaking the rules as I was. I was trying to help her work through her discomfort. It was clear how nervous she was now, though. We were the same age, but Linnie was a natural rule follower. I... was not.

“What about it, Lawdawg?” I addressed Sheriff Grady. “We gettin’ special treatment?” Lawdawg was a play on his job as well as his actual road name. While mine and Linnie’s dads were members of Salvation’s Bane MC, Lawdawg was a member of a nearby MC called Black Reign. Our clubs were allies and, as such, had several functions a year together.

“Just saving everyone time and money, sweetheart. Besides, if I took you to jail for the proper processing, we’d never have gotten here before Judge Daily was done for the day. Since it’s Friday, that’d mean you’d be in jail until at least Monday

morning.”

“Point taken,” I drawled. Then I gave him a bright smile. “Anything to save the good taxpayers of Glades County and Moore Haven a couple of bucks.”

Lawdawg shook his head, frowning at first me, then Linnie. “Your daddies shoulda spanked the pair of you more often as kids.”

“That’s a mean thing to say.” Linnie was better at pouting and being all innocent and shit than I was. She always went first.

“And vandalism isn’t?” The bastard looked at us like we were still wayward children.

“We didn’t vandalize anything.” Linnie sat up straighter.

“You put a blow-up sex doll in the back of Santa’s sleigh in Mrs. Cranston’s front yard, Caroline.”

“There was no permanent damage done and all anyone had to do was pull off the duct tape. And that is not an admission of guilt. I happened to watch as the police removed the sex doll in question from the Santa blow-up. Besides, anyone who has Christmas decorations still up deserves to have fun had at their expense.” Linnie was learning. Good argument. Reference to the alleged crime without saying we did it. Point out no harm was done. “As to the residential area, there is no one in that subdivision under the age of sixty, and all their grandkids live in other states.” Yep. She was getting good.

I could be mistaken but if anything, Lawdawg looked amused. “Doesn’t matter. If it did, you’d be spending the weekend in jail rather than going to see Judge Dailey now.”

“Come on, Lawdawg.” I rolled my eyes, wanting to stomp my foot in irritation. And no. I would never call him Deputy Dawg or anything to his face. Very often. “This is horseshit and you know it. We didn’t hurt anyone or scar anyone for life. Besides, someone didn’t mind the sex toy being out in public too much because it was hanging half in half out of a trashcan in the neighborhood before making its way to Santa. Ain’t sayin’ whose house it was in front of, but the house number was 2187, and the female who put it there was yelling pretty loud at the male trying to get her to come back inside so they could ‘talk’.”

Lawdawg rubbed his chin, looking thoughtful. “That explains some things, believe it or not.” Then he pointed an accusing finger at me. “Girls, your daddies are gonna be pissed.”

“Our daddies ain’t gonna find out.” If my tone was clipped, fuck the bastard. He didn’t like it, he could damned well take himself someplace else. And let me get the fuck outta here.

“Your daddies already know, sweetheart.”

“Tattletale. Don’t you know snitches get stitches?”

“I know little girls who get arrested for pranking get their asses spanked.”

I snorted. “I’m twenty-one years old, so I can say with absolute authority” -- I narrowed my eyes at him – “not in this fucking lifetime, baby.”

Lawdawg gave me an evil grin. “Yeah? Wait a while. Your daddy’s sendin’ someone to get the two of you. Should be here before we’re through in court.”

“Sonya’s riding with me,” Linnie piped up.

“Look. How long’s this gonna take? We got shit to do.”

“You’re a brat who needs a lesson in manners, Sonya. How the fuck did Thorn raise boys who were so straight and narrow, then raise a daughter who’s a hell-on-wheels wild child?”

I barked out a laugh. “My brothers? Straight and narrow? Are we even talking about the same fucking people?”

Lawdawg pointed an accusing finger at me. “You’ve got a mouth on you, Sonya.”

“No shit, Sherlock.” Sparring with Lawdawg was always fun. I think he enjoyed it as much as I did. Probably why I never managed to truly piss him off like I did most other people, though not for lack of trying. “You just now figuring that out?”

“Nope. Just was never tempted to duct tape it shut before today.” He gave me a big grin like it was all the height of hilarity, but I could tell he was actually getting a bit ruffled.

My dad was president of Salvation’s Bane MC in Palm Beach, Florida.

“Gee, Lawdawg, tell me how you really feel.” I rolled my eyes at him and crossed one leg over the other and my arms over my chest.

“Oh, I plan on it, young lady. You’re old enough to do better than this.” He pointed a finger at me. “You need to grow up and act your age.” He glanced from me to Linnie. “Both of you.”

“It was just a bit of harmless fun! No one got hurt. We didn’t make any noise and keep people up. We did it in a neighborhood with no young children around. And we didn’t even break the law. At least not any important ones.”

“You put a blow-up sex doll in the back of Santa’s sleigh in Mr. and Mrs. Cranston’s front yard.”

“It was Mr. Robinson’s! We watched Mrs. Robinson bring it to the trash in front of their house last night when we went for a run. She was screaming at him. He was trying to get her to go back inside and ‘talk about this like civilized adults.’ We saw an opportunity and we took it.”

Lawdawg opened his mouth to respond but the court bailiff chose that moment to open the door to the courtroom. “Sheriff.”

“Jon. He ready for us?” Lawdawg stepped aside slightly to hold the door open.

The older man looked from Lawdawg to me and back. “Christ, Grady. Again?”

Lawdawg shrugged. “Afraid so.”

“Come on, then.” Poor Jon sounded resigned, like this was something he had to endure every couple of weeks. Hmmm. Come to think of it, he actually did have to endure this every couple of weeks. My bad.

Bailiff Jon led us inside the courtroom of Judge Rupert P. Dailey. Lord knew I’d seen the inside of this place more than I should have. It was all in good fun; I never did anything dangerous or serious. This was just a fun place to pull pranks.

Judge Dailey looked up from where he’d been reading something at his desk. He sat behind the bench in the main courtroom where he presided. When he met my gaze, he started and did a double take, then frowned. “Christ, Grady. Again?”

“Déjà vu,” I muttered.

“You two.” The judge sounded tired, like he was so exhausted he couldn’t manage much longer.

“Look, Judge. In our defense, anyone leaving their Christmas decorations up this long deserved to be poked fun of. It’s spring, for crying out loud!”

“Not another word, young lady.” The order was given by both Judge Dailey and Lawdawg. In unison. Like fucking choir boys or something. I wasn’t saying that out loud, but the thought made me want to giggle.

Judge Daily and Lawdawg exchanged a look, and the judge sighed. “What sex toy did the two of you run up the flagpole this time?” I opened my mouth to answer, but Judge Dailey immediately raised his hand in a gesture to stop me from speaking and shook his head vigorously, his eyes comedically wide. “No, no, no! It doesn’t matter. I don’t want to know! I don’t want to know!” I smirked at Lawdawg. We were totally getting a slap on the wrist. “Grady, have you made arrangements to get these young ladies home?”

“I have, Your Honor.” Grady gave me the side eye before turning his full attention to the judge. “Caroline’s stepmother is on her way. I’m making sure Sonya gets home.”

“But --”

“And she’ll go.” Lawdawg spoke over me, turning his head to give me a stare promising death and destruction if I didn’t shut the fuck up. Now. I did. Not because I was afraid of the big bastard, but because I was trying to learn the finer points of knowing when to keep my mouth shut. Seemed like a good time to practice. “Without. Further. Comment.” He spoke through clenched teeth. Yeah. We might have broken him this time.

“Good! Can I assume whatever mischief they left behind has been... disposed of?”

And any mess cleaned up or fixed?”

“It has, Your Honor.”

“Don’t let me see you in my courtroom again, ladies. You’ve caused enough mischief to last several lifetimes. If I see you again, it will require some jail time for giving me a headache. Understood?”

Me and Caroline both muttered, “Yes, Your Honor,” before Lawdawg took us each by the upper arm and escorted us back outside and to his waiting truck. It was emblazoned with “Sheriff” on the side and a light bar with blue and white lights on top.

“Great,” I muttered. “The fucking Lawdawg mobile.”

“Get in the back and stay put. Both of you.” He remotely started the vehicle before unlocking the doors for us. Of course, he put us in the back seat where we couldn’t get out once the door was shut.

“What a stick in the mud.” Linnie crossed her arms over her chest, indignant. But I could also see her relief. She was likely sweating over dodging a bullet with the whole jail thing.

“I’m sorry, Linnie,” I said softly. “I know you’re not as comfortable with breaking the rules as I am. Yet I keep dragging you into my messes.”

“What? Sonya, no! You’ve been my best friend since the first day I met you. Sure, you push my boundaries, but we never hurt anyone or anything and it’s all in good fun. Embarrassing for some, maybe, but never maliciously.” She gave me a bright smile. “Besides, think how boring people’s lives around here would be if not for us.”

I reached out to grasp Linnie's hand. "Thanks for being such an awesome friend, Caroline."

"You're an awesome friend too, Sonya. Now, I have a serious question."

Nodding, I met and held Linnie's gaze. "Why are they separating us?"

"Exactly. They already know what we did. Why would they need to separate us?"

Lawdawg opened the door, bracing one arm on the open door, the other on the door frame. "We're separating you because you're not going to the same place."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Do you have this truck bugged?"

"Of course. Everything inside these four doors is recorded. It's all for safety purposes. But it comes in handy when two brats think they need to get their stories straight."

"For the love of God, Grady! You already know what we did! If we're going separate places, where are we going?"

"Well, she" -- he nodded at Linnie -- "is going home with her mother. Like I said."

"And me?"

This time, his smile was the smile of a man who was about to see justice served in the most satisfying way. Not gonna lie, the look made me nervous. "You're going with him." He stepped back and jerked his head to the left, indicating the straight stretch of US 27, leading from one end of town to the other.

Two blocks down, I saw a big, black Harley heading our way. Even from this

distance the roar of the pipes was distinctive. And I knew the sound well. A dense trail of smoke had covered the four lanes from where one of the residences was burning a small pile of brush. Just like in the movies, the big Harley I'd known was attached to that rumble parted the haze with smoke circling behind him like a jet trail. The man sitting on the bike was just as intimidating as the machine. All the scene needed was a slow-motion sequence and it would be perfect.

Archangel . He was the most unflappable man I'd ever met. There was an eerie calm surrounding him most of the time. Sure, he laughed and had a good time like anyone else, but he was the peacemaker. The person everyone called when they didn't want El Diablo or El Segador to take up the cause. More than once, I'd heard Archangel make the statement you knew when you had a successful negotiation because neither party was completely satisfied. He didn't play favorites, and he was always fair, but the man had a giant stick up his ass the size of a telephone pole.

He crossed two lanes of traffic at the corner to pull into the parking lot of the courthouse, not even hesitating at the light as he did. Brazen, considering where he was, and that three deputies and two city cops were sitting close by. He parked the bike in front of Lawdawg's truck before turning it off and putting down the kickstand. A long, thickly muscled leg was lifted over the seat as Archangel dismounted and walked toward the truck and Lawdawg.

I knew there was drool dripping from the corner of my mouth, but I didn't fucking care. Archangel was the most perfectly built man I'd ever had the pleasure of viewing. No matter how many times I saw him, he was still awe-inspiring. If anyone saw me, all I would have to do was point at the man and any red-blooded woman on the planet who looked would understand. He wore snug, black jeans. The material clung to his hips and thighs in all the right places. He didn't have on a shirt, but his plain leather vest covered most of his rippled torso. Which left his arms bare, and a sliver of chest and abdomen showing when he walked. Muscles and thick veins roped his arms. Tattoos peeked from his vest and crept up his arms. His salt-and-pepper hair

was over his collar but artfully shaggy, and his beard was full and neatly trimmed. Mirrored aviator sunglasses rounded out his outfit. The man rocked it like the ultimate bad boy.

“Hooooooly shit. Are you seeing this?” Linnie sounded awed, and I glanced at her sharply.

“What the shit, Linnie, you whore!” I wasn’t really mad. This was how we communicated.

“What?” She didn’t take her gaze from Archangel and the question was more of a demand. “Tell me you weren’t eye fucking him too and I’ll be ashamed. Or something. OK. No, I won’t be ashamed, but look me in the eyes and tell me you weren’t eye fucking him. Besides, we always eye fuck him together.”

“I’d love to. But I’m too busy eye fucking him to look you in the eyes and tell you I’m not eye fucking him. Because I’m eye fucking him like crazy. Also, I’ve changed my mind. We can’t eye fuck him together anymore.”

“You sure know how to pick ‘em, Sonya. If you change your mind and decide he’s too much work, let me know. I’ll give it a shot.”

“Like hell.” I turned and hissed at my friend. “Mine.”

“You know he’s so much older than you as to not be believed, right? The man is practically ancient!”

“Red and Rosana have more of an age gap than me and Archangel.”

“Right. Use their successful age gap relationship to justify your own. I’m sure it will go over with your dad as well as it would with my own father.” She had a point.

“Why’s he here, I wonder?”

“Don’t know, Sonya, but if the look on his face is any indication, the reason can’t be good.”

Whatever was being said between Archangel and Lawdawg seemed to have gotten under Archangel’s skin. He snatched his glasses from his face and leaned into Lawdawg’s space. His lips moved, but I couldn’t tell what he was saying. Mainly because Archangel had his teeth clenched. Lawdawg shrugged and jerked his head toward the truck where we sat and watched them from the back seat.

Archangel turned his head to look at the truck and us. Lawdawg spoke, gesturing with his hands a couple of times while Archangel continued to stare.

Finally, he nodded, and stepped away from Lawdawg, moving toward the truck. Archangel came to my side and opened the door. “Come on. Out with ya.” When I hesitated, he added. “Or I’ll haul you out over my shoulder. Choice is yours.” Though his eyes looked like he was furious, his face was relaxed and his voice was calm.

“What crawled up your ass?” The only person in the world I loved pushing more than Lawdawg was Archangel. Probably because both men were so naturally uptight yet unflappable. Anyone who followed the rules so close to the edge should feel anxious at least some of the time. Neither of these men were. Both of them stayed true to their consciences, but when the shit hit the fan, they were the calm, driving force behind fixing the fan and cleaning up the shit.

“When I’m called an hour and a half away to take a young woman in hand who’s acting like a spoiled teenager, it tends to eat away at my social niceties.”

“Look, you don’t want my company, I’ll happily catch a ride back with Linnie and Talia. I’m not sure why anyone called you to begin with. I don’t belong to your club.”

“No. You don’t, thank God, but your daddy thinks you need a come-to-Jesus meeting about what you’re gonna do with your life. I owe him one, so I got drafted.”

I blinked. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Afraid not, Sonya. Now, come with me. We’ve got a long ride ahead. You can rest tonight, but tomorrow we’re going to sit down and figure out your next steps in life.”

“Oh really.” I raised an eyebrow at him. “What if I don’t want to talk with you about my future? I happen to like my life the way it is.”

“And that’d be great. Except for stunts like this.” When I would have continued to argue with him, Archangel snagged my upper arm and pulled me with him to his bike. His hold wasn’t painful, but it was clear he wouldn’t tolerate me trying to get away from him.

He took the helmet strapped down to the back of the bike and shoved it on my head. “Fasten it, then climb on behind me.”

Well, the circumstances weren’t ideal, but I was getting on the back of Archangel’s bike. Archangel ! My secret crush. The only person in the world who knew about my slight infatuation with the big biker was Linnie. And she was my ride-or-die chick. A vault for my secrets same as I was for hers. He had no way of knowing, but Archangel was giving me a longtime dream. And fuck, if I wasn’t gonna enjoy every fucking second of it.

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Archangel

What the fuck was Thorn thinking, having me talk to Sonya? I didn't want to talk to Sonya. Not for a very long fucking time. After I'd fucked her out of my system, which could take several days, then we'd fucking talk. If Thorn knew the complexity of my affliction, he'd blow my head clean off my shoulders and I wouldn't lift a finger to stop him. Any man my age having the thoughts I was having about this girl needed to be castrated right before he was eviscerated, because it went beyond lust. Oh, yes. I wanted this girl to be fucking mine . It was bad enough she was the daughter of the president of another club, but I was forty-eight years old. She was twenty-one. Yeah. Not happening.

I took the state road back toward Lake Worth. There was less traffic and the way ahead wasn't always straight. Meant I needed to concentrate on something other than the woman with her arms wrapped around my waist, precariously close to my cock. Well, not really, but I imagined she was closer. Hell, I could practically feel her slide her hand down to cup my crotch. She wasn't, but I had an exceptionally vivid fucking imagination.

By the time I rolled into the Black Reign compound, my control was shot to shit and back. My cock was impossibly hard, and I had broken out in a sweat that had nothing to do with the heat and humidity of the Florida afternoon. Sonya had laughed and hollered practically the whole way home, obviously enjoying the ride. I couldn't think about her other than to make sure she didn't fucking fall off. Last thing I needed was Thorn's daughter getting hurt in my care.

I pulled in front of the main compound. It was a huge, obnoxious structure that was

more like a luxury hotel. The rest of the compound consisted of several large buildings with various businesses and group housing for the club. Beyond that was a kind of subdivision with houses for the brothers with families. And still farther was open land. A lot of open land.

There was a small picnic area with a wooden deck extending into a pier over the freshwater pond to allow for fishing or swimming. There were a couple of small, furnished cabins a few of the women had started maintaining to have a place to get away from everyone occasionally. Some of the older kids used them for parties and get-togethers away from the adults. I had no doubt more than one young man or woman had lost their virginity in one of those cabins. Or on the pier. Or under the hot noonday sun or bright midnight moon. It was truly a magical place.

I'd normally bring someone to that quiet oasis for meditation and as a way to create a sense of peace before an exceptionally hard conversation. I found the tranquility helped ease one into troubled situations, helping them to focus on the problem and figure out a solution. No way I could take Sonya to the little haven. No. Fucking. Way.

Shutting down the bike, I spoke over my shoulder to Sonya, trying like shit not to let her know the effect she had on me. I knew Sonya well enough to know if I showed weakness, the woman would attack without mercy. "Off."

"Sir. Yes, sir." She snapped off a mock salute before shifting her weight on the back peg so she didn't get burned climbing off.

I gritted my teeth, sure the muscles in my jaw bulged with tension. Thank God, Rycks met us at the door of the clubhouse. "Angel, everything good?"

"Not in any way," I muttered, taking a deep breath. "Will you please see to it Miss Sonya has a private room away from the club girls?"

Rycks raised an eyebrow but nodded. “Not a problem.” He turned his gaze to Sonya and gave her a kind smile. “Welcome, Sonya. How’s your father?”

“Apparently, more than a little pissed off.” I glanced at her to find her smiling brightly. “I’m supposed to be finding something to do with my life. Archangel here is supposed to be helping me.”

“I see.” Rycks glanced back at me again. I met his gaze with a steady one of my own. The other man shook his head in confusion, so I just shrugged.

“She needs rest, and I need to prepare.”

“She’s not tired,” Sonya interrupted. “She’d love to party with the rest of the club though.”

If anything, Ryck’s smile got wider. “You would.”

“She would not.” I turned to see Lawdawg hopping out of his truck. It was a testament to my distraction I hadn’t even realized he’d pulled up.

“Christ,” Sonya huffed. “I thought I left you back in Moore Haven.”

“Sorry to disappoint you.”

“I think I’d like to call my dad now.” Sonya lifted her chin and gave me a stubborn smirk. “I’m not sure what was supposed to go on here, but you are obviously not up to the task, Archangel. So I’d like to go home now.” The sweet smile was more saccharin than sugar. Little did she know she’d just waved a red flag in front of the bull.

“Challenge accepted,” I snarled. “Rycks, I’m gonna need a side-by-side.”

“I’ll tell Mechanic. Where you takin’ her?”

“To the pond. Is Lyric in the clubhouse?”

“Yep. I’ll have her meet you in the common room. She’ll get whatever you need.”

“Now wait just a Goddamned minute.” Sonya had an outraged look on her face, but something bothered me about her expression. She seemed too... calculating?

“You started it.” Lawdawg grinned, looking supremely satisfied. “Now you gotta see it through.”

Sonya rolled her eyes. “You really need to get that giant stick outta your ass, Lawdawg.”

Rycks barked out a laugh before schooling his expression. Or rather, he tried to. “Yeah. This should be fun.”

“I tell him that all the time.” Eden, Lawdawg’s spunky wife, wrapped her arms around his middle and hugged him from behind. “If you figure out how that works, let me know, Sonya.”

“Hey, Eden! Is Bella here?” If Sonya thought Rycks and Lyric’s daughter would save her, she really needed to think again.

“Doesn’t matter if she is.” I was done with this shit. “This doesn’t involve Bella. This is between me and you.”

Up to this point, I’d done everything in my power to stay away from the woman. I’d been attracted to her since she’d come back from her second semester of college. She and Caroline had spent the entire summer with Bella because she’d been in a

motorcycle wreck and had been broke all to shit and back. Though I knew Sonya and Caroline were closer, the two girls had pulled Bella into their circle and the three of them were fast friends. The only reason Bella hadn't been in that mess today was because she was still recovering from the most recent surgery to her leg.

"Just because my dad doesn't like my life choices doesn't mean he can dictate to me. If my own father can't, you most certainly can't."

That was it. I ducked and put my shoulder against Sonya's abdomen and lifted her so she was draped over my shoulder.

"Hey! Put me down, you bastard!"

I swatted her ass. "Mouth shut, missy. You're in enough trouble as it is."

"I will totally carve out your balls for this, Archangel."

I ignored her. "Rycks. Is Mechanic on the way?"

"Yep. He is." The man looked too amused for my peace of mind.

"If you, Thorn, and Doc had spanked those girls when they were little, I wouldn't be in this fuckin' situation."

"Hello?" Sonya beat a fist on my back and squirmed, trying to get down. "I'm right here! I can hear you talking about me!"

I swatted her ass again. "Told you to shut it, woman. I meant it."

"Leave me outta this, Angel." Rycks put his hands up in surrender. "I personally think Thorn needs to be shook up from time to time, but I suspect he gets more of a

kick outta her antics than he wants to admit. And Bella is a contained, well-behaved young woman.”

“Uh-huh. Seem to remember going to get her out of more than a couple scrapes when she started college.”

Rycks waved me off. “You can’t count Freshmen Orientation. Those parties are supposed to be wild.”

“Seem to remember Bella’s roommate got her head shaved after passing out drunk, and Bella didn’t even attempt to deny it. As I remember, she told the girl she was going to do it if Bella had to help her back to the room.”

“Look. To be fair, I told Bella not to let people walk all over her. She tends to lean toward the side of caution.”

“Not that time.”

“I’ll pass on to Thorn and Doc instructions to spank their kids more often. All right?” I could tell Rycks was amused, but I wasn’t feeling it. Much.

“You do that. Call and talk to him. When Thorn asked me to take this on, the man was furious.”

“Furious?” For the first time, Sonya looked less than confident. I looked over my shoulder to see she had a sliver of worry in her expression. I probably liked it too much.

“Nervous now?” I raised an eyebrow at her. Hopefully, the scope of her transgressions was finally dawning on her. “Think you finally pushed your daddy too far?”

“Why are you so fucking pissy, Archangel? I didn’t do anything to you.” Oh, she was angry. She was also worried and lashing out. Anger was a classic response in someone who was such a force of personality, especially when someone she cared about was upset with her. Good. She needed to understand what she was facing as the consequences of her actions.

“I already told you. I got called out only to be told half my day is about to be gone and I’m being expected to sacrifice the other half -- and God only knows how many more days -- bringing a stubborn wild child to heel.”

She snorted. “Well, good fucking luck with that, hot shot. Besides, I’m not the one who called you outta bed and away from your fucking beauty sleep.”

Rycks, the fucking bastard, outright guffawed. “I think maybe I understand now why you’re such an ugly bastard, Angel.”

“You’re not helping, Rycks.”

“Not trying to.” The bastard was still grinning, not to mention looking entirely too smug.

We were interrupted when Mechanic pulled up in the requested side-by-side. “Someone call for a ride?” His grin was wide and all too knowing. What the fuck was up with everyone having so much fun at my expense?

“I’ll take a ride back to Salvation’s Bane.” Sonya braced herself on my back and pushed up, looking back at Mechanic.

I swatted her butt again. “Keep it up. You’re about to write a check your ass can’t handle.”

“I swear to God, Archangel. You smack me one more time, when I get down -- and I will get down -- me and you are gonna come to blows.”

“You know better than to throw down that shit, Sonya.” Rycks leaned over to look at the annoying woman. “He’s just gonna spank your ass again.”

It was my turn to laugh, only I sounded almost sinister. Or coulda sounded like I was turned on beyond belief. I was really hoping it was the former. “That ain’t a spankin’,” I drawled. “Trust me when I tell you she doesn’t want a real spankin’.”

I knew she was only going to continue to be a brat until she got her way. Right now, all she knew was she didn’t want to go with me. Once we got to our destination and I gave her her own space, she’d settle. For a while anyway. Remainder of the day, we rested. Tomorrow, we talked.

Rycks helped me get her into the passenger’s seat in the side-by-side. I stalked around the other side of the vehicle to hop into the driver’s seat.

“Where are you taking me?” Sonya glared at me while she adjusted her seat belt.

“The Oasis. It’ll help you calm the fuck down.”

“Oh no, you didn’t!”

I flashed her a cocky smirk, a look that said I was in charge and found her attempts to pretend she was in charge amusing. “Yeah. I did. Get used to it, little girl.”

Sonya did something unexpected then. Instead of getting even more angry or threatening me or even physically striking out at me, she gave me an assessing look. “Hmm. Might be time to see what you’re really made of, Archangel.”

“Always up for a challenge. Just be prepared to deal with the consequences of anything you start.”

I’d meant to threaten her, but she didn’t look at all intimidated. “I always am.”

Something about the way she looked at me and the grave way she spoke told me Sonya was, indeed, prepared to accept whatever happened from the bomb blast she was about to create. And I had a feeling the fallout was going to be nothing short of nuclear. There was every possibility neither of us would survive.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 1:02 am

Sonya

If I do it, I get a whippin...

I remember watching an old cartoon where a “wascally wabbit” was contemplating doing something he knew would get him into trouble. I now knew exactly how the poor rabbit felt because I was in the same situation. And I was going to resist just as hard as the rabbit did. Which was to say, not very Goddamned much.

Archangel took us deeper into the Black Reign property, to a place I’d never been to before. Wasn’t surprising since this wasn’t my club, but as much time as I’d spent here with Caroline and Bella, whatever this place was must be extremely private.

It took us about fifteen minutes of driving. I knew the Black Reign compound was big, but the property must be pretty damned big. I wondered how far from the border of their area we were. I should probably be wondering what the big bastard was gonna do to me, but, honestly, I didn’t care. He wasn’t going to hurt me or my dad would never have given him permission for this. I was about to throw Archangel a curve ball and couldn’t wait to see how he reacted.

The “Oasis,” as he called it, really looked like an oasis. There was a privacy fence around the entire area, as well as three enclosed structures. Two of them looked like one-room cabins, while the other one had walls on two sides and was screened in on the others. Beyond that was a neatly kept pond. The grounds were immaculate. The place was like some fancy, exclusive spa.

“Wow.” I didn’t bother to hide my admiration. “This is some place!”

“This is where I bring people to meditate and reflect. It’s tranquil, and I find it helps set a relaxing mood.”

There was a long silence. Very long. There was so much to unpack in Archangel’s explanation I wasn’t sure where to start.

After what had to be a full minute of us staring at each other, neither of us willing to give anything away, I finally found my voice. “Meditation. Reflection.”

Archangel lifted his chin at a stubborn angle, daring me to say anything further.

Naturally, I did. “I wasn’t aware bikers practiced meditation and reflection. Do your brothers know about this? How about the club whores? Is this some form of punishment? Because if it’s punishment, I’m afraid Imm’a have ta pass.”

“Keep it up. Thorn won’t get the chance to spank you because I will.”

“You say that like it’s a threat or something.” I grinned and twirled one long, curly strand of my hair.

“This might be beyond my capabilities,” he muttered, scrubbing a hand over his face like he was bone weary. “Not on no sleep.” He focused on me again, seeming to be trying to make a decision. Then he nodded his head once. “This cabin is yours. The only electricity is what it takes to run water. There’s no cell coverage out here either. There is a small bathroom with plumbing, but the shower is barely big enough for one person.” He turned to the side-by-side and picked up a large duffel bag. “Lyric packed some things. You should have everything you need in here to be comfortable, including several changes of clothing.”

“OK... What exactly are you expecting to happen here?”

“I expect you to do as I tell you and to open your mind up to what you have to offer the world. To find a way you can help your club and your family. I’m going to help you find your way.”

I blinked up at him. “Wow. That wasn’t rehearsed at all .”

He clenched his jaws and his fists, giving me a look that said he wanted to flay me alive. “Go to the fuckin’ cabin, Sonya. Make your bed. Set up your shit the way you want it. Walk around the fucking pond. I don’t give a fuck. But get some rest tonight and be ready to start at sunrise.”

“Fine, Mr. Cranky Pants.”

“I’ve locked the gate to this place. You can’t get out and no one can get in. It’s only the two of us until we get this done.”

I tried to look put out, but inside I was rubbing my hands together with glee. “Fine. Fine. I’ll just take my shit and go sit with my thumb up my ass.”

“I’ll have supper ready in a couple of hours. We eat and work in the shelter.” He pointed to the half-enclosed building I’d noticed before. “No matter what task you’ve been assigned, we always eat three meals a day together. Seven, noon, and five. It’s where we talk to each other and express our concerns and share our accomplishments with each other.”

“This has got to be some kind of alternate universe.” I know I was staring at Archangel like he’d grown a third eyeball, but I couldn’t help it! “What are you?”

“Curious?” He arched one dark eyebrow.

“You kind of maybe sound like you might have done this a time or three. So I want to

know if you're, like, some kind of New Age healer or shaman or something."

"I'm a soldier who's seen too much death and turned to philosophy. I've studied several different religious sects and methods of healing mental trauma through different meditative techniques. If you want to know why, you'll have to stay and not fight me on what I'm asking of you."

I laughed softly. "By God, you're good. Fine. I'll play your little game." More because it suited me to take my time with this. Well, for the moment anyway. "I'll be here every day. Do what you tell me to do. Mostly. And I'll try to pick up what you put down. I'll keep an open mind and all that shit. But you have to give me some kind of time frame. I have no intention of being stuck here indefinitely."

"I don't like having a time limit. Defeats the purpose."

"And I'm not signing over my life to you until you see fit to call a halt. I'll give you two days."

"A week. Minimum." His gaze was flat and cold. I'd thought I'd seen his icy exterior crack earlier, but either I was mistaken or he'd reinforced his defenses. "And I prefer two weeks."

"Four days. I'll reevaluate after that," I countered.

He nodded. "Fine. Now go get settled. I'll see you in the shelter in two hours for supper."

I found myself exhilarated as I raced to my cabin. It was only feet from the one Archangel was using. In fact, the window next to my bed faced a window in his cabin. I thought I saw him moving around, but the sun was glaring off the glass too much.

Turning away from the window, I tossed my duffel on the twin bed shoved against the wall. Lyric had packed sheets, a comforter, towels, and washcloths, as well as clothing all the way down. She'd also included a bathing suit and flip-flops as well as assorted toiletries. The cabin was spotless and cozy, even if it was small. I found I rather liked the tiny home. I found this place to be somewhere I could live comfortably. At least until I got bored. I had a feeling the next few days promised to be anything but boring.

* * *

Sonya

Two Days Later ...

I was bored outta my fucking mind!

"In, and hold... Let it out." I felt like I was in a Richard Simmons video. Only without all the fun and laughs. And don't judge me for knowing who Richard Simmons is or for watching his videos. If I'm exercising, Imm'a have fun doin' it. "That's it. Good job, Sonya. Now again. Close your eyes. Listen to the breeze through the trees, the rippling of the water." His voice was oddly hypnotic, but all I heard was a sexy cadence telling me to do shit that was sexy.

"Now, take off your top and pull your tits out of your bra. That's right. Show me those pretty nipples. How they harden when the breeze tickles them."

"Oh yeah," I whimpered.

"What?" The word was nothing short of a demand.

"Hmm?" My gaze snapped to him. I tried to look all innocent and shit when I'd

gotten caught red-handed daydreaming about Archangel instructing me to strip. No doubt, if he'd left me alone, I'd have gotten to the part where he fucked me. "Did you say something?" Oops.

Archangel frowned down at me. Even with both of us sitting on the grass, he was still taller than me. Or maybe it was my imagination. He was so much larger than life! Not to mention my ultimate fantasy. Besides, like I said, I was bored. "Are you even listening to me? What were you thinking about just now?"

I leveled a look at him. "Do you really want me to answer that question, Archangel? Because I will. Then you'll have to be the one to deal with the fallout." I raised an eyebrow at him. I wasn't bluffing either. What did I have to lose by telling him I was fantasizing about stripping for him? It wasn't like anything was going to happen, and it might get him to call off this little charade and I could go back home. Worst case, he avoided me for the rest of my life. Sure, it would be embarrassing, but Archangel would never be cruel about letting me down. He'd reject me but do it gently. Or he'd fuck me and I'd get to live out several fantasies. Which... yeah.

If I do it, I get a whippin'...

"You're a brat, girl. I have a feelin' you ain't gonna respond to anything short of force."

I smirked. "Probably not. You got a plan for that?"

"You're testing me." He gave me a knowing smile. A soft and tranquil smile. Like I was falling right into his plan. "Good. You need to know I'm dedicated to helping you."

"Bullshit," I sang out, smiling. It really was funny. "You don't even want to be here. You think I don't know when someone doesn't like my company?"

“Never said I didn’t like your company. You’re one of the most interesting people I’ve ever met. You simply have a problem with authority. I’m here to help you realize you don’t always have to buck the system. Especially with those close to you.”

“Like my mom and dad?” I shook my head. “Dad is a bit of a control freak. I get it. Unfortunately, he has a daughter as stubborn as he is, so good luck with helping me be OK with him making all my decisions for me.”

“Sonya, Thorn doesn’t want to make all your decisions for you. He just wants you to make better ones so you don’t get into trouble.”

“OK, that’s a good one.” I actually laughed. “My father doesn’t want to make all my decisions for me? That’s the very definition of what he wants! He just wants me to think his ‘suggestions’ are all my idea so I don’t feel like he’s telling me what to do.”

He tilted his head. “Do you really think your father tries to manipulate you into doing what he wants?”

“Of course he does! Mom will even say I’m right. Did you even look into this whole situation before you agreed to brainwash me?” It was a barb. I couldn’t help it! His horrified expression told me I’d hit my mark. I didn’t really think he was brainwashing me, but the look on Archangel’s face was too funny not to continue.

“Sonya, I don’t want to brainwash you or convince you not to make your own decisions or anything like that. And I happen to know your father only has your best interest at heart. He loves you.”

“Oh, I know he does. I love him too. Doesn’t mean I’m going to change who I am to make him happy. Changing myself would make everyone miserable.” When he opened his mouth to respond I interrupted him. “ Really fucking miserable.” I gave him a knowing look with raised eyebrows.

“You don’t have to change who you are, honey. Just... don’t put blow-up sex dolls in the middle of people’s Christmas decorations.”

“It’s almost fucking spring! Who leaves their Christmas decorations up this long? They were asking for something to happen. You’re trying to take away all my fun.” I tried to pout, but couldn’t hold it. A laugh bubbled up and had to escape. To my surprise, Archangel laughed with me, real mirth shining in his eyes. It was a stunning moment. Though I’d seen him smile and laugh occasionally, this was a real, honest-to-God laugh like he was enjoying himself to the fullest. I couldn’t help softening toward him. Just a little. “You should do that more often.” I reached out to touch his hand which was resting on his knee where we’d been meditating. Or, as I liked to call it, sitting cross-legged with our eyes closed, being bored out of our minds.

He stiffened at my touch but didn’t pull away. “Do what more often?”

“Laugh.” I smiled at him. “You look loads younger when you laugh.”

“And there’s the brat.” Archangel tried to scowl at me, but he couldn’t hold it any better than I could. “You’re smart, Sonya.” He turned his hand over and gripped my fingers. “You could be anything you want to be. Why are you still hanging around home?”

I shrugged. “Why move away from home? I have everything I love right here. My family. My friends. I work around the clubhouse grounds and garage. You know, cooking and cleaning and shit. I do it because I like taking care of my peeps. Why change that if I’m happy? Besides, I’m doing more work than all the club girls combined. Sure, I don’t fuck the guys, but I earn my keep. I don’t expect to stay in the compound for free just because my dad’s the president. I never have.”

“He just wants to make sure you can survive on your own. You know. Away from the club.”

“Why would I ever need to?” I wrinkled my nose at him. “I’ve seen what the world outside the club is like. And I don’t mean when I was pulling those little pranks I pull in Moore Haven. People are mean at the best of times in the outside world. Inside Salvation’s Bane, or even here at Black Reign, everyone respects each other. Well, except the club girls, and even they have lines they rarely cross. Besides, Dad doesn’t know everything I do. I have some... hobbies.”

“If you mean the clothing and toy drives you do for the local group homes and nursing homes, I know about them.”

I gasped. “Have you been spying on me?” I wasn’t really shocked. In fact, I was surprised Ripper, the intel officer for Salvation’s Bane, hadn’t discovered it sooner. He probably had -- the guy was good -- and just hadn’t said anything.

“I don’t know why you keep it secret, Sonya. Be proud of what you’re doing. Bring more attention to your cause.”

“That kinda takes the point out of it,” I muttered. No. Not many people thought the way I did.

He blinked at me before narrowing his eyes in an adorably confused look. “I don’t understand.”

“I’m not the primary fundraiser for any of those things. I just contribute. Also, if I went around bragging, ‘look what I did,’ then it makes the giving about me showing the people in my world what good things I’m doing. Not about me helping kids and seniors who can’t help themselves.”

“I get that. From what I’ve seen, your usual M.O. is to find out what was raised and match it. What I don’t understand is where the money comes from. Thorn would be raising hell if club money came up missing. Not because he objects to giving

charitable donations, but because he's the fucking president."

"Surely you know I'd never steal anything from anyone. Especially not from my dad's club." Now he was just pissing me off.

"Of course I know you'd never steal from your club." OK. Maybe he got to live a while longer. "Which is why I can't figure out where your money is coming from. You don't have a job or money of your own."

Or not.

"Ah. I see." I grinned. Because, finally, I did see. "This has less to do with me figuring out my path in life than it is about Dad wanting to know where I'm getting my funds. Which means Ripper did rat me out."

"I didn't say your dad was only interested in where you get funds. I didn't even say he was curious."

I sighed. "You didn't have to, Archangel. If he doesn't know what I do to get money, then he wants to know. He should have come out and asked me."

"Can't speak to that, but he does want me to help you to find, as you say, your path in life."

"If I tell you what I do, will you call this whole thing off? I'll go back home and stay out of trouble. As long as I can anyway."

"I'll take it to your dad. Ultimately, it's your decision. I can't force you to do anything. But I don't think you'll outright defy your father."

Shit. He was right. "Look, I got an Only Fans page, all right?"

“What?” He snapped out the question, his eyes going comedically wide. I had to fight to keep from laughing. The look on his face was priceless. Like if he had mind bleach, he’d use it.

“I sell pictures of my feet, Angel. Where did your mind go?” I shrugged like it was all no big deal. “Ask Ripper. He caught me when I first set it up. He said the only reason he didn’t tell Dad was because there was no harm in showing my feet, but any breach of his trust in me would not only result in him ratting me out, but in my Internet and phone privileges being taken away. Since he was the tech guy, he could pull off the restrictions with ease and good luck telling Dad why Ripper had grounded me when I complained. It was quite diabolical.”

“You definitely need a spanking.”

“I’m twenty-one, Angel. I’ve got plenty of time to be an adult. I want to enjoy getting into trouble for petty shit like the aforementioned blow-up sex doll while I’m still young enough to appreciate the humor. There’s plenty of time to grow up.”

For some reason, he stiffened. He snatched his fingers away from mine and stood abruptly. “Yeah. Plenty of time.” He backed two steps away before stopping, lifting his chin like he’d just realized he was retreating. “Take the rest of the afternoon to reflect on... uh... something. Growing up.” Then the man beat feet back inside his cabin.

“Was it something I said?” I didn’t get a reply to my muttered response.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 1:02 am

Archangel

I was fucked. I mean, really fucking fucked. When Sonya and I had carried on a normal conversation where she expressed her love of her MC life and about her relationship with her father and the rest of her family at Salvation's Bane, she'd been so animated and unfiltered. She truly meant what she said.

I also understood a little more about Thorn. He was worried about his daughter and needed to know how she was making her money without asking her and possibly insulting her by insinuating she was doing something illegal or, worse, stripping or sex shows or something else he didn't want to know his little girl was doing. No one else cared if she was making her money with some skin, but daddies were a different breed. So yeah. I got it. I'd still be calling him out on his deception later, but right now I had bigger fucking problems.

First, Sonya was more than what she presented to everyone. There was an intriguing depth to the wild child I doubt anyone other than Sonya's mother, Mariana, or possibly Caroline and Bella, had realized existed. Thorn might have a clue, but he'd never admit it. Because, despite his instructions to me on making Sonya sit down and come up with a plan for her future, Thorn never wanted his little girl to grow up and not be dependent on him. He only sent me to find out about her funds. He'd used this latest escapade to throw me to the wolves.

Second -- and this was really the more disturbing part -- somehow in the middle of the conversation between me and Sonya just now, I'd fallen in love with her. Fucking hard, too. I wasn't being dramatic either. The longer she'd talked, the more my fucking heart had opened up, needing to drink in all her brightness and energy.

I'd dedicated my life to helping El Diablo and all the members of Black Reign MC to keep from falling into complete darkness. We'd all done some pretty bad things in our past. Most of us would do them again if necessary. I had taken it as my calling to help us all keep the pieces of our souls together as much as possible. Up until now, I'd thought I'd done a decent job with my own soul. Until I let Sonya fill me with her presence. That was when I realized how many holes I had inside me. Because Sonya's light spilled out from me, from those missing parts of humanity inside me, and I began to heal.

I shut the door and leaned against the cool wood, then thumped my head against it and groaned. I'd broken out in a sweat and my heart felt like it was going to beat out of my chest, almost like a panic attack. Which was probably an accurate description of what was currently happening to me.

The one sink in the place was only a few steps away along the counter running the short length of the back wall. I managed to make it without my knees giving way, though it was a struggle. I braced one hand on the counter while I turned on the water with the other. The cool water felt good on my skin, so I splashed my face. Water sluiced from my beard and I shook my head, sending droplets flying.

"Christ," I muttered. "What the fuck am I doing?" I had to get a grip. What Sonya had said to bring me screaming back to reality was that she had plenty of time to be an adult, reminding me of her age. She was twenty-one. Twenty-one ! I was forty-eight! Besides the fact she was the daughter of an MC president and far outranked me, she was young enough to be my daughter. A wide age gap like ours worked for some of my brothers, but even they might blink at close to a thirty-year difference.

I needed to go apologize to Sonya for running off, but there was no way I could be near her right now. Not and keep my dick in my pants.

Just as well. If Sonya knew the effect she had on me, there'd be a war. First between

her and me for dominance. Next between Black Reign and Salvation's Bane because her daddy would demand his pound of flesh for me defiling his daughter, and El Diablo would have my back to the death. I'd kept the peace for years inside the club. I could keep the peace outside as well.

The fading light seemed like a blessing. No electricity other than to keep running water meant no lights. I could meditate and calm my mind and my heart. I could get through this with my self-respect intact. Thorn would have no reason to come after me.

I pulled open the curtain so the sunlight filtering through the trees would hit the bed in the morning. A good night's sleep would help me regain perspective and maybe help me to calm down. I thought I'd fallen in love, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe it was the meaningful, fun conversation with a beautiful woman. I could have felt this way about any woman. But, given the fact my whole purpose in the club was to talk to people and look to the deeper meaning of what they're telling me, I doubted my feelings stemmed from anyone other than Sonya.

I pulled my shirt off and tossed it on my duffel before kicking off my shoes and shorts and sitting on the bed. Normally I slept naked, but it didn't feel right for some reason. I was the only person Sonya could come to for help or if she needed something. So there was a reasonable expectation she might come in on me at some point. It seemed safer not to have my dick out.

The night was warm and slightly sticky. Both windows were open to allow the breeze to move freely through the cabin. It was a calming sensation over my skin, so I didn't use the light sleeping bag I'd packed. Instead, I lay on top of the material and let the wind kiss my skin until I drifted off...

* * *

Archangel

Sweet God in heaven! I woke up to the most intense sexual need I'd ever experienced in my whole fucking life! I was about to come and I wasn't even truly awake yet. Hell, I wasn't even really sure where I fucking was.

Whoever was sucking my cock had me losing my fucking mind! I groaned and threaded my hands through the silkiest hair imaginable in a tight grip. I wanted to wrap the strands around my cock and jack off with them, but that would mean pulling out of the mouth currently swallowing me down.

It was full dark, the moon but a tiny sliver in the sky. No light gave me a clue as to my surroundings or the people in them. It would be like one of the club whores to sneak into my room and get me to fuck her, but I didn't think that was the case currently. Every time I thought I could put together what was going on, I'd hear a greedy slurp, followed by a contented sigh of pleasure. Any hope I had of holding a coherent thought vanished.

"Christ!" I thrust my hips up so my cock slid farther into that hot, wet mouth. I tightened my grip in her hair so I guided her movements. "So fuckin' good."

A feminine moan hummed around my cock, pushing me that much closer to the edge. Her soft palm gripped the base of my cock and worked the length she couldn't fit into her mouth. Which wouldn't do. I batted her hands away and pulled her down farther by her hair. She gagged, but put her hands on my thighs and held on.

"So fuckin' good!" I growled as I fucked up into her mouth.

"Mmm..." She hummed around me when I let her up. She backed off to a more comfortable depth, but a few seconds later, she gagged herself on my dick again. This time with feeling. She swallowed as she gagged, massaging the head of my cock with

every movement of her throat. Saliva and thicker mucus brought on by her exertions eased her way and she continued to take me deep over and over until she had to come up for breath.

I counted backward from ten, trying to keep my control, but it was a losing battle. When I reached four, I erupted into her mouth with a loud groan. She didn't pull back, didn't protest when I shot my jizz down her throat. Instead, she swallowed with a contented hum and licked my tip before she pulled away completely.

"Come here," I growled, pulling her up my body with her hair. She let out a small cry before she giggled. There was something I needed to process. I needed to slow down. But then her lips were fused to mine and I forgot my own fucking name.

I tasted myself on her tongue every time I thrust mine into her mouth. She whimpered but rubbed herself all over my body. Like she was trying to rub her scent on me. While she did, she kissed me like she wanted to devour me. Like she owned me.

No! No one owned me. But the more this woman kissed me, the more her lithe curves tormented me, the more I questioned my inner declaration.

With a snarl, I flipped us so that I pinned her to the bed with my heavier frame, never breaking our kiss. I pressed against her pussy where my body was situated between her legs. I still had on my boxers, but I thrust against her like I was fucking her.

The second the thought of sticking my dick in her pussy entered my head I knew it was prophetic. I was going to fuck her. It wasn't going to be gentle either.

"Get my fuckin' shorts down," I growled, fully expecting her to obey me. She did. Her cool fingers were at my hips, tunneling under the waist of my boxers. Her nails dug into my ass as she pulled me to her.

“Angel...” Her voice was a needy whisper dancing through my head.

“Fuck.” I shifted my weight so I could reach between us to guide my cock to her entrance. The second the head touched her opening, she arched her back at the same time I thrust and I was inside her to the fucking hilt.

I grunted at the same time she gasped in a startled breath. I knew I needed to stop, to figure out what the fuck was going on besides the best sex of my life.

Her fingers slid from my ass to grip my hips and she stilled me. I shoved inside her once more and held still. I could control myself from taking her like a rabid dog, but I had to be inside her to do it.

A growl escaped me as I pressed my face to her neck and inhaled, needing to take her scent into me so I could keep her with me forever. I nuzzled her, coaxing her to relax again, to be that little nymphomaniac who’d swallowed me down. I needed to... fuck her !

“Just give me a second.” Her voice was a mere whisper, but I could hear the slight tremor. “One second.”

“Tell me what you need.”

She turned her head and found my lips. Her kiss was like black magic. Forbidden but so much Goddamned fun. I flexed my hips and she met me. I wasn’t a small man so I’d had more than one woman need to adjust, but the small hesitation gave me the time to realize something was off. Her kisses and tight little pussy were rapidly driving my returning sanity off again, but a tiny corner in the back of my mind was telling me I needed to hold still and pay way more attention to the woman in my arms.

Then she arched her hips, driving me just that little bit deeper inside her. Her pussy clamped down around my dick and she gave a surprised yelp, then screamed as her pussy milked my cock with her orgasm.

“Angel!” My name on her lips as she came was the final nail in my coffin. I wanted to hear that voice in that tone every single day for the rest of my life. Two quick thrusts later and I came. And came. And... came ...

With one last grunt, I collapsed on top of her. Sweat coated our skin, and we were both breathing hard. I buried my face in her neck. When she tilted her head and exposed more of her skin to me, I kissed and licked her flesh tenderly in praise of her giving so freely of her body. The show of affection wasn't something I ever did but was as natural as breathing with this woman.

I rolled us to our sides, my arms still locked tightly around her. When the fog started to lift from my brain as the blood rushed from my dick back to my brain, the thing I was missing hit me like a bullet between the eyes.

“Sonya.” Her name was like both a whispered prayer and a plea for mercy.

“Wow.” She smiled as she breathed out the word. “You came hard.”

“Fuck yeah, I came hard,” I muttered as I tried to catch my breath. I hadn't meant to speak out loud but opening my big fat mouth was the very least of my problems. “What the fuck was that, Sonya?”

She gave me a dazzling smile, stretching beneath me like a contented cat. “I was bored. And you needed a good fuck.” She shrugged. “Looks like we both win.”

I was so stunned I couldn't say anything. This was what I'd been missing. I'd just come my brains out inside Sonya's sweet pussy. And I was ready for another round.

Sonya continued to smile. She must have felt my cock growing hard where it rested against her thigh because her eyes got wide, then she slipped her arms around my neck. “So... do you want a repeat?”

It felt like someone tossed a bucket of ice water in my face. I jerked back and practically jumped out of bed. “Holy fuckin’ hell!” I shoved myself away from her and stood, pulling up my boxers in a couple of jerky motions. I gave her a pointed look meant to chastise her like the naughty little girl she’d been. And, oh, my God, I was going to hell for that thought! “No more of that!” Took everything I had not to tack “young lady” at the end.

There was a brief flash of hurt in her expression before she smirked and rested her arm on her hip as she lay on her side. “Up to you. I figure if we’ve still got a couple of days before we leave, we might as well do something besides sit on the ground with our eyes shut... breathing .” She sat up and reached for her shirt, turning her body away from me as she shrugged into the garment. She gave me a little wave. “See you in the morning, Archangel.” The smile she flashed was meant to be cocky and confident. Instead, I thought I saw hurt and doubt. Then she opened the door and was gone.

I closed my eyes and pinched the bridge of my nose. My cock was still leaking cum and was rapidly getting hard again. Fuck! How the fuck had I let this happen? Being half asleep was no excuse. There is no way I should have been so caught up in the pleasure I forgot where I was and who I was with. I’d told her we were locked in this place, and I’d meant it. No one came in or out without my knowledge. So, had I listened to that little feeling in the back of my brain, I’d have realized who was in my bed. The truth was, I hadn’t wanted to know who was sucking my dick. Because knowing would have meant stopping her sweet mouth from taking my cum.

For the first time in a very long time, I was at a loss as to what to do. Where my instinct had been telling me to stop before, now it was telling me to go after Sonya.

To keep her now that I'd made her mine. I could deal with Thorn. My problem was not knowing what she wanted. So yes. We were going to have to talk about this sooner rather than later.

I took a breath and held it, trying to locate that inner calm I'd been trying to teach Sonya about. There was no peace to be found. Not while Sonya wasn't in my arms.

I opened the door to my cabin just as the door to hers clicked shut. She hadn't slammed it or even hurried to her private space, instead taking her time and quietly shutting herself inside. I did hear the snick of the lock as I took the first step onto her porch.

"Sonya? Open up."

"I'm sorry, Archangel. Now the adrenaline's gone, I'm really tired."

"Me too. Open up." I knocked several times on the door for emphasis.

"Please, can you just let me be? I'm sorry I came to your cabin. I won't do it again." Yeah. That wasn't happening. I could definitely hear the hurt and regret in her voice and I wasn't having it.

"Open. Up." I put some force behind the command. I hoped it would get her back up. She'd deal with me better if she was angry or stubborn than she would if she was feeling vulnerable. Because now that I'd had time to replay a few of the events leading to this point, I knew she might not have been a virgin but wasn't much more than that.

I heard her heave out an exasperated sigh before unlocking and opening the door. "Are you always so fucking stubborn?" Her upturned face was a mask of indifference and annoyance, but a mask was all it was.

“Nope. I’m usually worse. Let me in.”

She stepped back and gestured inside. Our cabins were the same. Other than the bed, there was a small table with two chairs and not much else. I took a seat at the table and indicated for her to do the same.

“Do you mind if I go to the bathroom first?”

I winced, but nodded. “Of course. Take your time.” I had to be careful here. Really fucking careful.

She disappeared into the bathroom, and I scrubbed a hand over my face. I’d really fucked this to shit and back. I had to find a way to fix this, more for Sonya’s sake than my own. I’d take whatever Thorn dished out because I could have stopped fucking her at any time. But I didn’t want her getting hurt more than she already had been. She deserved a better man than me. Someone she could grow old with. While I knew I’d never look at another woman as long as I lived, she had her whole life ahead of her. The last thing she needed was a man twice her age.

The second she opened the bathroom door and took the three steps from the door to the chair, any hope I had of keeping her at arm’s length vanished. Nope. Sonya was mine. The look on her face, the uncertainty and dread, made me want to kick my own ass. Not because I’d fucked her. Because I hadn’t held on to her after I’d realized what the fuck was happening.

“So?” She laced her fingers tightly together in front of her on the table. “What did you want to talk about?”

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Sonya

What had started out as a fantastic idea had rapidly... devolved. Not only had I made a fool of myself, but I had touched Archangel without permission, which had put him in a tenuous position. Especially if my father found out. If the positions had been reversed, there was no one in either Salvation's Bane or Black Reign who wouldn't kill Archangel for taking advantage of me. I get the dynamics were different and he was both mentally -- in terms of age and life experience -- and physically my superior. He could have fought me off where I'd have been at his mercy. But the end result was still the same. I'd sat at the table with every intention of playing off the whole incident, but the truth was, what I'd done was inexcusable.

Before Archangel could say anything, I ducked my head so he couldn't see tears forming. "I'm sorry, Archangel." I whispered. "I didn't think about what would happen after. I only thought about what I wanted and that if you didn't, you'd stop me."

Archangel let out a long breath. Then he reached out to put both his big hands over mine. "Look at me, Sonya." I shook my head, but he simply reached out with one hand and tilted my chin up. "Yes." When I still refused to look at him, he brushed my lower lip with his thumb. "Give me your lovely eyes, little Sonya."

I gasped in a small breath. There was such gentleness in his voice and touch, I had to comply. But when I met his gaze, the heat and need I saw reflected my own. Sex with Archangel had surpassed my every fantasy and left me longing for so much more. Looked like he'd enjoyed himself too.

“Sonya.” His voice was rough, gravelly as he stared into my eyes intently, obviously wanting me to believe whatever he was about to say next. “Whatever you think you did wrong, don’t. If I’d truly wanted to stop things before they got out of hand, I could have. My inaction is on me.”

His eyes were swirls of gray and green that seemed to shift with his emotions, but there was a softness in them that caught me off-guard, making my chest tighten and my breath catch. I wasn’t sure exactly what he was feeling, but whatever emotion was dominant was something he embraced with his whole heart. Archangel was a hardened man with internal walls built out of concrete and steel. Yet, here he was revealing a vulnerability I was quite sure he’d rarely shown to anyone before.

“I’m sorry.” I couldn’t help the apology. It needed to be said.

“OK. Apology accepted.” He gave me a hint of a smile. “The real problem is, you’re right. You didn’t think.” His tone was gentle, and he didn’t break eye contact with me. “What you did, Sonya... It was dangerous. Reckless even. As much as you enjoyed it, as fan- fucking -tastic as it was for me, we can’t ignore the possible consequences.”

“I understand that,” I replied in a barely audible whisper. A single tear slipped and traced its way down my cheek. I was well aware of the damage that could already have been done. We hadn’t used a condom, but I couldn’t say I’d have done anything differently if I’d been given the opportunity. So, yeah. He was right about consequences. What kind of person did that make me?

His gaze softened, and he reached out to wipe my tear away with his thumb, his touch tender and lingered longer than I’d have liked given he hadn’t declared his undying love for me. I knew that was a laughable fantasy, but it was still my fantasy. “It’s going to be okay, Sonya. But we need to clear a few things up.” His voice had an intensity I found impossible to ignore.

He leaned back in his chair, giving both of us space to breathe. I watched him swallow hard, the movement of his Adam's apple jerking my heart in a painful beat. Archangel didn't seem like a man who was at loss of words, yet here he was struggling to find the right ones. And even though I wanted him to speak, to clarify the muddled mess in my mind, I also dreaded his next words because they might shatter me completely.

"Sonya." The word came out barely audible, as if caught in his throat. "What happened between us... it can't happen again."

I'd known he was going to say something like this. He wasn't wrong. Hearing him voice it, though, was a punch to my gut. I stood slowly and moved to the window in front of the counter running along half the back wall. I braced my hands on the flat surface and took a deep breath. I was very much afraid I might cry if I didn't get a grip on myself. I wasn't sure what hurt more, his words or the fact he was right.

After a moment, I felt Archangel move in behind me. His body caged me in, his hands on either side of me where I stood with my back against the counter, which surprised me. He was telling me that us having sex had been wrong, but now he was all up in my space? I gritted my teeth against the urge to lean back against him. I still had some pride.

"Sonya." His voice was rich with emotion when he finally spoke again. He pressed his body against me. I sucked in a breath. I could feel the heat coming off of him. How was I supposed to resist this attraction when he was clearly baiting me?

"I don't mean to hurt you." His voice faded away like a summer breeze before he could finish, leaving behind an emptiness that echoed the hollow feeling inside me.

I turned to face him then, preparing to meet those gray eyes of his with an unconcerned look. "You didn't." I smiled up at him. "You're right. I shouldn't have

touched you without your permission.”

“Honey, I don’t care about that.” He was looking at me intently now. His brows drew together as he continued to stare at me. Then Archangel shivered slightly, his eyes narrowing. His jaw clenched. Very slowly, he leaned back away from me. He didn’t take his hands from the counter or his gaze away from mine. “Fuck me,” he whispered. The next thing I knew, Archangel was kissing me like his life depended on it. And I surrendered to him.

The feel of his lips against mine was like nothing I’d ever known. They were firm and demanding, yet tempered. There was something far more intimate in Archangel’s kisses that left me with no room to think about anything else but the taste of him and the way he made me feel. His hand slid up my spine and into my hair, holding me still as he plundered my mouth like he was starving for me. I knew I was starving for him. I’d had a taste before and wanted so much more.

He pulled away abruptly. Breathing heavily, he stared down at me. “I can’t do this. Not with you.” He shoved away and walked out of the cabin, leaving me standing there, shaking and lost. OK, that comment hurt. Not with me?

I followed him out the door, fully expecting to have to hurry to catch him before he got inside his own cabin. Surprisingly, he stood just outside on the tiny porch, bracing himself against the railing with his hands. He was obviously struggling with something, but I had my own thoughts to worry about. Like I’d let this man take me to unmanageable heights and wasn’t willing to never experience sex with him again.

“What does that mean?” I demanded, moving around to see as much of his face as I could. I needed to see his expression clearly. “Not with me.”

“It means I’m not fucking you. Not again.” If I were guessing -- and I totally was because Archangel was good at covering his emotions -- I’d say he totally wanted to

fuck me again.

“Well, that’s unfortunate.” I tried to sound light and airy, like none of this actually mattered to me. “I was hoping to find out more about your path of philosophy. But if you’re giving up already, I must be more than you’re used to handling.” It was a calculated risk, baiting Archangel, but I threw out my line and waited to see if I’d made a fool out of myself or hooked me a whale. Or a shark.

“Don’t do that.” He growled. “Don’t use your fucking wit to try and manipulate me.”

I held my hands up in surrender. “Fine. So, who’s up for a movie and some popcorn?” I grinned, needing to back off and come at him from a different angle. This was a very bad idea. A very bad idea. But I had this sickness. Once I started something, I had to finish. Call it morbid curiosity. I wasn’t sure where this road was going to lead, but I was hauling ass down it as hard as I could go.

Archangel gave me a threatening look, actually going so far as to point a finger at me. He opened his mouth to say something but promptly closed it again. His gaze swept me from head to toe, his nostrils flaring. “Did you put on underwear?”

The question caught me off guard, but this was my opening. If he ended this little therapy session, I’d never get another chance to be with him because he’d never put himself in a situation where I’d have the chance. Then my lips tugged upward and I couldn’t stop the words that I uttered next. “Why would I have done that?”

“Christ, woman!” Archangel lunged for me, fisting his hand in my hair. His kiss was brutal, his tongue darting between my lips to claim what he refused to admit he wanted. The intensity of it left me breathless, as if he was trying to consume the very air I breathed.

He pressed his body against mine, pushing me back against the door of the cabin. His

cock hardened against my belly and a wave of satisfaction washed through me. Archangel might have been saying one thing, but his body was telling a very different story. No doubt he wasn't happy with himself or the situation, but he was going to fuck me again. I just had to keep pushing and not let up for an instant.

I wound my arms around his neck, pulling him closer. His hand tightened in my hair as he thrust his tongue deeper, tasting every part of my mouth. As quickly as he'd started kissing me he broke away, panting heavily. He pulled back just enough to look at me, his gray eyes dark and filled with a torrent of emotion I wasn't sure he understood. Granted, I was no expert, but I swore Archangel looked like he was both completely lost and right where he wanted to be.

I thought he'd pull back again, maybe leave me here for the night, which I couldn't allow, but he stared down into my face for long moments. His grip tightened in my hair, and he pulled me up to meet his lips again. His other arm tightened around my back, clamping me to him like an iron band. He lifted me and I locked my ankles around his waist as he got us inside and to the bed.

Archangel shoved me down on the bed, taking in every inch of my body with a hunger that both terrified and thrilled me. He stripped out of his clothes, his movements brutal and swift. I held my breath as he crawled back on top of me, his cock hard and leaking pre-cum against my stomach. He leaned in, his forehead resting against mine. "You make me feel things I shouldn't."

"You make me feel things I can't get enough of. I want more." My hand slid over the muscled expanse of his back, trailing down until I cupped his ass with both hands. He groaned and kissed me again, grinding his cock against my bare pussy.

"Get your fuckin' shirt off, woman." His snarl made me shiver and cry out. I obeyed as fast as I could, shrugging out of the T-shirt. He helped before tossing the garment to the floor and lying fully on top of me.

All that delicious muscle pressed me into the mattress again. I had almost made myself believe I'd imagined how good it felt to have Archangel in such a dominant position over me. I was at his mercy. At the moment, he looked like he had none.

I shifted my hips and Archangel slid inside me with his next thrust. When he did, he jerked like I'd slapped him, a glaze seeming to go over his eyes. Something like euphoria glimmered in his eyes before he slid them shut and groaned.

He held himself deep inside me, letting out his breath slowly as he rested his forehead against mine. "Fuck..." Archangel breathed the word like a prayer. Then he moved inside me, starting out slow but getting faster and harder with each stroke. I welcomed him with a moan, tightening my legs around him to hold him close. Archangel drove inside me, his hips slamming against mine in an almost violent rhythm. The breath slammed out of me as he rode me. He nudged my head to the side and latched on to my neck, sucking. Leaving his mark.

My heart rejoiced even as my head tried to tell me to slow down and take this for what it was. Scratching an itch. Hooking up. Sure, I'd push him for all I was worth. I'd push until he pushed back. But I knew it would eventually end.

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Archangel

I was drowning in her, losing myself completely in the feel of Sonya's body beneath mine, surrounding my cock. I knew this was wrong on every level, but I couldn't seem to stop myself from taking what she was so freely offering. What I so desperately craved.

With every thrust into her tight, wet heat, I fell deeper under her spell. This wild, infuriating, beautiful woman had me completely enthralled. I wanted to possess her, own her, make her mine in every way.

Sonya moaned and arched beneath me, her nails raking down my back. The sting only spurred me on, making me fuck her harder. Faster. I felt like I was possessed, chasing my release, chasing that sublime connection with her. The only thing I knew would give me relief, would calm my raging mind and body, was... her. Sonya. I'd been obsessed with her without really acknowledging my feelings and this is where it landed me. Balls-deep inside the woman of my dreams, knowing no good could come of this.

"Angel," she gasped, her head thrashing on the pillow. "Oh, God! Yes!"

"That's it, baby." I growled my praise for her, sounding like some fucking caveman. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't proud of the way I made her lose control. I loved that she clung to me, that she urged me on. I knew I'd pleased her before and was doing so again. The question was, could I please her enough for her to want to stay with me? To give me a chance to work this out between our clubs. And her daddy. "Come on my cock, Sonya. Milk my cum and take it deep in that sweet pussy." She did.

I was so fucked, beyond comprehension or salvation. With every thrust, every quiver, every shudder of Sonya's tight little body beneath mine, I fell deeper under her spell. I knew this had to stop, but I'd be Goddamned if I could remember why. I didn't want to stop, and she didn't seem like she wanted to either. I wanted to consume her. Possess her. I had a driving, dominating need to make her mine in every way possible. Including with my property patch, which was totally fucking insane. Not only was Sonya way the fuck too young for me, I wasn't nearly good enough for her.

None of it stopped me from fucking her now. I was really going to have to come up with a way to explain this to Thorn. Preferably without losing any important body parts. Was I scared of Thorn? No. I simply had too much respect for the man to not take whatever punishment he thought best to deal out with regard to a dirty old man fucking his daughter when he was supposed to be mentoring her.

My hips pistoned forcefully as I drove into her welcoming heat again and again. She clung to me, nails digging into my shoulders, legs locked around my waist. Her moans and cries spurred me on, inflaming my lust to impossible heights.

How the fuck had I lived my entire life without this? Sex had never been like this. I'd never imagined sex could be like this!

I nipped and sucked at the tender skin of her neck, overcome by the primal urge to mark her as mine. Mine. The word echoed in my brain. Yeah. I wanted Sonya to be mine. Hell, she was mine. I just had to figure out how to make it permanent without spooking her. Because I had no illusions the girl wanted me actually in her life. She wanted the rough, hard fuck of a biker. As I saw it, my job was now to make her so addicted to the sex that she was willing to take me on. Yeah. I could do that.

A plan to make her addicted to sex firmly in my mind, I focused entirely on making Sonya come as hard as possible. The instant and immense relief that fell over me was like a warm blanket in the cold of winter. Pleasure Sonya well and she'd never want

to leave me. Yeah. It's a hard life.

She screamed, her pussy squeezing my cock in a forceful massage as she milked my cum from my dick. Denying her wasn't even a question. I came, planting my seed deep inside her hot pussy. Both of us shouted our releases, the sounds echoing through the tiny cabin as we came together in a powerful climax.

I collapsed on top of her, my weight pinning her down. We lay there, both breathing hard as the sweat dried. Sonya ran her fingers through my hair, and I lost myself in the feeling. She kissed my jaw and chin, sighing softly before settling beneath me. I knew how she felt. I wanted to praise her for giving herself to me so completely and selflessly, but I wasn't sure how to express everything I was feeling. Hell, I wasn't sure exactly what I was feeling, which was damned embarrassing. It was my job to take care of everyone's feelings because I was the level-headed one. The one who had a Zen-like calm. Now, I was anything but calm.

I wanted to love on her some more. To cuddle and kiss and show her I could be sensitive to her needs. Unfortunately, all I could do was pull her to me. I couldn't do much more than simply breathe. Not after coming my brains out more than once. My body had other ideas. I was spent, tired as hell. I let myself be pulled down, cuddled against her warm body and fell asleep with the scent of Sonya enveloping me like a warm blanket. And I slept like the dead.

* * *

Archangel

For the second time today, I woke up unsure of where I was. Shit like this never happened to me. I was always aware of my surroundings. I groaned, reaching for... something. I opened my eyes and recognized the tiny cabin... and it all came back to me in a rush.

Sonya. The woman who'd haunted me. The soul-shattering sex. And she was not in my bed where she was supposed to be.

I sat up with a groan. "I'm definitely gettin' too old for this shit." I found my pants and slung them on. My shoes followed. I couldn't find my shirt and said fuck it. Clothes weren't important. Finding Sonya was.

She wasn't in the other cabin, or out by the pond. Which was when I noticed the front gate wasn't closed all the way. Immediately, I patted down my pockets for my keys. Not there. I hurried to the gate, knowing what I was going to find.

"That beautiful little bitch." In the padlock on the gate, my keys were looped over the lock while the hook was open and hanging in the ring that would latch the gate. I had to chuckle. It wasn't funny, either. I couldn't remember the last time I'd slept so soundly I missed someone moving literally right under my nose. The woman had completely worn me out and I was not sorry. Not even a little bit. Thorn could try to kill me if that's what he wanted to do, but I'd fucked Sonya and loved every blistering second of it.

I took in a deep breath, the morning air warm and fresh, puffing my chest out. Yeah. Sonya had screamed my name. Several times. I'd satisfied her too. She'd clung to me and begged for more until she'd finally gone limp in my arms. So yeah. I was damned proud of myself.

I hurried back to my cabin and found a clean shirt, then went in search of my wayward charge. She hadn't taken the side by side, which surprised me. Likely she was hoping to slip by security and outside the compound without anyone knowing. She should have known better. Ripper didn't miss anything. I took the vehicle she'd neglected and headed to the main part of the compound. Even if she didn't head there straight away, she'd end up there before she could leave.

A few minutes later, I skidded to a stop in front of the main clubhouse. I hopped out and went inside, looking for Sonya. She wasn't in the immediate area, but there were other places she could be.

"Ripper? You here?" Ripper's office was just off the common room. If he was in the clubhouse, he'd be in his office.

"Yep. That you, Angel?" Ripper leaned back in his chair so he could look out the door. "Though you were with Sonya at the Oasis?"

"I was. She stole my keys and gave me the slip."

Ripper, the bastard, thought that was the height of hilarity. "Fuck me," he chuckled. "She's her father's daughter. Girl's fuckin' smart."

"Yep. Can you see if she's still on the property?"

"She's on the property. I got an alarm from your privacy gate when she opened it. She's finally realized she's going to have to go to the main gate to get outta here. Either that or she knows you'll be onto her soon and figured speed over stealth." He nodded out the door. "If you head to the gate now, she'll be about ten minutes behind you."

"Thanks, man. I owe you one."

"Nah. Just bring the hellion back and spank her ass."

I nearly stumbled. I did choke, but didn't stop to catch my breath. Instead, I ignored Ripper's laughter and hurried to the main gate. Sure enough, ten minutes later, Sonya hurried in my direction.

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Sonya

Fuck. Yeah. I'd run straight to Archangel. To be fair, I hadn't planned on bailing and hadn't been able to get an idea of my surroundings or the layout of the whole compound. And Black Reign MC had a seriously large compound area.

He leaned against the gate, one foot hooked on the bottom rung and an elbow resting on the top. The smug bastard looked bored. Unconcerned, even. While me? Yeah. My stupid insides were fluttering like freaking fairies had taken up residence.

Three other men hung out at the gate, obviously on guard duty. Their vests labeled them as prospects, but I didn't know them.

"Hey, Angel!" I waved and smiled brightly when I really wanted to punt him in the balls and dart out the gate before he could recover.

"Hey yourself, little runaway. Pretty sure this is not where I left you." He raised an eyebrow, daring me to contradict him.

"Yeah? Where, exactly, did you leave me?" If he wanted to play hardball, we'd play hardball.

The bastard didn't even flinch. "Beside me, in my bed." His gaze didn't waver from mine and he didn't speak quietly, but I was too busy gaping like a fish to form any kind of witty reply. Also, it was hard not to notice how the prospects all perked up and crept closer, obviously listening intently to the conversation now. "Uh-huh." He grinned when I said nothing. "That's what I thought. Come on, Sonya. Back to bed

with you.”

“I can’t believe you said that!” Not what I needed to say, but that’s what came out.

“Oh? In that case, what lesson did you learn from our encounter?”

“That you’re a bastard?” I smiled sweetly at him.

“Not to bait me. You might find you’re the bait.”

“You realize what you said is on the way to Salvation’s Bane right this second. Right?”

“You mean, good news travels fast?” Archangel didn’t look the least bit concerned.

“You’re happy about that?” I know I looked like I thought he was insane. Because the man was totally insane !

“Your dad would have found out sooner or later.” He shrugged. “Might as well start as I mean to go on. I’ll never lie to him about you. I respect you both too much for that.”

“And what, exactly, is he finding out? That we slept together?”

“All of it, Sonya. And I wouldn’t keep our relationship from him.”

“Are you stupid or something?” I couldn’t believe this shit. “My dad will kill you, Archangel. Dead . No further questions necessary.”

“No, he won’t.” How could he look so smug at a time like this? And why wasn’t I panicking about my dad finding out about me and Archangel like I let on I was?

Probably because I knew I was the only person in the world who could stop Thorn from doing anything he Goddamned well pleased. Well, me and Mom. So if I told him not to kill Archangel, he wouldn't.

"You think not?" I gave him a skeptical look. "How do you figure that? And exactly what kind of relationship you gonna tell him we have? That we're fuck buddies? Yeah. I see that going over reeeeeeally well."

"Because --" He crossed to me and threw an arm around my shoulder, and guided me back toward the clubhouse. "You're going to be my old lady."

Of all the reasons I'd expected Archangel to name, me being his old lady wasn't even in the top fifty.

We'd taken several steps before I could finally find my voice. "You really have lost your Goddamned mind." I stopped moving away from the gate and freedom, planting my feet on the asphalt as best I could. Of course, Archangel tried to make me continue, but he didn't force the issue when I refused. "What makes you think I want to be your old lady?" I totally wanted to be his old lady and that was the shit of it! He was going to break my fucking heart!

Archangel raised an eyebrow at me. "Don't you? You came to my bed, Sonya. You initiated this between us. And I know you felt what I felt -- this isn't just physical attraction or a casual fling. There's something deeper here."

"That's not the point!" I sputtered. "You can't just decide something like that without even asking me." I swallowed hard, unable to deny the truth in his words. There was definitely more than just lust between us. At least, there was for me. Knowing Archangel, he saw this as his way of taking responsibility for his actions.

He shrugged. "I'm asking you now. Be my old lady, Sonya."

I gaped at him. “That’s not asking! That’s telling!”

“Fine.” He grinned slightly before taking a step closer, never looking away from me. God, I loved having his full attention. I was in so much trouble. “Sonya, will you be my old lady?”

My heart was racing. Part of me wanted to snag what he was offering and hold on for dear life. The other, more realistic part knew this was the wrong thing to do.

“I’m sorry, Archangel,” I said softly. “I’ll tell Dad it was my doing, but you don’t love me. And I...” I swallowed. “I d-don’t love you.” Emotion was clogging my throat because the lie burned like acid.

Archangel’s eyes narrowed as he studied my face intently. “You’re lying,” he said softly. I opened my mouth to protest but he cut me off. “Don’t. I can see it in your eyes, Sonya. You feel what’s between us just as strongly as I do.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I whispered, fighting back tears. “This can’t work. You know that.”

He stepped closer, cupping my face in his large hands. “I know there are obstacles. I’ve been tellin’ myself that for several days now. But it’s been a long Goddamned time since...” He trailed off. Something like anger and hurt flashed on his face before his expression smoothed over. He took a step back, giving me some space, clearing his throat. “Never mind. Come on. Let’s get back to the clubhouse. We can get your things, and I’ll take you back to Salvation’s Bane.”

“NO!” I yelled, stepping away from him. I took a breath and spoke again, this time more softly. “No. I’ve got Linnie coming to pick me up.” As if on cue, I heard her little Mustang rumbling as it pulled up to the gate. “See?” I smiled and waved.

“Wait!” Archangel lunged for me, grabbing my arm and pulling me to him. “You have my number programmed in your phone. Use it, woman.” His gruff tone was as rough as his voice. Then he kissed me until my head spun.

I was so startled I forgot I wasn’t going to kiss him anymore... and kissed some more. God, I was going to miss sex with him! I knew to the depth of my soul I’d never find pleasure like he’d shown me ever again. He was still the man of my dreams and probably always would be.

He caressed my cheek as he ended the kiss with one last sweep of his tongue and press of his lips to mine. I stared up at him and I knew my emotions were clear in my eyes. Archangel would know how I felt. Would he pity me? The young woman who had a hopeless crush on him?

I shook myself and backed away from him a couple of steps. “I’m sorry, Archangel. About everything. I took liberties I shouldn’t have.”

“You were curious. I could have stopped you at any time.”

“Yes,” I whispered. “I suppose you could.” This was so much harder than I thought it would be. And I knew leaving him was going to hurt, which is why I’d snuck off on him in the first Goddamned place.

“Promise me you’ll call me if you need me, Sonya.” His gaze was steady on my face, his expression relaxed. This was his serene mask. I’d always seen it, but I’d gotten to know that look very well over the last few days. It meant he’d put up a wall between us. Though I was the one leaving, I found the distance, both physical and emotional, was an ache I wasn’t sure I could overcome. Also, I found I hated that fucking mask.

“Yeah,” I said, giving him a smile that was as fake as his was. “I will.” No way would I ever call him.

He sighed. "Sonya, promise me." That was his stern voice. The one that said I better do what he told me to do.

"Fine, Archangel. I promise." I had to get outta here before I did something unforgivable. Like throw myself in his arms and accept his request that I be his old lady. Or cry. I started to go again, but somehow, I ended up in his arms, clinging to him like my life depended on it. He hugged me just as hard and those stupid fucking tears tried to prick my eyes again.

I'd just loosened my grip when another car whipped through the gate ahead of Linnie's Mustang, side-swiping the driver's side, and headed straight for me and Archangel. His arms tightened around me and he whipped around to put himself between me and the approaching vehicle. I heard the screech of tires and the scent of burning rubber hit me in the breeze as the little red sports car skidded to a halt.

One of the prospects at the gate pulled a gun as he ran toward us. The other prospect was with Linnie. Shouts came from the clubhouse as everyone inside hurried outside to contain the threat.

The engine was shut off. The doors opened upward at an angle. I didn't recognize the emblem on the front, but I was guessing it was something Italian and very expensive.

"Colm! What do you think you're doing? This your new little bitch?"

I gasped and my focus went immediately to Archangel. Or, rather, Colm. Of course, I'd known Archangel was his road name, but that's all he'd ever been to me. I'd never even wondered what his real name was. Not because I didn't want to know about his past or anything. It was just a name. No matter what name he was given at birth, he was still the same man.

"Gloria?" Archangel still had his arms around me. If anything, he held me tighter

since the driver had revealed herself.

“Don’t act so surprised to see me.”

“Now isn’t the time, Gloria.” Archangel’s face hardened. For the first time since I’d met him, Archangel looked just as deadly as every other member of his club or mine.

“Why? Because you’ve not sent your little whore on her way yet?” I stiffened and a stab of hurt sliced through my belly. I tried to push away but Archangel still refused to let me go. I knew what he was doing. By retaining his hold on me, he knew I’d wait passively until he either let me go or this Gloria left. Though I loved pulling pranks, I didn’t like true confrontation. The shit that went down in Moore Haven was just that. Shit. All in good fun. This was a whole different ball of wax.

“Call her names again, and I’ll forget our history, Gloria. She’s off limits.”

Gloria gave a delicate snort and stepped away from the vehicle. The woman was as sexy as the car. Long, loosely spiraling golden hair, a killer figure that spoke of both hard work in the gym and not a little bit of plastic surgery. She wore skintight leather pants and a formfitting leopard print halter top that showed her cleavage to perfection, and six-inch pumps that matched her pants. Her makeup was flawless, and she carried herself like someone used to being obeyed. She was older than me and had history with Archangel before he was Archangel. So where did that leave me?

Gloria waved her hand dismissively. “Whatever. Say goodbye so we can talk, Colm.”

I looked up at Archangel. He’d already taken up for me. He was holding me so possessively and protectively I knew he was going to tell her to go to hell.

But he was silent, staring at me. When he spoke, something inside me died. “Maybe it’s best if you go, Sonya.”

“Angel?”

“Linnie is waiting for you. I’ll have Red and Rosanna fix her car. If they can’t make it better than it was when it was new, I’ll get her another one.”

“I don’t care about the damned car, Angel! What’s going on? Who is this?”

Archangel winced and, once again, for a very brief moment, I saw what he was feeling. Regret. Longing. Resignation. Anger. Pain. I reached out and touched his face, wanting to take away his pain.

“Go on. I’ll talk to you later.” He gave me what I thought was supposed to be a reassuring smile, but it was anything but comforting.

“No. Tell me who she is, Angel.”

He looked down at me and I could see that whatever he was about to say was going to kill something inside me. I wanted to tell him never mind. I didn’t want to know who she was. But he’d already taken a breath to speak.

“Gloria is... my wife.”

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Archangel

I stood there and watched the dimming light in Sonya's eyes flicker, then die. She jerked as if I'd slapped her. I might as well have.

"Your... wife?"

"There's more to our past relationship than just us being legally married, honey."

"Don't 'honey' me!" To my utter horror, Sonya's eyes filled with tears, but she blinked them back heroically. The girl had backbone, but I could see what this was costing her. She tilted her head back in a stubborn tilt. Her chin quivered as she struggled to hold on to her emotions. "You want to honey someone, honey her." She pointed an accusing finger at Gloria.

"Sonya, please." I tried to frame her face in my hands, but she batted me away and stepped back a couple of steps. "I swear to you, I wasn't trying to keep this from you. I'll explain everything."

"What's to explain?" Now her voice wavered and she winced, sticking her chin up defiantly. The tears overflowed then, but she still stood her ground. "She's either your wife or she's not. Which is it? Ex-wife? Explain this to me, Angel." She winced again and gave a humorless laugh. "That's an oxymoron," she muttered through her tears. Because two more of the vile things slid from her eyes for her to bat away angrily.

"I hooked up with her in Vegas right before I left for special training in the service. I was drunk, and she was hunting for someone like me. I'm still not exactly sure how

she managed it, but when I woke up the next morning, we were in bed together and I was informed I'd gotten married."

"Why not get it annulled?"

"I was going to, but she spun me a story about an abusive family and being told she was being married off to a man she'd never met so her father could have a business tie to him. I had no family and no reason to think I'd be coming back alive. I figured with the money she'd get in death benefits, not to mention a portion of my pay, she could leave and go wherever she wanted. Then my death would have counted for something, and someone would remember me when I was gone."

She still looked hurt, but I could see she was at least considering what I'd said. "You made it back, though. When was this?"

"Fifteen years ago, honey. We wrote a few letters to each other. She sent a few care packages, and we talked a couple of times the first year. Then I went deep undercover and couldn't talk to her for two years. When they'd recruited me for that mission, the primary requirement was that the operative not be married or have children they were responsible for. There were three of us chosen. Not for our skills, but because we had no close family ties. No one we had to keep in touch with or would miss back home and not be able to give a hundred percent. I caught hell from command when I had to make arrangements for the paperwork to be filed so she could get benefits. If they could have replaced me, they would have court-martialed me for that stunt. But I figured if I was going to give my life for my country, the least the people who'd demanded my sacrifice should help me to make someone else's life a little better, and I didn't flinch."

"Sounds like you," she muttered, toeing a pebble on the pavement.

"It was seven years before I spoke with her after that. And it was only to let her know

I'd made it back to the States if she wanted a divorce or whatever."

"I take it she didn't want a divorce?" Sonya glanced from me to Gloria and back. Gloria was busy flirting with one of the prospects. The man was trying his best to ignore her, but Gloria was nothing if not persistent. I was literally living proof she always got her way.

"Actually, no. She did want one. She was supposed to meet me for lunch to sign a standard divorce agreement. Once she said she wanted the divorce, I went to a lawyer to do the paperwork. I gave her half my benefits and kept her as my beneficiary in the event I was KIA. It was very much in her favor. I was career military and spent all my time on bases or overseas because I was special forces. Until I met El Diablo, my life was the military. I had nothing and no one else. Never needed or wanted anyone else. Kept things simple."

"Except you had a wife you barely knew." Sonya sounded equal parts understanding yet bitter, as if she were resigned to the fact she'd lost me before she'd ever had me. Which could not be further from the fucking truth. "So why aren't you divorced, then?"

"Because I never showed up." Gloria was headed toward us with purpose. Her hips swayed with an erotic twist that made a man wonder what she could do to him if she were on top during sex. Her breasts were high and firm and barely bounced at all when she moved. There was no denying she was a beautiful woman, but she did absolutely nothing for me.

Sonya stiffened and backed away from me another step, eying us both warily. That's when Linnie came up beside Sonya and took her hand in solidarity.

"Why wouldn't you meet him after you'd said you wanted the divorce? Was he lying? Did you really not want it?" Sonya gripped Linnie's hand in a white-knuckled

grip. I could see sweat beading her upper lip and brow and she was trembling.

Gloria waved her hand like it was all no big deal. “My boyfriend took me on a trip to the Maldives. Besides, it wasn’t that important. I figured I could worry about it later.”

“Sounds like it was pretty serious between the two of you. Why wouldn’t you want to have your divorce final in case you decided to marry the other guy?”

“Why would I want to marry the guy? You marry a man rich enough to afford a private resort room in the Maldives at fifty thousand dollars a night and all you get is a prenup saying you get nothing from him in the event you divorce unless it was a gift. However, if you’re the girlfriend, you get all the benefits of his money and get to negotiate your personal allowance in addition to all the trips and clothes and basic necessities of being on the arm of a billionaire.” She gave me a superior smirk. “I had Colm’s pay coming to an account I never touched. Compared to the money I got from Jasper, it wasn’t much, but it let me have a personal stash. I saved every penny of my allowance I could so I’d be OK if we broke up. Getting a divorce was last on my list of things occupying my time because it wasn’t strictly necessary.”

“Then why bother meeting with him at all?”

“Why not? I probably would have if Jasper hadn’t sprung the trip on me. After that, I forgot about it.”

“We haven’t spoken since, Sonya,” I said. “By that time I’d taken up with El Diablo, so when I called her about a divorce, I told her about Black Reign and that she could find me here. I’m assuming that’s how she found me?” I raised an eyebrow at Gloria.

She shrugged. “Yes. I’d have come sooner if I’d known this wasn’t an ordinary motorcycle club clubhouse.” She looked over the emaculate grounds with appreciation. “Who did you say owned this place?”

“No one you need to worry about, Gloria. If you’ll please wait in your car, I’ll take you inside when I’m ready.”

“I don’t have all day, Colm.”

“Gloria, go wait by the car.” I was losing patience. More, I was starting to panic. Caroline was tugging Sonya away from me back toward her car. “Sonya, please stop.” I tried to keep my voice as calm and tender as I could when I spoke to Sonya. “Talk to me.”

“Why didn’t you try to find her again?”

“What was the use? I had the papers. I’d given her a way to contact me. And I was gone most of the time with either my unit or something for El Diablo. We were married, but had spent exactly one night together that I didn’t remember. That was it, Sonya. She was a passing acquaintance with a legal tie to me, but it didn’t really matter because no one else did. You and I are too new for me to have worked out everything, but me and Gloria would have been one of the first things I took care of. Shotgun would have taken care of it like he did with Warlock when Warlock’s mother had married him and Hope without his knowledge. I would have explained all this to you right out of the gate if I’d had the chance.”

Sonya still looked uncertain, but I thought she might believe me. She still glanced at Gloria with more than a little resentment in her eyes. “Look, I’m not saying I don’t believe you, but this is something I need to think about.”

“Of course. Just promise me you’ll let me see you tomorrow.”

“You’re going to be busy tomorrow, Colm.” Gloria buffed her fingernails on the collar of her halter. “Your little girlfriend will have to wait a few days.”

“Tomorrow,” I said again, never taking my gaze from Sonya. “And you know I do not break my promises.”

She nodded, then sighed. “Yeah. OK. You can call or text, I guess.” She sounded so defeated I wanted to throttle Gloria, then take Sonya back to the Oasis and make love to her for the rest of the week. Sure, it was a fast turnaround for me, but I was a believer in listening to my instincts. I knew beyond any doubt, Sonya was meant to be mine.

“I’ll call you tonight after Gloria leaves. If you’re still awake, I can come get you. Otherwise, I’ll call you first thing in the morning. I’ll call until you answer and tell me you’re ready, then I’ll come get you. Both instances will involve talking with your father, too.”

“Don’t get upset when he doesn’t show up, sweetie,” Gloria said, looking down her nose at Sonya. “Because he won’t.”

“That’s it.” I’d had enough. “Prospect!” I yelled at the two men manning the gate. Normally I’d call them by name, but I needed them to know I meant business and they better not give me any fucking lip. “Escort Gloria outside the compound. Do not let her back in, no matter what she or anyone else says.”

“Colm! No! I’m telling you, you need to listen to me.”

“I’ll listen to you when I get Sonya taken care of and not one second before. You don’t get to order me around.”

“You’re my husband. You have to do what I say!”

I finally understood why she’d targeted a drunk military man. Because no man who was sober would have spent more than ten minutes in her company, let alone married

her skank ass, and a military man would mean he was away from her most of the time, which meant he might not insist on a divorce the second she opened her fucking mouth. That might have been a stretch, but I was betting it was close to the truth. And I still had no idea why she'd targeted me in the first fucking place.

"That's not how it works, Gloria. I was never the easy-going man you met in Vegas. You met the face I put on in public. No one tells me what to do. For any reason." Then I lifted my chin to indicate Sonya. "Except her. For Sonya, I'll do anything. Kill anybody . So keep that in mind when you're throwing around your little attitude. I'm not warning you again."

"Fine, Colm." I suspected Gloria kept calling me by my given name to remind Sonya she'd known me far longer. It was something the club girls did all the damned time once they found out our real names. "But don't say I didn't warn you." She hiked her thumb over her shoulder, giving me a little sneer. "I'll just wait by my car." The look she gave me as she rolled her eyes was one of supreme irritation.

When she was gone, I reached for Sonya again, but she retreated once more. "Not yet, Angel," she whispered. "I need to have a clear head. To think without being reminded of what I'd be giving up."

"Whatever is going on with Gloria, I'll help if I can and make it go away. In return, she'll agree to the divorce. I've done as much as she'd allow me to do, which was make sure she had money. Shotgun can get Wrath to write it up for a simple dissolution of marriage. No one pays anyone anything. No one gets anything. But I will keep you involved every step of the way. I will always keep my promises to you, Sonya. I will be over either tonight or first thing in the morning."

She searched my face for whatever she needed to find for a long time. When she finally nodded, I was able to breathe again. "OK. I can do that. But, Angel?"

“Yeah, baby.”

“Please don’t try to play me. I know you could. But my dad will see straight through you, and he will kill you. I’d rather you just tell me straight and let me decide what I’m comfortable with than to find out later you were stringing me along as your dirty little secret.”

“Never, baby. You have me. I’m yours. I have every intention of making it official both in the club and with the law.”

“I’ll reserve judgment, then. If what you said was true, I think I can understand. It was just bad luck she turned up before you could explain the situation and make it right. I know it’s not fair to doubt you since we only just... you know.” She cleared her throat and tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. “But I’m going to get Ripper to look into this. Given the circumstances, I’m not going to apologize until after he tells me what he found.”

“Honey, you don’t have to apologize. Never for protecting yourself.” I turned my head to look at Caroline. “Linnie, are you OK to take her home or do you need me to get Red to drop the two of you off back at Bane?”

“No. I think the car’s drivable. She scuffed the whole side and took the mirror off, but it’s fine.”

“I’ll talk to Red about fixing it. Will you stay with Sonya when you get home?”

“Of course.” Caroline’s gaze darted back to Gloria where she stood resting against the hood of her Maserati. I had no idea what the woman wanted, but I absolutely would not let her take up more of my time than strictly necessary. I wasn’t losing Sonya now that I’d claimed her. “Keep her away from Sonya.” Caroline was normally sweet and kind to everyone. But I could see more of Doc in her than she’d

admit to. Her father was the same way. Kind and caring until someone pissed him off.

“You have my word.”

I wanted to pull Sonya into my arms and tell her I’d make everything all right, but I couldn’t. The fact was, I’d slept with Sonya. She might have forced the issue, but I hadn’t wanted to stop. I was married. I wasn’t lying when I told Sonya I hadn’t thought about Gloria in years. I’d had no reason to. She was a one-night stand, or would have been if not for the whole Vegas wedding thing. I knew absolutely nothing about the person she was and had no desire to know.

“Good.” Caroline gave me a crisp nod before tugging Sonya to the car.

Sonya kept looking back at me like she was afraid she’d never see me again. Or maybe, if she did see me, like nothing would ever be the same again. I didn’t take my eyes from the little Mustang until Caroline had them out of sight.

When I turned my gaze to Gloria, I let her see a glimpse of the man she’d tricked into marrying her. I stalked toward her. I could only imagine what I looked like. I was pissed. Good and fucking pissed. Whatever happened next wasn’t going to be pleasant.

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Sonya

I wasn't nearly satisfied with Archangel's explanation. Seemed like he had played it stupid, and Archangel was most decidedly not stupid. I didn't think he was lying, but I needed more. I needed to know how anyone could let something like this go for so long. I'd been ready to leave to spare myself pain; now I wanted to stay because I was in so much pain. Maybe that made me a glutton for punishment, but I'd been infatuated with Archangel, literally, for years. I'd known I was too far gone to stay away from him after we'd had sex, but I'd hoped to pull back slightly and sort of regroup.

"Talk to me, Sonya." Linnie drove down the highway between Lake Worth and Palm Beach. She was taking every back road known to man, likely trying to draw out the drive as long as I needed her to.

I shook my head, swallowing back the lump of emotion stuck in my throat. I couldn't break down before I was safely inside my room at the clubhouse. I turned my head to try to express to Linnie I just wanted to go home, but the tears started coming and when I opened my mouth to speak, the only thing out of my mouth was a sob of despair.

After that, things were a little fuzzy. I cried so hard my head ached. It was hard to keep from screaming, but I wouldn't have done that to Linnie. Instead, I turned my face toward the window and hunched in on myself. Linnie would get me somewhere safe and likely call in reinforcements.

I'd somewhat calmed down when we pulled into the parking lot of a hotel. She

snagged her phone and my backpack from the back seat. “Ripper got us a suite. Two bedrooms. Two baths. Let’s get you inside, and I’ll go get some necessities and food. Pizza good?”

That was Linnie. She’d take care of everything. It was what she did. She might be less adventurous than me, but she was the fixer of our trio while Bella was the one trying to keep me and Caroline out of trouble.

I nodded numbly, allowing Linnie to guide me into the hotel and up to our suite. Linnie opened the door with her phone and, once inside, she guided me to the couch. She was gone for a moment but returned with a blanket and set it on the couch beside me.

“Let me help you get your shoes off.” She knelt and helped with my shoes and socks. I tugged up my knees and turned to lie with my back against the couch, curled up in a ball. Linnie draped the light blanket over me and sat on her knees in front of the couch. She brushed my hair gently from my face when it fell forward. “I’m so sorry, Sonya.” There were tears in Linnie’s eyes. She knew how much I was hurting because she knew how big a crush I had on Archangel.

“I didn’t even know his name.” It was an inane thing to say, but it was all I could come up with at the moment. My voice wavered and tears spilled from my eyes to streak down my cheeks and my temples where I lay on the couch.

“I know. Bella is on the way. I’m going to get some stuff. Do you want me to wait for Bella to get here?”

“No. Actually, why didn’t we go home?”

Linnie smiled, leaning in to kiss my forehead affectionately. “Because you’d hate it if anyone saw you cry. And I don’t think you’re quite ready for Thorn to kill Archangel

yet.”

“I’m so glad to have you as my friend, Caroline.”

She smiled at me. “I’m glad you’re my friend too, Sonya. We take care of each other.”

I nodded. “We’ll always take care of each other.”

“Yes. We will. Always.” She stood and leaned in to kiss the top of my head. “I’ll be back. Bella has the key on her phone so she can let herself in. “Pizza and beer?”

I managed a half-hearted smile. “Sounds perfect.”

As soon as the door clicked shut behind Linnie, my tears started flowing again. I had a small window of time to get this out before my best friends surrounded me and we set about helping me dull the pain. I clutched the blanket tightly around myself as I let the grief envelop me.

How could I have been so stupid? Of course, a man like Archangel would already be taken. I should have known better than to throw myself at him. He was quiet, but so much larger than life it was hard not to focus on him the second he entered a room. Now, I’d gone and really fallen for him, only to have my heart crushed. Hadn’t I given myself this talk already? Like, before I’d gone and fucked him? I’d been right. But no number of pep talks could have prepared me for him telling me he had a wife.

Once the harsh sobbing was finished and the immediate storm had passed, I pushed off the blanket and stood, heading to the bathroom. I washed my face and used the bathroom before washing my hands. When had I ever let myself feel this way over someone else’s actions? Not only that, but Archangel was right. He hadn’t had the opportunity to tell me because there’d been no reason. You know. Until there was.

Of course, my leaving had also contributed to the problem. So I got it. Didn't mean I was going to stop Ripper from digging up all the dirt he could. It was time to test Archangel's word not to lie to me. I wanted the information going into that conversation ahead of time.

My phone chimed from where Linnie had put it by the couch. I picked it up and looked.

Archangel: Can I come to you now ?

In a way, the early contact from Archangel immediately telling myself I needed to go into any conversation with Angel from a strong position told me I was making the right decision. And, God knew, it had been a very long time since I'd made the right decision. I knew what wrong decisions felt like.

Me: I'm not ready. You're going to have to give me a couple of days .

Archangel: I'll check with you every 12 hours .

Me: Why don't I message you ?

Archangel: Tried that once. This is where I ended up .

He had me there.

Me: Forget I asked that. Once a day will be fine .

Archangel: Every 12 hours .

Archangel: You don't have to answer every time. I'd appreciate it if you answered at least once a day though .

Me: That's fair.

Archangel: I will always answer if you reach out to me, Sonya. Do it .

As I set my phone back on the table, the tears started again. This time, it was a slow, steady trickle instead of the all-consuming grief I'd experienced before. I reached for tissue by the lamp and blew my nose and tossed the tissue in the trash can by the couch.

The whirr of the electronic lock signaled Bella's entrance. She gave me a consoling smile as she shut the door behind her.

"Hey, Sonya." She hurried to me, setting down a backpack beside the couch before giving me a hug. "I'm so sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry for. Just... piss-poor timing on everyone's part." I tried to give her a small smile, but I don't think I managed very well.

"Caroline said you hadn't told her what happened. Only called her to come get you so you could sneak out. She said you weren't upset when you called her, so what happened?"

I filled Bella in while we waited on Linnie to get back. She said she'd talk to Ripper, but I wanted to talk to him too. I also hoped Linnie told Ripper to keep this one close to the vest. I wasn't ready for my mother and father to know about any of this.

"Holy shit." Bella's eyes were wide with shock. "Holy shit! That's insane!"

"Right?"

She reached over and took my hand in hers. "It's going to be OK, Sonya. We'll figure

out what to do. If we need to prank Archangel, we can do that. I'm sure we can find something appropriately embarrassing."

Her comment got a genuine laugh from me. "Thanks, Bella. I don't know what I'd do without you and Linnie."

"You'll never have to find out. We're your ride or die chicks."

The door lock whirred again, and Caroline came in with two huge pizza boxes and dragging a cooler behind her.

"Good God, Linnie!" Bella jumped up and ran to our friend. She snagged the pizzas while Caroline continued with the cooler. "You could have told me to meet you in the lobby."

"I was good."

The normal conversation helped pull me out of the fog of hurt, and I knew I'd be OK. My friends would always help me when I was down. We were a team.

"I'm so fuckin' lucky to have you guys." I gave them a watery smile. "You're the best."

"Come here, Sonya." Linnie pulled me and Bella into a three-way hug. I let their love fill the holes in my heart. I recognized part of my heart would belong to Archangel for a long time to come, but these two women would be with me.

"You know," Bella said when we finally broke away and started dishing out the pizza. "If what he told you was true, Archangel and Gloria's marriage didn't sound like a real marriage but more of a paperwork technicality."

“Yeah,” I mumbled around a mouth full of pizza. “I’ve decided I’m not talking to Angel until I get some facts from Ripper’s investigation. Did you ask him, Linnie?”

She nodded. “I told him everything I heard and some of what you filled in for me that I’d missed before I got there. He says he’ll have some questions for you, and to call him when you’ve had a chance to rest.”

“It shouldn’t have hurt, but it did,” I whispered, setting down my slice and popping the top on a beer. I took a long pull before setting it down with a gasp. “I’ve had a crush on him forever. Then this happened.”

“OK, so fill in the rest of the gaps, Sonya.” Linnie took another bite, wiping her mouth. “What is ‘this’?”

I let my head fall back on my shoulders to look at the ceiling. “Well...”

“Yeah?” Linnie wasn’t going to let this go. I wasn’t exactly sure how I was going to say this, even to my best friends in the world.

With a sigh, I sat up and closed my eyes. “I slept with Archangel.”

I opened my eyes, needing to see their reactions. Both of them stared at me blankly, like they didn’t understand what I’d just said. They glanced at each other briefly before Bella cleared her throat.

“Um, by slept with, you mean...” She let the sentence hang, obviously wanting me to fill in the blank so they didn’t hurt or embarrass me. Yeah. I loved these girls!

“I fucked him, Bella. And, sweet baby Jesus in the manger, he fucked me too.”

There was a beat of silence before both of them dissolved into giggles. And just like

that, we were all laughing until my tears were tears of joy. No matter what happened next in my life, I'd always have these two. They'd have my back, and I'd have theirs.

Then I had a thought. I got up and snagged my phone before grabbing another slice of pizza and taking a huge bite off the end. I wiped my fingers, then picked my phone back up and drafted a text.

"Sending you guys something to proofread." I grinned as I hit send. Both their phones dinged simultaneously. As they read, Bella's eyes got wider and she made an "O" with her mouth, while Linnie's face split in a grin until she was laughing nearly as hard as she had been before.

"Oh, Lord..." Bella's face was a delicate shade of pink, but she was fighting a grin. "You realize if this works out like we all hope it will, you're gonna get the biggest spanking in the history of spankings. Right?"

I shrugged. "Maybe. Besides, I've not decided if I still want him or not."

Bella did smile then. "That's my girl!" She held out her fist for a bump and I obliged.

"I made a couple of minor adjustments and sent it to everyone in Bane and Reign I had phone numbers for, with a note to pass it on to everyone but the club whores." Linnie beamed. "Pure genius, Sonya. Pure fucking genius."

Archangel

“You’ve got a lot of nerve coming here, Gloria.” I’d never wanted to hit a woman in my life more than I wanted to hit the woman in front of me.

“I’m your wife, Colm.” She waved off my words like they were of no concern to her. Figured. “I have every right to be where you are.”

“Bullshit. What do you want? Why are you here?”

She stuck her chin up in a stubborn mien, but as I studied her, I could see she was mostly bluster and bravado. Underneath, the woman was uneasy. I held her gaze, never letting up. Then she huffed out a breath. “Fine. I need a place to stay.”

I just stared at her, unsure if I’d heard her correctly. She was going to have to explain, and I wasn’t asking her for the courtesy. I took a threatening step closer, and her eyes widened. It was easy to see the exact moment she realized she’d underestimated me, this club, and the entire fucking situation. Her unflappable demeanor shattered.

“No, wait!” She stumbled backward in those ridiculously high heels. She fell against the hood of her Maserati. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

“Just a suggestion, Gloria. When you trick someone into marrying you, you should really find out what kind of person you’re scamming. I gave you a pass in Vegas. I felt sorry for you and had no reason to think I’d be coming home alive. Not to mention killing someone right before you deploy to a place you’re likely to get killed is just really bad karma.”

“I’m sorry, OK?” She tried the pretty pout, but it did nothing to soften anything inside me. Especially after watching Sonya riding away from me as hard as that fucking Mustang would go. “I was in a bad financial spot. I overheard you and your buddies talking and seized the opportunity.”

“What opportunity? Why did you trick me into marrying you? You were never going to get rich. Hell, I don’t even remember fucking you. Did we even do that?” I was getting increasingly agitated. Mostly at my younger self.

She shrugged like it was really no big fucking deal. “I needed the money. Once I got myself out of my tight spot, I realized I had a nice little nest egg, so I saved the rest. Mainly because I didn’t need it anymore, but also because I felt bad about tricking you out of it. As to the fucking part, Colm, you were really way too fucking drunk to fuck, if you know what I mean.” She gave me an angry, embarrassed look. Did I have to reference our hooking up on what she’d made our wedding night? Not at all. Didn’t mean I wasn’t going to continue this confrontation. Just because I did my best to keep the peace didn’t mean I wouldn’t be passive aggressive.

“You could have contacted me anytime and given back the money, as well as freed me from a marriage neither of us wanted.”

“Who said I didn’t want it?” She looked almost as outraged as she had when I’d asked her if we’d fucked. “A strong man to protect and look out for me?” She gave me what she probably thought was a seductive smile. “I came back hoping you’d be my husband in truth as well as name.” Gloria reached out and slid her hands up my chest over my T-shirt and tried to wrap her arms around my neck. I grabbed her wrists -- hard -- and shoved her back into her car. She had to grasp the mirror to keep from falling and, because she’d already swiped Caroline’s Mustang with the driver’s side, the mirror fell off and Gloria landed on her knees on the pavement.

She sucked in a pained breath, and it took everything in me not to go to her

immediately. The poor prospect wasn't so disciplined. He lunged for her and helped her to her feet.

"You all right, ma'am?"

"No, I'm not all right!" she snapped, reaching for him to help her up. Of course, the guy did.

Ben was barely more than a kid. He'd been taken in at Black Reign when he was sixteen or seventeen and had begun prospecting immediately. More for him and his street brothers who'd been taken in with him to feel like they were contributing than for any real desire for them to patch in. El Diablo had started letting teens prospect in cases like Ben's, and the first thing he'd instilled in them was respect. Whether or not someone had earned it. When they were old enough to know the difference, they were to treat everyone they met with respect. No matter what. Both of his street brothers as well as Ben had taken to that lesson with gusto. Even if I'd dressed Gloria down and called her every derogatory name in the urban dictionary I could come up with, I doubt any of those three young men would have followed suit. It wasn't who they were. And they'd have called my ass out on my treatment of her, too.

"You should be careful in those heels, ma'am," Ben offered helpfully as he made sure she was steady on her feet before he let her go and stepped away from her. "At your age, you could easily break a hip." I never said the kid was smart.

"Excuse me?" Gloria clenched her hands into fists and took an angry step toward Ben. "What exactly does that mean?" She gave him a saccharine smile.

He blinked at her guilelessly. "Just that as you get older, your bones get fragile. I'm surprised you didn't break something when you fell this time." Ben looked so distressed I nearly missed the way his lips twitched as he fought a grin.

“I’m not that old!” Gloria screeched and struck out at poor Ben. The kid didn’t miss a beat but caught her swing with a level expression. He didn’t retain his hold, but let her go and stepped back again, ceding his ground but also letting her know he wouldn’t let her abuse him. Gloria gasped, turning to me immediately, cradling her wrist in her other hand, her lip trembling. “Did you see him? He crushed my wrist, Colm! Is this the kind of people you run with? You’d stand by while he hurt an innocent woman?”

I glanced at Ben who just grinned and shrugged. He was willing to take the fall. Kid was definitely smarter than he looked.

“If I say yes, will you be scared and go away?” I hadn’t meant to say that out loud, but I couldn’t take it back. Ben, who might not be smarter than he looked after all, laughed unapologetically. He didn’t even try to cough or anything to cover up his laughter.

“Sorry, Angel. I know it’s not polite. I swear I’ll get on my knees and apologize later, but I can’t help it right now.”

“Don’t worry, kid. I got your back with El Diablo.”

“Who’s El Diablo?” Gloria demanded. Probably more to bring my attention back to her. Granted, I didn’t know the woman. I might be married to her, but I’d spent less than twenty-four hours with her in total. Probably closer to twelve than twenty-four, and most of that time was in Vegas where I was passed out. I couldn’t even remember how I got back to the hotel room that night.

I took a breath to explain El Diablo, but before I could say anything, Ben’s street brother, Gray, answered for me. “He’s the Devil.” Simple. Straightforward. And the truth. It was right there in his name.

Gloria rolled her eyes. “Does he own this place? Seems really big.” I could practically hear the wheels turning in her mind. I almost wanted to see what happened if she tried to get her claws into El Diablo. It wasn’t the Devil she had to worry about. El Diablo’s wife, Jezebel, was just as deadly as her husband. And El Diablo was an assassin.

“He does,” Ben answered cheerfully. I was beginning to see I needed to keep a closer eye on this kid. “It’s really huge. Several buildings and all kinds of private homes for the club members who don’t want to stay at the clubhouse. El Diablo owns all of it.”

If we’d been in a cartoon, Gloria’s eyes would have lit up with solid gold dollar signs. “Ben...” I practically groaned his name. “You’re gonna cause so much fucking trouble.”

Kid shrugged. “Sorry, not sorry.”

“I demand to see El Diablo about my treatment!” Gloria had an almost gleeful look in her eyes.

“Ma’am,” Gray had come closer, putting himself between Gloria and everyone. He guided her back to her car with a hand in the middle of her back. “I think it might be best if you leave.”

“I can’t leave!” she yelled at the younger man. “I don’t have anywhere else to go!”

Ben, who it seemed loved stirring the shit, peered around Gray to grin and wave at her. “You got a nice vehicle, ma’am.”

Still eyeing trying to get around Gray, she straightened but stayed near the car where Gray had opened the door and was trying to urge her inside. “It was a gift! I don’t have to give it back!” The car was clearly a point of contention with her and whatever

had happened.

“Didn’t say you had to, ma’am,” the prospect continued. “Just... I mean, you could sell it. Get a more practical vehicle and probably a nice house.” The look of abject horror on Gloria’s face sealed her fate with me. But not before I got what I needed from her.

“Bring her and that fucking ostentatious car to the clubhouse. Keep her outside until I come for her. She tries to get past you, fuckin’ shoot her .” I didn’t wait to see what Gloria’s reaction was, but I was riding a fine line between keeping the peace and killing the bitch because she’d upset my woman. Except that it was more my fault than Gloria’s. Sort of.

No. You know what? Hell no. If I’d had an inkling of what my future held, I’d have taken care of this little problem with Gloria and told Sonya everything from the very beginning. Before I’d been in a situation to be alone with her. So this wasn’t my fault in the way it was handled. What was my fault was letting it go on this long.

I stomped inside the main clubhouse, not even bothering to calm myself. Bandit was behind the bar and gave me a chin lift when I shut the door. Took him a second to register the look on my face because when he did, he raised an eyebrow and picked up his phone. Probably to give Samson a heads-up there might be trouble.

“Shotgun!” I yelled as I went deeper into the structure toward the tech officer’s command center, as he loved calling it.

“Yo, Angel. In here,” Shotgun called from the room across from his office. Looked like he was expanding or something. Or could be he and his kids needed a bigger game room. Could go either way.

“I need you to look into someone. Right now.”

Shotgun gave me a curious look but was also all business. He led the way across the hall and sat at his desk, clicking a few keys on his keyboard. “Wassup?”

“Gloria Turcot.” I gave Shotgun her birthdate and social security number. “Look her up.”

He typed as he talked. “She the viper out front?”

“Yep.” I waited to explain further until Shotgun glanced at the initial results.

“The fuck? Colm Flynn? Gloria Turcot is... your wife ?” Shotgun shoved back from the desk and stood so fast he nearly knocked over his chair. “Your fuckin’ wife ? And you and Sonya --”

“Keep looking.” I pointed at the computer screen, interrupting him before he could give me the beating he thought I deserved. “You tell me what you find, then we’ll talk about my beatin’.”

Shotgun gave me a wary look. “How’d you know I was gonna throw you a beatin’?”

I gave him an exasperated look. “‘Cause it’s what I would fuckin’ do.”

He narrowed his gaze at me, but rolled his chair back over to his desk, sat, and got to work without questioning me further. It didn’t take him long to lean in closer to the monitors, that frown on his face deepening.

“The date on this marriage license is fifteen years ago.” Shotgun punched some buttons and clicked his mouse or whatever. “Two-thirds of your pay goes to her. Even what you make here.”

I tilted my head to the side. “Two-thirds?” I frowned. “I thought it was half.” I

scrubbed a hand over the back of my neck and groaned.

“Well, sixty-five percent. This started the next deposit after the license was issued. No other withdrawals other than normal bank fees. Only major withdrawals come every May and November. Women’s shelters in the spring, children’s charities in the winter.” He kept typing, clicking, and reading. Then he looked up at me again. “Have you even seen this woman since you married her?”

“Not after my first mission. Not until I came back. I’d been in deep fuckin’ cover. So it was a couple years before I even had the chance to contact her. To be honest, I kind of forgot about her. Yeah, there was a piece of paper with our names on it saying we were married, but she was a drunk hook-up for me. Only reminder I had of her was the missing part of my paycheck. I didn’t need money for myself. I lived the job. Anything I needed was provided for me. It’s why I give so much money away. I don’t need it, and there are plenty of people who do.” I sighed. “Anyway, the last time I talked to her was about four or five years ago. She was supposed to meet me to sign divorce papers, but never showed up. There was no indication anything was wrong, then El Diablo needed me in Argentina and I was gone another year.”

Shotgun stared at the screen for a long time. “So... what you’re saying is, you... forgot? You were married?”

“My life isn’t normal, Shotgun, and I don’t have to explain myself to you. What I want is simple. I want to not be married to her anymore. I don’t give a rat’s ass about the money, but she’s not a nice person and I don’t want to give her any more.”

“No, I can see that.” Shotgun squinted at the screen just about the time Eden, his wife, stormed into the room, an angry frown on her face.

“Archangel? Does that woman out there in the expensive-looking car belong to you? Because she says she does and that you’re expecting her to be waiting on you in the

common room to introduce her to El Diablo.” Eden huffed and stomped over to me, pointing a finger in my chest. I figured I was going to get yet another dressing down. Fuck my life.

“No,” I said, then shook my head. “Well, technically yes, but not for any longer than it takes Shotgun to make her not belong to me.”

“Already done,” Shotgun said, his fingers moving again. “Dissolving your marriage was way easier than fixing the money issue, but I can get Ripper to help. Breaking into a government system, while not out of my reach, isn’t something I want to do without backup.”

“Understood. The money’s not worth exposing you or the club. If it’s too risky, leave it. I’ll go through the old-fashioned way.”

“Nah, I can get it. Do you want anything taken out of her accounts? Any of the money she already has?”

“No. Just stop any more payments from going to her.”

“On it, Angel.”

“Never mind that.” Eden waved Shotgun off. “If that woman belongs to you, bring her inside. That way, when you spank her, no one will come to investigate.” Eden crossed her arms over her chest. “That one is rude. Teach her some manners.”

“Oh, I’m fixin’ to. Just not the kind of lesson she’s gonna want.”

“You need anything else from me?” Shotgun pulled out a lollipop and stuck it in his mouth.

“Yes. I want to know where Gloria’s been all this time. She indicated she had a rich man keeping her up and that they no longer have that sort of arrangement.”

“Yeah,” Shotgun grinned, talking around the sucker. “Looks like her boyfriend is some kind of oil billionaire. It’ll take me a while to find out everything -- they weren’t married, and therefore no legal documents. Give me a few hours and I should be able to find something.”

“Main thing I want to know is if the guy’s dangerous and likely to come looking for her, or would hurt her physically. I’m not taking care of the woman anymore, but I’m not a bastard either.” I took out my phone. “I need to talk to El Diablo,” I muttered.

“And, as luck would have it, Archangel, I’m here.” El Diablo, the president of Black Reign MC, stood at the door to Shotgun’s office and he didn’t look happy. “Come with me, please. My office is quieter.” His light English accent was deceptively calm.

“Good news travels fast, huh?” I sighed and stalked after my president and friend. El Diablo was the man I’d sworn to follow without question for the better part of my adult life. I’d met him in the middle of my first mission and I knew beyond any doubt, he was the only reason I survived. Now, he might be the reason I died right there.

“Indeed.” His clipped tone told me he was, indeed , pissed to shit and back.

He led the way, stepping into his office and behind his desk while I sprawled in the chair in front of him, scrubbing a hand over my face.

“Why don’t you start from the beginning.” El Diablo didn’t believe in wasting time. He wasn’t above toying with someone before the real interrogation began, but only for his own amusement. Not when the conversation was this important.

“Of which story? Because I have more than one you need to hear.”

“Start with the woman outside. Not how you being with her came about or all the circumstances surrounding the meet. That’s between you and Sonya. What I want to know is the plan for her and her involvement with you up to this point.”

“I haven’t seen or communicated in any way with her in at least four years. Probably closer to five. We were supposed to meet to sign papers to get our marriage dissolved, but she never showed.”

“Who had the papers? You or her?”

“I did. Still have them in my footlocker.”

“I’m assuming Shotgun is taking care of everything with regard to the divorce? Or are you staying with her now that she’s come home?”

“No, I’m not staying with her. I did everything in my power to make sure she was taken care of. I reached out to her once after she didn’t turn up. I was kind of concerned something had happened to her. All she said was that she was fine and would call me later. After that, nothing. I was too busy to worry about her after that. There was no expectation I’d ever want a woman of my own since my life was too damned dangerous to bring anyone else into it.”

“Then you met Sonya.”

“Then Sonya met me.” I wanted to make this perfectly clear. “I had no intention of ever going after her, El Diablo. The second I realized I saw her as more than a child, I kept as far away from her as I could.”

“Why?” There was no mistaking I didn’t have the option of not answering his

question.

“You know the life I’ve led. Why would I want to expose any woman to that kind of life?”

“Not what I want to know. Why would you believe you’d be exposing her to your past life?” I knew exactly where the bastard was going. He was going to make me admit my feelings for Sonya and to gauge how deep they ran.

“Because the first time I saw her after she came home from her first semester of college, I knew I’d never look at another woman the way I looked at Sonya. I couldn’t have her, and she’d never want me. Seeing her living her life and playing around with some hapless boy unable to resist her would have... not ended well. For the boy.”

“So, you’re telling me you stayed away from her because you wanted her to be yours. Am I understanding you correctly?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you agree to bring her to the Oasis when Thorn asked you to help her channel her energies and find her future?”

“What was I supposed to say, Liam?” I snapped angrily. ““Sorry, Thorn. I can’t help your daughter out because I’d rather be fuckin’ her’? I can imagine how fuckin’ well that’d go over.”

To my surprise, El Diablo laughed. Not a sinister laugh that said I was getting ready to die, but one of genuine humor. “Yes. I can see where that would have been a problem. So, what about you and Sonya?”

“She’s going to be mine.”

“Unless Thorn kills you first.”

“There’s that.”

El Diablo studied me for a long time, then sighed. “Only you could ever get so caught up in something you forgot you were married.” There were equal parts irritation and amusement in his expression. “But I suppose it never had an occasion to come up.”

“It did not. After she didn’t show to sign the papers and basically said don’t call me, I’ll call you, I didn’t try to contact her again. She knew how to find me, as evidenced by her showing up here for her bad timing award, and I had more important things to worry about.”

“Yes. As I recall you were hunting a particularly nasty drug lord.”

“Which is yet another reason I suppressed it all. I have no family, Liam. Only you and Black Reign. If the tie between Gloria and me had gotten out back then, she’d have been as good as dead.”

“And Sonya?”

I stood abruptly, glaring down at the man I considered a brother. “I’ll kill anyone who comes near her.”

El Diablo raised an eyebrow. “Don’t growl at me. I’d never hurt that girl.”

That’s when I realized I had bared my teeth and tensed to spring. At El Diablo. I cleared my throat and straightened. “Sorry.” I sat and gave him a sheepish grin. “I should say, I will protect her with my life and God help anyone who comes between

me and her.”

“I’d expect nothing less. Now. Next question. What are you doing to do about little Miss Sunshine out there?”

“Who the fuck let in that skank ho in the car compensating for her personality?”

“Ah, my sweet Jezebel.” El Diablo held out a hand to his wife. She flounced to him and plopped down in his lap. “You sound displeased.” He frowned at her, but winked at me when she spoke.

“The bitch is flirting with anything with a dick. Which, I could care less about. What I do mind is how she keeps asking for El Diablo. President of this club.”

“Me?”

“Oh, yes. Apparently, she wants to be the woman of the president because everyone else is beneath her.”

El Diablo gave me a look. “I think I’m beginning to see why you forgot her so completely.”

I shrugged. “Apparently, it was a defense mechanism. As to my plan, Shotgun is going through everything he can find. Given Eden had about as good an encounter with Gloria as you did, Jezebel, she’ll help him. He’s doing the divorce as well as redirecting my payment deposits. Once that’s done, he’s looking into her life and the man she was in a relationship with until recently.”

“How long does Shotgun think that’s gonna take?” Jezebel obviously wasn’t liking where this was going. The woman had good instincts.

“Not sure. Several hours at minimum, but I’m sure he’ll want a little more time than that. She can be confined to a room in the club whores’ wing. Lock her in. Give her food and some clean clothes. Though from the looks of her, I’m sure she’d bitch about anything we gave her.”

Jezebel huffed out a laugh. “Do you honestly care?”

I grinned. “Not in the least.”

There was a chime and a buzz as both El Diablo and Jezebel got messages. Jezebel pulled hers out and read the message before handing it to her husband. Neither of them gave anything away with their expression. I checked my phone in case I’d missed the thing buzzing. If Shotgun had sent out a club message, I needed to check. Nothing.

“Everything OK?” I asked, looking from El Diablo to his woman and back.

“Yep.” Jezebel gave me a friendly smile that made me entirely too uneasy. “Just got a couple of things to take care of.” She stood, then leaned down to kiss her husband. “I’ll start working on this now and meet you later tonight. I’m sure she’ll need all this sooner rather than later.”

“This is your forte, my dear. Spare no expense. Funding your good deeds is my forte.” He grinned at Jezebel and she gave him a merry laugh before kissing him once more, then hurrying out of the office, closing the door behind her.

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Sonya

I didn't make it the first twelve hours waiting on Archangel. Me and Linnie and Bella had pizza and beer until we were stuffed, then passed out for a couple of hours. They left right at dark at my insistence.

"There's no use you guys staying here when you could be at home in your own bed. I'll have Ripper send me the bill because I think I want to chill here for another day."

"Stay as long as you like. You know your dad won't mind."

"I just want to be away from both clubs for a few hours so I can think without everyone wanting to know what happened. That'll come soon enough. I need to have time to process."

"You sure you don't want one of us to stay with you, Sonya?" Bella gripped my hand in hers. "I don't mind."

"I appreciate it, Bella, but I'm good. Really. Besides, you guys have work to do." We all three burst into giggles again.

"God, I'm full," Linnie groaned. "Got Lock and Poison headed here with a cage. One will drive my car home and the other will take us home. He might have brought someone with them to get Bella's car too, but I'm not sure." She shrugged. "Someone'll get it for her."

"You guys are the best," I said again. "I know I said it before, but I mean it."

“You feel better?” Bella gave me a hopeful look.

I thought about my answer before nodding. “Yeah. I actually do feel better. I also realize you were right, Bella.”

“Oh?” Her eyes widened in surprise. “Er, I mean, of course, I’m right. But what was I right about this time?”

I laughed, pulling my friend into my arms for a hug. “About Archangel.” I pulled back and smiled at them both. “I might have overreacted just a touch.” I tried to grin, but I knew my expression looked as forced as it was.

“You were protecting yourself,” Bella said softly. “You weren’t leaving because you didn’t want him. You were leaving because you wanted him too much. When that woman showed up... Well, that was the feeling you were trying to avoid. By leaving before he could convince you to stay.” Of course, Bella knew what I was feeling. Felt like the three of us had been friends forever.

“I’m still going to look at what Ripper finds before I talk with Archangel. But I’m not going to assume the worst. He told me what happened, and I believe him. His next actions will tell me all I need to know.”

Linnie nodded. “I think that’s a good assessment. Take all the time you need. I’ll call you tomorrow and bring food.”

“Make it tomorrow evening. I’m going to try some of that meditation shit Angel was trying to teach me.”

“Seriously?” Linnie traded a look with Bella. “She’s got it pretty bad, Bella.”

“Meditation? Who are you and what did you do with Sonya?”

“Shut up.” I grinned. “I’m going to be all right. In fact, now that I’ve decided to grow the fuck up and stop acting like a sulking teenager, I feel better about the whole situation.”

“You just tell us what you need and we’ll make it happen. If that means we drag Archangel here by his hair, that’s what we’ll do.” Bella was the sweet one, but she was also fierce as a dragon when someone messed with her family.

“I got this, Bella. Thank you, guys, so much.” We group hugged. “You’re the best friends ever.”

“We love you, Sonya. You need us, you call or text. We’ll come with reinforcements.”

“I will, Linnie.”

After they’d gone, I’d soaked in the jetted tub for the better part of an hour. Thinking. Meditating. Trying to find my inner peace like Archangel had taught me. I was surprised, but I had a measure of success. I managed to float in a sea of calm until my mind was quiet and I could find my inner strength once again. The first thought when I came back to the here and now was that Archangel would be proud of me. That was when I realized I was torturing us both by not talking with him.

I got out of the bath and dried off, wrapping a towel around myself. My hair was still up in a messy bun to keep it out of the water so I didn’t have to dry it. I picked up my phone and opened my texting app. I stared at Archangel’s name for a long moment before opening the last messages we’d traded. I took another unsteady breath and texted him with shaking fingers.

Me: Archangel? Are you up ?

Immediately, the dots of an incoming text flashed.

Archangel: Always .

Crap. The guy was smooth. I couldn't help but smile. The butterflies in my stomach made me shiver.

Me: If you're not busy, would you like to talk ?

Archangel: When and where ?

Me: The girls got me a suite in Palm Beach. You could come here whenever you have time. I'll share the key with you on the app .

There was a whirr as the door to the room opened and Archangel stepped inside. He put the Do Not Disturb sign on the door, then shut it, turning the lock as well as closing the safety latch.

"Angel!" I jumped up and took a couple reflexive steps back. "You asshole! You scared me to death!" I tried to be mad. I really did. But all I felt was relief. I grinned and threw myself at him, wrapping my arms and legs around him.

He chuckled. "Ah, baby. I missed you."

"Were you sitting outside my door? That's a little fuckin' creepy." I laughed. Because he was waiting for me to call him. He was watching over me. And he respected my privacy by not coming in before I invited him. Yeah. I was a goner on this man.

"Like I said. I missed you."

“I was only gone a few hours.”

“Way the fuck too long.” He hugged me as hard as I hugged him. “Though I confess I hadn’t expected this kind of greeting.”

I pulled back to grab him and kiss him all over his face. He laughed until our lips finally met.

Archangel responded to my eager kisses with equal passion, his hands sliding down to cup my towel-clad bottom as he held me against him. Our lips moved together hungrily, tongues tangling. I felt like I was starved for a taste of him. Angel had given me a small bite and I wanted the whole fucking pie.

When we broke apart, both of us were breathing heavily. Archangel rested his forehead against mine. “I’m so sorry, Sonya. I don’t care if it was my fault or not. I will take full responsibility and beg your forgiveness and mean every fucking word. Just please let me explain.”

“It’s OK. I swear. I just needed a bit to calm down. I’m sorry for making an idiot of myself in front of... uh... your...”

“Ex -wife. Emphasis on the ex .” He slid me a sheepish grin. “Shotgun fixed that first thing. She’s still at the Black Reign compound because I want to make sure whoever she was with before isn’t still a threat to her. While there’s no way I’m continuing a relationship with her, if she’s on the run from someone, I can’t kick her out until I’m sure she’s not in danger.”

“Nor would I expect you to.” I smiled up at him, still cupping his face in my hands. “You’re not that kind of man. You’re a protector. A fixer. You can’t go against your nature. Not like that.”

He pulled me close again, this time turning to sit on the bed. My knees were beside his hips and I clung to him. He sighed and so did I, both of us content to just sit there and hold each other.

When he finally pushed me away from him enough to look at me, he brushed a few strands from my forehead and tucked them behind my ear. “I fucked this up to hell and back. I’ll tell you everything you want to know. But I swear to you, I don’t remember half of what happened that night.”

“I think you explained that part well enough. What I want to know most is what happens from here? You said she was now your ex-wife, but that she was staying at Black Reign until you knew she was safe. What will your obligation be to her?”

“Nothing.” His answer was immediate and firm. “El Diablo said Jezebel was taking care of her. If she wants to stay, they’ll find work for her. If not, they’ll settle her somewhere else if she needs help.”

“Like financial help? I thought she had all kinds of money.”

“No financial help. She’s got all the money she’s getting from me or the club. But if she needs help moving her stuff, the prospects will help her out.”

“No one is that much of a saint, Angel. While I think it’s admirable and I wouldn’t want it any other way, why would you do that after she deceived you?”

He moved us farther onto the bed and rolled over so he laid on top of me. I loved the tender smile he gave me. He looked... younger, or something. Maybe carefree? Contented? Whatever he was feeling certainly agreed with him and I wanted to always see that expression on his face when he looked at me.

“When I first met El Diablo, he told me something I took to heart and I try my best to

live by. He said to treat everyone with respect, even if they hadn't earned it. He said, when you understand the difference between granting respect to someone you don't know and making someone you do know earn your respect, then you had the right to choose which applied. If you aren't sure, you err on the side of caution. It costs nothing to be nice. You might make an ally."

"Sounds like something he'd say." I smiled up at him.

"So I'm going to assume she thought she had a good reason for what she did. To be honest, I don't care why she thought tricking someone into marrying her was a good idea. All I care about is getting that marriage dissolved -- which it has been -- and getting back to figuring out us."

"Speaking of us. What exactly do you see happening here? How do we end up?"

"I want you to be my old lady. I want to spend the rest of my life making you happy. I see us ending up very old, very wrinkled, and very happy in a beach house surrounded by grandkids and great-grandkids. And before you tell me how much older I am than you, I plan on living to be at least a hundred and twenty."

I chuckled, shaking my head. "You're so full of shit."

"Am not." He leaned down to kiss me again, tenderly. Gently. With so much love it made my heart clench. "What I am, is so in love with you, I'll defy any god to take me from you before I'm ready." He spoke so fiercely, I actually believed he could make good on his word.

Then I registered everything he'd said. "You're... in love with me?" The words were barely above a whisper.

"Yeah, baby. I love you. With everything that I am."

“Not because of, you know, because we had sex?”

“Sonya, honey. I try to be an honorable man in everything I do. That means I don’t lie. Especially not to people I love. I would most certainly make you my old lady to do right by you. But I will never lie to you about my feelings for you. And I’d never tell you I loved you if I didn’t mean it.”

“You didn’t wake up after we had sex and suddenly decide you loved me. I won’t believe that.” It hurt. Not because I thought he was lying. Because I was hoping like fuck he wasn’t. I wanted this so bad! I wanted Archangel for my own so no one else could have him but me. I wanted to ride behind his bike and for him to be proud to have me with him. Because I’d be damned proud to be with him.

He leaned in once more to place a lingering kiss on my lips. “Sonya, when you came home after your first semester of college, I realized you were the most beautiful woman I’d ever imagined. Not only that, you were wicked smart and sexy as fuck.” He leaned in again to nip at my neck, making me squeal. “I wasn’t in love with you then. But I had a healthy dose of lust aimed squarely at you. No. I fell in love with you when you were telling me about your life in Bane and how you loved everything about living there, even with your father breathing down your neck. You were so passionate and free spirited, you made me feel young again. I remembered a time before I met El Diablo when there was nothing to look forward to but death in battle and wished I’d met you then. Because, in those precious moments when you spoke to me from your heart, I knew you’d have been the person I looked forward to coming home to. And my life would likely have been much, much different.”

“Angel.” I stroked his beard gently, like I might pet a cat. “I’ve loved you since I was a teenager. There’s no other man I’ve ever wanted to be with. So I’m all in with this. You’re my fantasy. My dream.”

“You have me, honey. Everything I am.”

“You think you’ll be able to handle girls’ weekend?”

He stilled where he’d been kissing my palm and narrowed his eyes at me. “What’s girls’ weekend?”

“Well, you picked me up from one.” I gave him a bright smile. “One random weekend a month, we go to Moore Haven to pull pranks. Just to keep Lawdawg on his toes.”

“That’s your girls’ weekend?”

“Yep.”

Then he grinned down at me. “Yeah. I can handle girls’ weekend.”

“Good. Because I will fight for my right to party.”

He did laugh then. Leaning in once again to kiss me. “Yeah, baby. You do. You create havoc, I’ll keep the fuzz off your back.”

“Sounds like the best of plans. But I have a better one.”

“Oh?” He kissed me again. “What’s that?”

I pulled him close, so my lips were right at his ear. “I want you to fuck me until I beg for mercy. Then I want you to fuck me some more.”

“Christ,” he swore, sucking at the delicate skin of my neck. The little sting told me he’d definitely left a mark. Good. I liked him staking a claim. “You’re gonna keep me on my toes, aren’t you?”

“I’d rather keep your dick in my pussy. Think you can manage that?”

“Oh, little witch. You’re playing with fire.”

I turned my head and bit his ear with a sharp nip of my teeth. “ Then burn me !”

Archangel growled low in his throat, a primal sound that sent shivers down my spine. In one swift motion, he yanked the towel from me, taking it with him as he stood. His eyes roamed hungrily over my naked body as he quickly shed his own clothes.

“You want to burn, baby?” he rasped, settling his weight between my thighs. “I’ll give you a fuckin’ inferno.”

He took my lips in a searing kiss as he thrust inside me in one smooth stroke. I cried out at the delicious stretch, digging my nails into his shoulders. Archangel set a punishing pace, driving into me with powerful strokes that had the headboard slamming against the wall.

“Oh god, Angel!” I gasped, wrapping my legs around his waist to pull him deeper. “Yes! Just like that!”

Archangel groaned, burying his face against my neck as he pounded into me relentlessly. His teeth grazed my skin, sending electric shocks of pleasure through my body. I arched up to meet his thrusts, our bodies moving together perfectly.

“Fuck, Sonya,” he rasped. “You feel so Goddamned good! So fuckin’ tight and wet!”

Arousal flooded me and made my pussy weep for him. I loved how vocal he was during sex, how he told me exactly what I did to him. I loved his dirty fantasies and the way he kept me on edge wondering what he’d say or do next.

“Only for you. Only for you!”

“That’s right, baby.” He grunted with his efforts as he fucked me harder, giving me everything he had. “And you’re gonna take all I have to give you like a good girl, aren’t you?”

“Yes! Fuck me, Angel. Fuck me!”

He shifted slightly, hitting the perfect spot inside me with each stroke. My orgasm built rapidly, tension coiling around my insides so I wanted to erupt to release the pressure. “Come for me,” he demanded. “Let me feel you come on my cock.”

His words pushed me over the edge. I screamed his name, embracing the pleasure he gave me and demanding more. Archangel grunted and buried his face in the pillow beside me and shouted into the fabric. Hot seed erupted inside my pussy, filling me with him.

And then it hit me. “Uh, Angel?”

“Yeah, baby.” He was breathing as hard as I was, his heavy weight on top of me the most comforting peace I’d ever had. I didn’t care what had just happened. All I wanted to do was lie like this for hours and hours.

“Hmm...”

He chuckled. “That sounded like a contented woman.”

“Yeah,” I said, stretching. I tightened my legs around him so he knew not to move.

“But I want to know what you were going to say.”

“Yeah...” I drew out the word a little. “We... uh... you know. Didn’t use...”

“Protection?”

“Yeah. That.”

I didn’t expect him to laugh, but he did. He laughed and kissed the side of my neck. Even when I tried to push him off me in a fit of temper, he still kissed me, his cock staying right where it was, buried deep inside my pussy.

“It’s not funny, Angel!”

“Honey, I’m not laughing about that. I’m laughing because you just baited me into hard, rough sex all while yelling at me to fuck you, and you couldn’t even say the word condom.”

“Shut up.”

He continued to chuckle, and I couldn’t help but laugh with him. One thing led to another, and I found myself getting railed from behind. And no. He didn’t use a condom that time either, and I wasn’t at all torn up about it. I knew this was his way of solidifying his claim on me.

“If you’re wondering, no. I’ve never come inside a woman intentionally without a condom. I can’t speak to Gloria since I have no idea if we had sex or not, but I knew when I woke up with my dick in your mouth that morning I was never going to tolerate a barrier between us. You’re mine and I’m not letting you go. I will use everything I can to make unbreakable ties between us because you are everything to me, Sonya.”

“I’m yours, Angel,” she whispered. “All yours. Forever.”

“Say it again,” he demanded hoarsely.

“I’m yours. Only yours, Angel. Always.”

Archangel

For the first time in my life, I was at total peace. Me and Sonya spent the night and the next day making love, talking, and getting to know each other. I'd slept with her held tightly in my arms and woke with her lips around my cock, sucking me for all she was worth. Not even going to try to deny I'd love to get used to waking up to that every fucking morning.

Now, she was on the back of my bike and we were headed to Salvation's Bane. Not only did she need to get her stuff, but I had to have a come-to-Jesus meeting with Thorn. President of Salvation's Bane. Sonya's father. I was hoping to be able to ride my bike back to Black Reign after the beating Thorn was likely to give me, but I had Fury at the ready in case I needed some help.

We pulled through the gate. The prospects each threw up a hand in greeting and waved us on toward their clubhouse. The main building was a converted firehouse. There were rooms for guests and most of the club girls were housed there, as well as some offices. Thorn's office was here.

I parked the bike and Sonya hopped off, bouncing with excitement as Caroline and Bella both met her at the door. The three embraced and I couldn't help but smile. I strolled toward the girls and the entrance to the clubhouse. Sonya looked back at me with the happiest smile I'd ever seen from her. And, by God, the woman was so fucking beautiful it hurt.

"Angel!" Mariana, Sonya's mother and Thorn's wife, called out to me from across the room. She had a lovely smile on her face as she greeted me happily and I could

see the resemblance between her and Sonya. “Come in! Thorn’s in his office. He said you’d be coming to talk to him.” She gestured for me to come with her. The smile seemed genuine, which was confusing as shit. Also, I hadn’t talked to Thorn yet or even reached out to him. Not because I didn’t want to tell him but because I wasn’t sure how I was going to word this. So, how did he know I was coming?

Mariana opened the door to Thorn’s office and ushered me inside. “Would you guys like something to drink?” She asked the question like she didn’t have a care in the world. I never expected Thorn wouldn’t have heard about me and Sonya by now. After the incident at the front gate of Black Reign, all of Reign knew. Someone would have passed it to Thorn. Probably El Diablo himself.

“Get me a beer, if you don’t mind, sweetheart.” Thorn smiled up at his wife. “Angel, we got anything you want.”

“Would it be too much trouble to ask for ice water?” I asked as I gave Mariana a polite smile.

“Of course not. You sure you don’t want a beer?” Her smile was polite and I didn’t sense a trap, so I tried not to automatically assume she was making a sly reference to the incident with Gloria and how we’d come to be married.

“No thank you, ma’am. I quit drinking a long time ago.” I kept my smile serene and in place. I didn’t know how much information she had, and just because Thorn knew didn’t mean Mariana did.

“I admire anyone who’s able to break from unhealthy habits. It shows strength of character.”

I dipped my head to her. “Thank you.”

“I’ll be right back. Anything else, Thorn?”

“No, honey.”

I thought the wait for Mariana to return would be awkward, but Thorn chatted cheerfully about Ripper’s triplets and how fast they were growing up. Ripper and his wife, Emmanuelle, had their hands full with the three girls and it amused Thorn to no end.

Mariana returned with the drinks, then left and closed the door behind her. I took a pull of my water before carefully sitting it on the edge of Thorn’s desk.

“Tell me how Sonya’s doing. I wasn’t expecting her home for another couple of days.”

I tried not to wince. “Momma always said it’s best to just rip the Band-Aid off. Peeling it off slowly prolongs the torture.”

Thorn chuckled. “That’s not cryptic or anything.” He leaned back, putting his feet on his desk and crossing them at the ankles. “What’s going on?”

“I’m in love with your daughter, Thorn. I’m going to make her my old lady.” I waited for the explosion. When none came, I continued. “She knows that’s my intention and has accepted my claim on her.” Still nothing. I was getting nervous. Thorn wasn’t that much older than me, but I felt like a naughty child being guilted into confessing his every transgression. “I’d like your blessing for this, Thorn. I love Sonya with my whole being, but she’s still your daughter. I won’t go against your wishes.”

“For Christ’s sake, Angel. Why the fuck do you think I sent her to you in the first Goddamned place?”

“I... uh, what?” My brain was pulling a four-oh-four on this one.

“She’s had a crush on you since she was sixteen! Not a normal crush either. I

watched her weigh your pros and cons. She might not have realized what she was doing, but she studied you like she wanted to make damned sure you were worthy of her. I knew before she went to college you would be the only man she'd ever accept. It was you or nobody, and my baby girl isn't gonna live her life by herself."

"Are you fuckin' kiddin' me right now?" I scowled. I stood and paced across the room, unable to process what the fuck just happened. Also, I was really glad I'd hadn't jumped to conclusions with Mariana before.

"Oh, come on, Angel. You're not mad. Well, other than at yourself for sweating bullets when you didn't have to."

"I was ready to take my beatin' from you, Thorn. Now, you might just have to take your beatin' from me."

Thorn laughed, almost falling out of his chair. "And before you start pitchin' a fit over you being married, I knew. I had Ripper dig up everything on you there was before I sent Sonya to you. So I contacted Gloria pretending to be the IRS and asked about her marital status." The man looked entirely too smug. "My guess is, the reminder of you sent her your way. She had all the money in the world until her boyfriend found his next mistress."

That got me thinking. "She forgot she was married same as me. Hell, she forgot all about me and the money. Like you said, she had all the money in the world until he cut her loose. She probably hadn't thought about me since the last time we talked."

"If you're in too much trouble over that with Sonya, I'll vouch for you. The whole scene at Black Reign as it was described to me would never have happened if I hadn't been digging into your past."

"You coulda just asked." I glared at him.

The bastard grinned. “Sure. But what fun would that have been?”

We had an early supper at Salvation’s Bane. Everyone laughed at my expense, and Sonya laughed until she had tears rolling down her cheeks and was clutching her stomach. So were all the other women. Especially when Thorn ratted me out with a video complete with very clear audio of the meeting in his office.

Yeah. This was my life now.

It was late afternoon when we rolled into the Black Reign compound. Everyone we met waved and called out to us. Sonya waved back and laughed. I got an itch between my shoulder blades. I couldn’t put my finger on the actual problem, but something was off. I began to see almost gleeful enthusiasm in the greetings called out from everyone we met. And I mean everyone. Seemed like every adult in the compound came out of the woodwork to greet us.

By the time I rolled into my parking spot in front of the entrance to the Oasis, there were several bikes pulling in behind me, followed by dozens more people on foot.

“What the fuck?” Instinctively, I pulled Sonya to me, wrapping both arms around her protectively.

“Relax, Captain Caveman.” She leaned up to brush a kiss over my lower lip. “They’re just being friendly.”

“Honey, no one in this compound has ever been this happy to see me.”

“Just coming by to welcome Sonya.” Jezebel smiled and reached for Sonya. Sonya went willingly, pulling away from me when I didn’t really want her to. “Why don’t you go unlock your Oasis, and we’ll all pitch in to help you move Sonya’s stuff into your home.”

I smelled a trap. It stank like three-day-old shit, but I could not see it. Instead of questioning Jezebel further, I nodded and went the few steps to my sanctuary to open the gate. This was the place I felt most at peace. I shared it with people from time to time, to help them find the same peace I'd found. It was also the place stacked three mountains high with... sex toys.

There was silence as I stared in disbelief at what I was seeing.

“Um, wow, bruh.” That had to be one of the younger prospects. “It’s always the quiet ones.”

Then the dam burst. Everyone laughed. The guys clapped me on the back, enjoying seeing me uncomfortable. Oh, it wasn’t the sex toys. I wasn’t a fucking stick in the mud. It was the fact two fucking clubs had got something this big over on me. And I knew without a doubt who had orchestrated the whole thing.

“When this is over, your ass is toast, woman.”

“Imma hold you to that.”

“Wench.”

I kissed my woman while everyone congratulated us and helped move Sonya’s things into my house. It was small, but I’d already put in an order to expand my house. I thought we could manage until the new section was complete.

Someone started bringing food, and more someones brought folding tables and chairs. Next thing I knew we were having an impromptu weenie roast. This was one of many reasons I loved club life. I knew Sonya loved it too.

“Hey, Angel!” Shotgun came trotting over to me. I’d seen him earlier in the evening, but he’d disappeared for a while. “Good news. Gloria’s in no danger at all from

anyone. She never was. No clue why she targeted you other than to get away with it. I believe you were right when you told me earlier you thought she'd completely forgotten about you until Thorn faked that IRS call to her. You could question her if you want. Other than that, there's no reason she needs to stay here."

"Send her on her way, then. Give her any help she needs as long as it doesn't involve money. I'm talking moving shit or whatever. She doesn't get a dime of this club's money. You are only obligated to drop shit off where she says drop it off. No carrying a six-hundred-pound recliner up four flights of stairs. She can take it from there."

"I don't think she has much other than her car and what's in her bank account." Shotgun grinned. "Too bad she tore the side off the car."

"I should see if you'd ask Red and Rosanna at Bane to fix it and send me the bill, but I'm really not feeling that generous. It was her damned fault and she has enough money to fix it, or she could sell it as is."

"You've done more than you should have." Jezebel walked over to us with a smile, arm in arm with Sonya. "She has the means. Don't reward her bad behavior."

"Cut her loose," I said without hesitation. "She'll be fine."

"You want to talk to her first?" Shotgun asked.

"What's the point? If it mattered now, it would have mattered years ago. We're no longer married. That's the only thing I needed from her."

"Good plan." Shotgun clapped me on the shoulder. "I'll escort her outside the gate."

"Well, now that's settled," Jezebel gave me a brief hug. "We'll be leaving. Be good. There's a year's worth of lube under the bathroom sink. Don't forget to wash

everything before using it. Bye now.” Jezebel waved a cheerful goodbye as El Diablo laughed delightedly as they walked away holding hands.

I put my arm around Sonya as we waved to the last of our friends as they left. “I owe you a spanking,” I said, still waving.

“Yep,” she agreed, still waving too.

“Thought I saw some bondage equipment near the top of one of those mounds of sex toys.” I glanced at her out of the corner of my eye.

“Yep. Middle pile. Jammed between a sex swing and a few dildos.” She didn’t hesitate with her reply.

“I’ll get a stepladder.”

“Good idea. If you see a strap-on, grab it, will ya?”

“Yeah, that’s not happening.”

“Oh, really?” God, I loved that wicked gleam in her eyes. It was a look that said I was well and truly fucked. OK, so not physically. At least, I didn’t think so. Then I remembered how this whole situation started.

“You know what, forget I said that.”

The grin she threw back my way said her memory was perfect.

As I looked to my future, wondering if I’d always have the peace I enjoyed now, I was sure of two things. First, whatever my future held, it would be with this woman at my side. And second, life would never be dull. I looked forward to every blistering second of what was to come.