



Bee (Eve's Fury MC #7)

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Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: Captured

I cant be tamed.

I tried that before and it didnt end well for me.

Now I live wild and free, doing what I please, how I pleasewith who I please.

Eves Fury have never worked with Rye before.

I also never expected our few wild nights to have left a lasting impression on him.

He wants more than I can give. He wants all of me.

Deep down I long for a real connection but will trusting Rye force me to become a better woman or will I end up heartbroken just like before?

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Bee

I will not cry.

The flickering light in the corner of the cheap grungy motel room only added to my internal rage. All I want to do is pick up the lamp and smash it across Cage's face. That way I'd be rid of two problems at once.

The light wouldn't be flickering and the man I'd been fucking for the past few weeks wouldn't be standing here telling me that he was conveniently done with our so called arrangement.

"You can't be serious right now? What the hell do you mean this is over? What happened?" I fist my hands at my side and glare at him.

"Don't pretend like we didn't have an expiration date on this thing between us." Cage shrugged.

"No, I'm not going to accept that. Something else is going on. Tell me what it is Cage. Did someone say something to you?" I take a step forward hoping to see even a slither of hope in the man's eyes. When he looks back up at me all I see is resignation and annoyance.

It stings.

My sister and I only recently escaped from the clutches of our captor. We'd been nothing more than prostitutes for him, nothing more than a commodity to be traded and sold. We were promised freedoms and a new life when we came to the states but it was all a lie.

We thought we'd have jobs as house cleaners or Au Pairs but the only job we had secured when we got here was one that involved us keeping our legs open and laying on our backs.

Escaping from that hell hole was the hardest thing I'd ever done or at least I thought it was until tonight. Now it feels like my heart is being ripped out of my chest all over again.

My sister told me not to get my hopes up. Told me that it was a dumb idea to get involved with Cage, but with just one look at him, I knew that he was different. Sure, we made a deal at the very beginning that what we had going on would be nothing serious. I promised him that I wouldn't get my feelings involved, that it was just sex, but that was before he reached into my soul and started pulling parts out of me that I'd thought were dead long ago.

He gave me a chance at a new life. At least that's what I thought was happening.

My eyes follow his hands as he fastens the buckle on his pants and reaches for his shirt. I lunge forward and grab it out of his reach before he can do that. There's no way I'm going to let him just walk out of here. Not without some form of explanation.

“I didn’t take you to be a tantrum thrower. You’re showing your age, Bee.”

My eyes go wide. Did he really think this was a game? I know he feels something for me, something more than what he's letting on right now.

"No, you're going to talk to me about this. What went wrong?" My voice breaks and I swallow down a frog that's lodged itself in my throat. I'm not going to cry. I promised myself the minute I was free that I wouldn't cry. I can't let Cage break me.

"Nothing."

"That's bullshit! Something happened? Stop fucking with me, Cage!" I yell at him no longer able to control my fury.

When he gives me that deadpan look I lose it. I raise my fist and hit him in the chest as hard as it can. He barely flinches. I pummel his chest and arms over and over determined to make him explain why he'd do this to me.

For the life of me I can't figure out why all I seem to be worth to anyone is someone to fuck and leave. What is so wrong with me that makes me so unlovable.

"Stop making this into something that isn't."

"You did this! You spend all this time with me. We go on dates and you take care of me and now all of sudden you want to just end it! What did you think was going to happen? You think I'm being crazy? Well I don't care, you drove me to this." My eyelids sting. I have to look up to keep the tears that are threatening to spill from falling down my face.

No crying.

"I'm sorry, Bee."

"Sorry? You're breaking my heart Cage. There's more to us and you know it. Just tell me what I did wrong." Even I can't deny how defeated I am.

When I first met Cage at the Broken Brew bar I wasn't looking for anything. In fact, I was adamant that I never wanted to be with another man. Never wanted to give myself to someone that could hurt me. I'd done all that trusting the wrong person back in my home country. I wanted to be free and be safe.

Cage was the one who pursued me. He was the one he made me open up about my past and even seemed like he was angry enough to do something about it. My sister warned me against him but the more I spent time with Cage the more I knew he wasn't the same type of man either of us had grown used to.

Cage was different. He's a real stand up guy. Not to mention he's absolutely gorgeous and the sex was out of this world. Before I'd met him I'd never had a man give me an orgasm.

Cage made sure I could barely get out of my bed my legs had been so weak from all the loving he gave me. The great part about it was he didn't even have to be told. I didn't have to ask him to please me, it seemed like it was all he wanted to do.

I know I shouldn't have let my heart get mixed in to what we have going on but I couldn't stop myself. He was the type of man I thought I wanted. The type of man who was going to show me that not all guys were the same.

Turns out he's exactly like everyone else and I'm nothing more than just a stupid little girl.

"Just don't leave. Give us another day. That's all I'm asking for." My shoulders tremble as I cringe at the sound of me begging for him to stay. How did it come down to this.

"I can't. I just can't, Bee."

The desperation and want I feel inside me quickly turns into anger. Once again I'm up on my feet. If he won't even pretend to care about me I can treat him like an enemy. "You fucking coward." I screech as I lunge in his direction and start beating on him again. "I hate you! I hate everything about you!" I'm losing my shit and I know it but I can't stop myself. The emotions with being discarded once again have me going insane.

"Stop!"

Cage shoves me back off him and this time when my bottom hits the bed I roll backwards and grab for that damn flickering light. The small lamp is hurling through the air before I can stop myself. My aim is true but Cage's reflexes are better. He lifts his arm at the last second and lamp strikes his forearm instead of his head like I wanted it to.

The fact that I missed my target only makes me more incensed. Jumping up and over the bed like a banshee, I rush him but this time I can see the anger blooming on his face. Cage has had enough. Just as I get close enough to him to land another punch, he grabs me by my throat and pushes me back to the wall with a hard thud.

He slams his lips down on mine but I know this isn't to restart what he's already deemed over. This is just to calm me down. It works.

It's a lie. It has to be a lie. My heart squeezes inside my chest. I can't believe he's doing this to me. I'm broken and as hard as I try after hearing him say those words to me I can't stop the tears from falling. The stream down my face and he leans forward to kiss them away.

How can he be so tender and sweet and still leave me? How can he be everything I want in a man but at the same time the one who's broken me down like no other.

All the fight I had seeps out of my body. I quit. If he wants to go so be it. My body slowly slides down the wall until I'm sitting on the floor. I don't want to watch him leave me. I can't handle it.

Cage gathers the rest of his things and with one final look in my direction, he opens the door and walks out.

It's over.

Quickly I dry my tears and race over to the window. Maybe if I see another woman it'll make me feel better. It'll prove he was only ever a liar. I could accept him being a liar.

I pull the drapes back and am startled by what I'm seeing. Cage didn't even make it to his bike. He's surrounded in the parking lot by what looks like undercover police officers.

My first reaction is to run out and see what's going on but I stop myself. He told me we were done.

Almost as if he knew I'd be looking for him Cage turns his head slightly in my direction and locks eyes with me before he deliberately shakes his head no. He doesn't want my help.

That's good for him because I've got no help to give him. I've got nothing for him or for anyone else. I'm empty.

I cross my arms over my chest as I watch the cops say a few things to him before they cuff him and put him in the back of a police car. The second they drive off with him out of my life all the emotions that were bubbling up inside of me flutter away and I'm at peace with what's happened.

Cage might not have been the man I wanted him to be, but he definitely proved at least one thing. I'll never give my heart away again.

My body, sure. But my heart, that is locked away forever, and I'm going to burn the key to ash.

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Bee

Several years later

"Woo! Let's party!"

The men at the bar laugh and toss back the shot that I've bought everyone. Rye and Barley is one of my favorite bars, but it hasn't always been like that. When I first started coming here it was nothing more than a dive bar. The owner has done a little renovating, added in a jukebox, and suddenly the flow of patrons has become a steady stream of what I like to call party animals.

My kind of people.

What's better is I rarely have to worry about getting home. I'm close enough to the clubhouse that if I do get too inebriated one of the girls can just ride down and get me.

I'm well on my way to having someone pick me up tonight.

I don't care though. I'm living my life and have a great time doing it.

"Damn, girl, you can really put it away." A man sitting next to me leans over to whisper in my ear. I lean back to get a good look at him. I'm not sure if it's because of the whiskey goggles I have on right now or what, but he's probably one of the finest

men I've ever seen. He'll do just fine for tonight.

It's my process. I get fucked up, find a man to have some fun with, and usually wind up sneaking out of his house or the hotel some time in the early morning hours.

"I can put a lot of things away... you want to see?" I do my best to sound sexy but the words come out on a slight hiccup.

I'm so wasted right now.

"Fuck yeah. Let's go." Mr. Sexy man next to me says and instantly reaches for his wallet to pay the bill.

"Maybe you should wait for your girls tonight." A deeper more agitated voice barks in my direction and it takes me a minute to figure out where it's coming from. My head is turning slow at least that's what it seems like.

"What?" I question, finally looking across the bar.

I should know his name. I'm in here enough that I should really know the bartender's name.

"I said, I think you should wait for your girls to pick you up tonight." The bartender repeats while he tosses a white towel over his shoulder. Just to further accentuate his point he crosses his arms over his chest and glares at me.

On what world did he think that was going to work? That's not going to do anything besides make me want to go against his word even more. Didn't he know who I was. I'm Bumblebee, nothing is ever going to hold me down.

"Thanks for the advice, old timer, but I'm free to go wherever I want and right now

it's with that hot piece of ass."

"Hot piece of ass?" The man to my side asks, puffing his chest out.

"Whatever." The bartender shakes his head and walks off toward the end of the bar.

I don't know why part of me is a little upset that it was so easy to get him to give up on me. As of recently, I feel like that's what everyone has been doing. As much as I hate to admit it even the girls down at the club have been doing little more than putting up with me.

Everyone is in their committed married phase, but not me. I'm still free as a bird with no intention of ever settling down. Not again. The last time I tried that it came back to bite me in the ass. I'll never forget the pain I went through with Cage.

Still, it wasn't until recently that I started coming to the bars every night on my own. Riot and Sugar used to come with me all the time but now they think the bar scene is played out. They want to do, what they call, more fulfilling activities. Turns out that means baking bread or target practice.

Boring shit if you ask me.

"Another round!" I shout and raise my hand so the bartender can stop pretending that he doesn't see me. He doesn't even have to ask what I want. He's already got my order memorized.

The grumpy bartender pours me another drink and with a shake of his head slides it in my direction before walking off and taking care of another customer.

"Nah, baby. You don't need another. We need to get out of here remember?" The man to my side reminds me and I'll admit I honestly did forget that I'd already made plans

to leave. Oh well, one more drink isn't going to hurt.

I reach forward to grab the cup that's right in front of me. I miss. Damn I'm a little more wasted than I thought.

"Come on. I got you." The man grabs my hand and urges me from the bar stool I'm sitting on.

"Hold up. I need to pay my tab." I say as I fight to get my feet planted on the floor.

"Don't worry about it. I've got it." He smiles and wraps his arm around my waist. He's holding me tight. Too tightly.

"You sure?" I question trying to process what's going on.

"Yeah. It's all paid for." He nods his head and once again urges me forward.

"Oh...okay." I mumble and my stomach lurches upward. I have to put my hand on my mouth to keep the copious amounts of liquor from coming up.

I look over my shoulder and the world tilts on its side for a second before it rights itself and I stumble another few steps. The bartender isn't looking at me, but there are a few other drinkers who are. Instead of happiness, I can see pity in their eyes. Like they know something I don't. If I had enough control over my hands right now, I'd flip them all the bird. I don't need to be judged.

"Just a little further." The man to my side says but I have a feeling he's talking more to himself than to me.

Finally, we make it to the side entrance and the cool air sobers me up just a little bit. I'm still off my rocker drunk but certain aspects of the night clear up in my mind. One

in particular is the fact that I definitely didn't see this man pay for any drinks. Not his own nor mine.

"I have to go back in and pay my tab." I slur.

"Baby, I already told you it's taken care of." His voice is a bit more tense, and he holds me tighter against his side.

"No, I didn't see. I have to make sure." I try to pull away from him, but he doesn't let me go. I come to this bar all the time. I don't want Mr. Grumpy pants behind the bar to ban me from coming because he thinks I skated on a bill.

"Just shut up about it will you."

Red flag.

"No, let me go. I'm going back inside." I try to pull away again. I don't have as much strength, but I do my best to push away from him.

"Fuck that. You made me a promise. I want to see what else you can put away. Like my cock in your mouth." He grits through clenched teeth.

What the fuck? I'm done with this.

Leaning forward I pull my arm up and slam my elbow back against his face. My aim is way off and I wind up hitting him in the cheek instead of in the nose like I wanted.

"You fucking bitch. You want it rough, so be it. I was going to be a fucking gentleman tonight, but you had to go and mess that up." He growls before he grabs my hair and yanks me back hard. Now instead of walking out toward the street, he's dragging me back into the alley near the side of the bar.

"No! Get off me!" I try to yell, but in that very second all the liquor I'd consumed decided to come back up. I try to lean forward but he's got such a tight hold on my hair that I can't. Most of the mess spills down the front of my shirt and onto the floor by my feet.

"You're a mess. That's okay, I like to get dirty." He chuckles, still pulling me backward.

I hack up some of the mess that is trying to slide its way back down my throat, but it's a lot. I'm struggling to breathe.

If I had any strength before this, it's all gone now.

"Come on, back here should be fine. No one is going to care about you anyway." Once again, he's talking more to himself than to me.

Shaking my head, I try to clear my brain from the liquor haze it's in, but I can't. I have to fight. Have to scream. I need help.

My feet bang against a large dumpster, and before I realize what's going on, I'm being thrown down to the floor. Instantly, I'm wet from whatever is on the pavement beneath me. I don't want to guess what I'm laying in, but from the smell I'm going to go with piss.

I struggle to get back up, finally getting up to my knees only to have him bring the back of his closed fist down across my face. The world spins faster and I fall backward.

This shit can't be happening. I've been trained and prepared for worse altercations. I know how to handle myself in a fight but for the life of me right now I can't get the upper hand. I'm too far gone.

I hear the telltale tinkle of his belt buckle opening up before he falls down on top of me, holding my hands with one of his and reaching for the button on my jeans with the other.

"No! Get off me! Stop!" I try to scream, but my voice is hoarse from the acid of my vomit.

Panic surges through me as I realize that I'm not going to be able to get out of this. He's too strong. I'm too drunk. It's a done deal.

When Free and I got away from the low life pimp who tricked us out, I promised myself that I'd never be a victim again and here I was back in the same position.

"Stop." I squeak out again but my head is spinning so violently now I'm not even sure what's going on. Did he start already? Are my pants off? Is he raping me?

"Hold still, and I won't hurt you." He puffs out, already out of breath.

I do my very best to do the exact opposite.

One second he's on top of me, yanking at my clothes and the next...he's gone.

Reality fades in and out but I manage to look up and see what's going on for a second.

A big man, built like a fucking bear has come to join the party. Except he's not focused on me he's focused on the man who was just trying to rape me. Bear has his hands up in a fighting position and I watch him swing with expert precision. Even in my drunken state I can hear the snap of his fist against the other guys face.

My attacker stumbles back a few steps, his pants tight around his thighs and blood pouring from his nose. I should get up and help but I can't move.

The bear of a man lunges forward again and I see the threat before it even happens but my instincts are slow. I can't get the word out to stop him.

The other guy has pulled a knife and is already slashing it through the air.

Bear shouts out in pain but doesn't fall back. Instead he watches my attacker with fierce eyes. Both of them at a standstill. That is until my attacker realizes he's not about to win this fight no matter what he's got in his hands.

Internally I want to jump for joy but the sweet relief of unconsciousness comes first.

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Bee

My head is pounding when I wake up.

This is a normal, everyday occurrence for me. What's different is the ache I have in my jaw. What the hell happened last night?

I roll over in my bed reaching for my pillow only to fall face first onto a thick shag carpet.

"What the fuck?" I croak and try to push myself up. The world spins, but I'm able to right myself.

I don't have a shag carpet. Blinking a few times, I take in my surroundings, and it doesn't take long for me to realize that I'm not home in my bed.

If I'm not home, where the hell am I. Reaching to my side, I search for my cell phone that isn't there. I had a bag last night didn't I? Fuck what the hell.

Climbing back up on the couch, I drop my head in my hands and groan. I've had wild drink fueled nights before but I don't remember the last time it was this bad. I fight to remember what exactly happen, and the memories come back like a tsunami.

I was leaving the bar with someone. I don't know his name and even if I really concentrate on it, I can't even remember what he looks like. Then he got pushy and I

tried to get away.

A deep gasp rockets through my system when I realize why my jaw hurts, that fucking bastard tried to rape me.

Did he succeed, am I in his house? Fuck no. No way in hell. I'm going to get another set of balls for Vexx's collection.

Steadying myself on my feet, I, as silently as I can, tip toe in the direction of the back room. It's not lost on me that I don't have a weapon, so on my way to the hallway I stop in the kitchen and grab a knife off the counter. It's a simple steak knife, but it'll do. No one forces me to do anything I don't want to do. It's just not how I roll. This bastard is going to wish he never laid a goddamn hand on me.

My head is pounding. Throbbing so hard I can hear it in my ears, feel it behind my eyes. My mouth is dry, my stomach twisted up in knots, and my skin is slick with sweat even though the apartment is freezing.

I don't know where I am.

My eyes scan the room trying to see if there are any other weapons around or anyone else for that matter. Always watch my back. I wish I was sane enough last night to follow that rule. Dark cabinets, black marble countertops, stainless steel appliances surround the small kitchen. Sleek. Expensive. Masculine. A heavy scent of coffee lingers in the air, but the pot is empty. No personal touches, no warmth. Just a place to exist, to function.

The hallway is the same—clean, sharp, too neat. Dark wood floors, sparse photographs in cold metal frames. The kind of place a man keeps because it looks good, not because it feels like home.

A pit opens in my stomach.

This is his place.

I swallow, my throat tight, my hands clenching at my sides as flashes of last night pulse through my head like a strobe light—hands grabbing me, breath on my neck, my own voice screaming, then fading.

I don't remember how I got away.

I don't remember getting here.

But if I'm in his apartment, then I know exactly what needs to happen next.

I make it to the back room. The door is cracked open, the air inside thick and still. I push it open slowly, my fingers gripping the knife so hard my knuckles ache.

A man is in the bed.

Covers pulled high, hiding most of him except for a messy shock of dark hair. He's sleeping, breathing deep, completely unaware of what's coming.

My pulse hammers against my ribs.

I could end this now. Just lunge forward, sink the blade into him before he even knows he's awake.

But I don't.

I want to see his face. I want him to know.

I step closer, my breath shallow, my fingers twitching. Then, slowly, I press the tip of the knife into the blanket, just enough to make contact.

The body stirs. A sharp inhale. Then?—

Stormy gray eyes snap open.

I freeze.

The man jerks up, scrambling back against the headboard, his hands flying up in surrender. The covers drop from his face, and suddenly, I'm staring at a familiar face—one that doesn't belong to my attacker.

His gaze locks onto mine, sharp, alert, flicking down to the knife before meeting my eyes again.

"Jesus Christ," he breathes. "Do you even remember who I am?"

The voice. Deep. Rough. Familiar.

It slams into me all at once. The bar. The whiskey. The bartender.

He's not the man who hurt me.

The knife in my hand trembles. The room tilts. My stomach churns.

I got it wrong.

I almost?—

I stagger back, my breath shuddering, my mind racing to catch up.

The bartender watches me carefully, his hands still up, his chest rising and falling a little too fast.

I don't know what to say. I don't know how to fix the moment before it shatters completely.

Dropping the knife on the floor I press the heels of my hands against my eyes. I fucked this up completely. This man saved me and here I am brandishing a weapon about to kill him. Thankfully I didn't follow through with my intrusive thoughts just to kill him while he slept.

"Hey, you good?" He asks finally dropping his hands down.

"No, man. Does it look like I'm good?" I snap at him and instantly regret it. This isn't how I show him my gratitude or the fact that I'm sorry he was woken up like that.

"I don't know what the hell you look like right now besides a crazy woman with a knife."

"I dropped it see, now I'm just a crazy woman." I smirk sarcastically at him.

"Yeah, sure. You need a hospital or something?" He asks stepping around me and to his dresser where he pulls out a plain white t-shirt.

"No, I'm fine. I just need to get out of here. How did I end up here in the first place?" I cross my arms over my chest and it's only then that I realize that I'm not wearing my clothes but something that belongs to him. "Where the hell are my clothes?"

"Bag out front."

"You changed me?" The inflection of my voice goes up a couple of octaves.

"You were drenched in piss and vomit. I wasn't about to lay you on my couch like that. I left your bra and underwear on." He shrugs as he turns back in my direction, his stance identical to mine.

I think back through the fog to the night before, and I do remember making a mess all over myself. "Fine, why am I here?"

"I didn't want to take you to the hospital in case you had issues with it. You were already passed out and my apartment was the closest safe place."

"What about my stuff?" I ask.

"You didn't have anything on you." He answers quickly.

I want to argue and tell him that I did but then again I've already insulted him more than once today.

"I need to get home. My club is probably worried sick."

"Eve's Fury? I doubt it. They probably think you're out on another all night bender." He shrugs and walks over near the door trying hard to get away from me.

"What the hell do you know about it. And if you know who my club is why wouldn't you just call them to pick me up?"

"I don't have their number on speed dial, the only reason I know you're part of that club is the countless times one of them has come to pick you up from my place. You didn't have a phone on you and I don't have a phone book handy to search them out. I did what I could, maybe you should be a little more grateful for that." He snarls at me and I can tell from the way he's breathing that I'm starting to push him too far.

He's right though. If it wasn't for him I'd be still passed out or worse in the back alley.

"You're right. I'm sorry. I'm just... this wasn't supposed to happen to me." I tighten my arms around myself and do my best to squeeze the feeling of being a victim out of my system.

My muscles tremble and I know it's not from a chill.

"You have anything to drink here?" I ask and his eyes pop open.

"Drink? You're not talking about water are you?"

"No, a beer? A shot? Unleaded gasoline?" I joke but he doesn't laugh with me.

He looks over my shoulder to the nightstand by his bed, "It's seven in the morning and you want a drink?"

"I just want to take the edge off, that's all." I don't want to be judged. He doesn't know what I'm going through right now.

He opens his mouth to say something but instead just shakes his head and walks out of the room. Not wanting to be in his personal space without him I follow behind him back into the kitchen. He gestures to one of the wooden chairs at the dining table and I take a seat.

"I would ask if you make this a habit but I already know the answer is yes." He sighs as he pulls out a bottle of jack daniels and pours me a healthy glass.

"What makes you think that?"

He scoffs and looks over his shoulder, "Did you forget I'm the same man who serves

you every night. I know how much you drink when you're at my place. I guess I only hoped it was at night and not through out the day."

Looking away from him I think about what he's saying. It's the same thing most of the girls at the club have been saying for weeks now. I have a problem. I don't think I do. I just want to have fun but it seems like the fun is dragging me down a very dangerous road.

"Lucky for you I'm not paying you to clock how much I drink." I reach for the glass as he gets closer to me and down the double in one gulp. The burn feels good in my chest and slowly the trauma of what happened last night starts to recede.

"If last night is any indication, you don't pay me at all." He raises an eyebrow at me.

Fuck, I never paid my tab last night.

"Damn, I'll get that bill paid today. I just need to go home and get my things." I nod my head and look down at the empty glass in front of me. I could sure use another.

"You're not getting any more from me. You're already too out of your mind, I'm not going to add to it."

My mouth drops open, "You're cutting me off?"

"Someone has too." He shrugs and leans against the counter. He's not going to go back on his word. I don't need to push the topic. I'm sure I'll be able to make it back home before I need another drink.

We sit there in silence for a few minutes before he opens his mouth again to talk. "You sure you're good. I can drive you to the hospital if you need me to."

"No, I'm fine." I shrug away his concern. "I do have a question for you though."

He lifts his eyebrow at me indicating that I should go on.

"What happened to the asshole from last night. I'd like to have a chance to put his ass in the hospital." I growl.

"Violent little thing aren't you." He jokes and I shoot daggers at him through my eyes.

"You've got no idea. You haven't answered the question though."

"The last time I saw him, he was running away with my blood dripping from his blade."

My eyes scan his body and it's the first time I notice the stark white bandage on his forearm.

"Shit, he got you? Do you need to go to the hospital?"

He laughs at that, "Nah, I've had worse. This isn't the first time I've had to stitch myself up."

More and more, I'm hating myself for getting him involved in all this. It also reminds me that I never actually said thank you. He's done a hell of a lot more than anyone else would have done.

"You know about that, I...umm..." I hate having to do this but I know it has to be done. "Well, thank you for what you did yesterday. I appreciate it."

He nods his head once but doesn't say anything in return.

The level of discomfort I'm feeling from this conversation is enough to make my skin crawl. "Well I guess I should get on home." I walk to the side and pick up my bag of soiled clothes more than ready to take that long walk back to the clubhouse.

I'm not looking forward to it but I'd rather get home than be out any longer. I don't necessarily want to hear their mess but there's no getting around it. Vexx is going to chew me out. I just know it.

"Yeah, no way I'm letting you walk home on your own right now. I'll get the car."

"I'm perfectly capable of walking on my own."

"And I'm perfectly capable of saying I don't have a concussion. Something you can't say for certain now can you?" He raises an eyebrow at me and just off instinct I tilt my head from side to side and it does indeed feel like my brain is sloshing inside my skull.

I'm not looking forward to this at all.

It was one thing being stuck in his house with him for the few minutes since I woke up but now having him drive me back to my space somehow makes what happened yesterday all the more real.

I glare at him for a second waiting for him to change his mind. Of course he doesn't.

"Who are you anyway. I don't even know your name." I kiss my teeth together and walk in the direction of the door fully aware that he's following behind me.

"That's such a shame. I see you everyday and you still don't know my name."

I spin catching him off guard and stand right up next to him. It's not until then that I

truly realize just how large he is. At minimum the man is six foot three inches tall. His shoulders are so broad he nearly has to turn sideways to get out of the door. Just one of his biceps is the same size as my ample thighs. But it's those dark ash gray eyes that has my breath caught in my throat.

He's a rugged looking man. If I saw him on the same side of the street as me walking in my direction I'd cross over. But now that I'm this close to him I can see the gentleness lurking deep inside. A gentleness he keeps hidden from the world.

I'm not going to make things easy for him though, not my style. "Are you going to tell me your name or am I going to have to keep calling you Bear."

"Bear?" He questions but doesn't wait for my response, "I guess I can understand where you got that from. My name is Rye."

"Seriously, that's your name."

He grunts in response and I shrug a shoulder, "Well Rye, I'm Bee. Pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"No it's not. Come on, let's get this over with." He grabs hold of the door from me and I make my way out.

The very second I step outside I'm grateful for Rye being here next to me. He's a safety net I never thought I'd need again. Now I just have to figure out what I'm going to do once the net is gone.

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Rye

To say the day has flown by is an understatement.

I didn't waste much time taking Bee back to the motorcycle clubhouse down the road. It was closer than I originally thought. The second I watched her walk in the door I peeled out of there like my ass was on fire.

She's a problem. I can tell just from the way she handles herself. I have a weak spot for problems.

I was married to a woman who had more issues than playboy magazine, but that didn't stop me from falling hard for other women who tend to make my life much harder than it needs to be. I finally got the need to be a savior out of my system, and I'm not going to let little Ms. Bee come in and derail me. I'd rather be alone than have to deal with that mess again.

The issue is I wonder if I don't take the time to help her than who will. It's obvious that she's too stubborn to ask anyone for help even though she clearly needs it.

No.

I'm not going to do it again.

The bar is buzzing with its usual crowd, a mix of laughter and clinking glasses under

the dim, flickering lights. I wipe down the counter, the familiar scent of spilled beer and old whiskey filling my nostrils. The walls are plastered with old concert posters and the occasional neon sign flickering half-heartedly. It's a dive, no doubt about it, but it's our dive—a second home for the regulars who come here to forget the world outside.

I glance around the room. At the far end, Mr. Thompson is nursing his usual bourbon, his weathered face creased into a frown as he watches the game on the small TV mounted in the corner. Next to him, Sarah and Jess are giggling over a round of shots, their laughter light, but I can see the tension in Jess's eyes. She's been through a lot lately, just like many of the others here.

But it's the door that keeps pulling my attention. Every time it swings open, a rush of cold air slips inside, and my heart skips a beat. I can't help but hope it's Bee, but as the minutes crawl by, the reality weighs heavier on me. Part of me wants her to walk through that door, to reclaim her space here, but the bigger part of me knows she needs to heal. Last night still haunts me, the memory of her fear and pain etched into my mind.

I pour a drink for a newcomer, a tall guy with a scruffy beard and a baseball cap pulled low over his eyes. He seems harmless enough, but I keep an eye on him, as I do with everyone. The bar is a sanctuary, but it can quickly turn chaotic if I let my guard down. I focus on my duties, serving drinks and cracking jokes, trying to keep the mood light, but my thoughts keep drifting back to Bee.

I remember the way she looked, shaken, vulnerable. I knew she had a drinking problem, but I didn't realize how deep it went until last night. I should have seen the signs. I should have done more to protect her. The guilt gnaws at me, sharper than any knife.

Another glance at the door. I catch a glimpse of a couple of regulars, but no Bee. I

pour another drink for Mr. Thompson and listen to him grumble about the game. It's comforting, in a way, the rhythm of bar life, but it's missing something without her presence.

Every laugh, every cheer feels incomplete. The bar is alive, but it's as if a shadow lingers in the corner where she should be. I take a deep breath, focusing on the tasks at hand, but I can't shake the worry that's settled in my chest.

"Hey, Rye!" Sarah calls out, snapping me back to reality. "Another round over here!"

I nod, forcing a smile as I move to fill their glasses. The steady humdrum sounds has become my life but I can't help but wish for a little bit of excitement.

11:50, ten minutes to midnight my dose of excitement comes bursting through the door.

"Why is it always so dead in here?" Bee shouts and a few of the regulars whoop and clap when they see her. She has a way of lighting up the room.

My eyes stay glued onto her as she saunters wobbly over to the bar.

"How's it hanging, Rye?" She calls over the noise and sits on one of the stools.

I did want to see her again just to make sure she was okay but now that I see her and can tell she's really not okay I'm so disappointed she decided to come.

"What are you doing here, Bee?" I question not even attempting to keep the anger out of my voice.

"What do you mean. I made you a promise." She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a wad of cash. Too much for her to be carrying around and flashing like that.

"Jesus Christ, put that away."

"What do you mean put it away. I'm paying my bill for last night. Did you forget?"
She smirks at me but she has to put her hand up to her mouth to stop a hiccup.

"You're wasted, already."

"No, I did pregame back at the compound. Nothing I haven't done before." She leans further over the bar, the low cut shirt she has on giving me full view of her small but somehow perfect chest.

"After yesterday maybe doing the same things you've done before isn't the best idea." I don't look away from her and see the moment her face falls. I'm killing her buzz but I don't care.

"I didn't come here for all this. I promised you that I would pay you tonight and I always keep my word." Bee peels off a few bills and slides them toward me on the bartop. I quickly take it and toss it in the cash register.

"Alright, you're all settled up." I'm expecting her to get up and try to go home but she doesn't move.

"Give me a double of Jack."

I could tell her no. I could refuse to serve her but I know if I don't give her the drink she'll just go somewhere else and spend that money. Somewhere else where someone can take advantage of her like that asshole tried to do last night.

No, it's better if I keep her here and keep an eye on her.

"Whatever." I mumble and grab the bottle of jack. I pour her a double and fill the rest

of it up with water. I'm sure she's drunk enough she won't even notice. I slide it in her direction and she takes it. She sips it at first, closing her eyes to absorb the sensation before she tips the glass up at me and slides off the bar stool.

The rest of my night is a mix of me taking care of the rest of the customers and keeping a close eye on Bee. She dances with the regulars and the newcomers. She talks to everyone she can. She literally buzzes from person to person making a lasting impression every minute of the night. I'm actually kind of surprised she's still able to go on. Finally, when I make the last call she makes her way back to the bar to sit down. It's nearly three in the morning and I'm more than ready to close up for the night but Bee looks like she can go another twelve hours or more.

"One last drink?" She waggles her eyebrows at me. I'm surprised she hasn't noticed by now that her drinks are more water than anything else and I've stopped charging her.

"Do you really think you need another one?" I bite my tongue as the question rolls off my lips.

Her features go hard and she shoots me that devilish glare. I'm sure with anyone else it might have been intimidating but to me it's kind of cute. I've already seen her at her worst, I'm not scared of the little bumblebee.

"I don't need a daddy. I need a bartender that's willing to do his job." She snaps in my direction.

"If that was the case I should've cut you off hours ago. You don't need anymore to drink Bee." There's no give in my tone. Even though I know she's not as drunk as she could be I'm not going to be responsible for her walking outside and getting herself into trouble.

We stare at each other for a long moment again. So far that seems to be most of our interactions, both of us pushing at the other just checking how far each of us will bend.

"Fine, some water then?"

I nod my head, "That I'll do with pleasure." I turn and pour her a large pint glass of water and slide it over in her direction. She sits there for a while just sipping it while the rest of the people in the bar mosey over to pay their tabs and file out. I have to take a few car keys but that's normal business for me. What I'm wondering is what Bee is actually waiting for.

"You planning on locking up for me too?" I question as I start cleaning down the bar.

"No, I just ... What's your deal anyway? You go around playing superman for everyone?"

The question shocks me. It's not the first time I've been accused of that but I need toot know what she sees that would give her that impression.

"No, just the ones who need it."

"And you think I need to be saved?"

"Last night you did, as for the rest of your life, I'm not the man to do that." I tilt my head and go on doing my chores.

"That's good because I'm not some weak little girl that needs a man to do anything for her. I take charge of my life. I do what I want, when I want." I can't tell if she's trying to convince me or herself.

"And how is that working out for you?"

"It's working out just fine thank you very much. Last night was a fluke if I was in my right mind I'd have skinned that guy alive." Bee grits through her teeth. I believe it.

"That's true. He would've had hell to deal with if you were in your right mind. But I don't think I've ever seen you in your right mind."

She crosses her arms over her chest, clearly upset that I'm calling her out, "I don't have a problem. I don't need to hear that from you."

"Then who do you need to hear it from Bee? You needed a drink at eight in the morning. If that's not someone who has a problem then who is?" I want to get through to her.

"You don't know anything about my life. Just because you see me here from time to time and at one of my worst experiences doesn't mean that you get to judge me." Her words are laced with venom but they don't cut my skin.

"I'm not judging you. I'm just telling you what I see. If you want a different opinion get it from somewhere else." Abandoning the rest of my clean up for tomorrow I come out from behind the bar and usher the last of the customers out. I'm ready for this day to be over. To be away from Bee.

She walks up behind me, "You know if you weren't such a jerk I'd actually be willing to take a ride on the Bear."

"Oh shit, did she just say what I-" I shove the last patron out the door.

My nerves are on ten right now and my body is tight but it's not from arousal. It's from rage.

I walk back over to Bee and grab the back of her neck tilting her face up so I can see her eyes clearly. They are glazed and she nearly topples over just from the one touch.

"Bee, you're fucking gorgeous. Exactly the kind of woman that gets my cock harder than forged steel. I'd bend you over every surface in this bar touching parts of your body you didn't even know exist." I hold her steady as I continue. "But I'd rather piss pine cones and have steel wool rammed up my ass before I'd fuck you while your this wasted. I don't know what kind of man you're used to but you're not going to get it from me. Go home." I let her go and walk to the front door to hold it open for her.

"You... But...I..." She's flustered. She huffs out a breath and storms out of the door not saying a word in return.

"I'll see you tomorrow?" I question but I don't have to. I know she'll come back. I just threw down the gauntlet and if I know anything about this woman is that she's going to rise to the challenge. I'm actually intrigued to see what she's got hidden inside of her.

I wanted excitement, this little Bee sure is just what the doctor ordered.

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Bee

"We've got another run upstate tomorrow, are you going to be able to come?" Riot questions me, she's standing at the door her arms crossed over her chest and a look of pure aggravation painted on her face.

Usually I'd brush it off as her being her, After Vexx, Riot is the only one in the house that can be mean at the drop of a hat. Her attitude flows through her veins.

"Yeah, I'll be there." I try to keep my voice cheery, but the reality is I'm not feeling it at all.

I'm hurting and all I want is a drink.

I'm not an alcoholic.

At least I didn't think I was one. But it's been a full twelve hours since I last had anything to drink and I feel like absolute shit.

The last thing I want to do is admit that this might be too much for me to handle. I don't want the other girls to see me as weak. I promised myself I'd never be weak again so how did I let this happen?

Riot huffs and walks away from my door. She doesn't believe that I'll be ready to ride. I don't blame her. I've missed the last three runs simply because I was too drunk

to get on my bike. Free has tried to get me straight, Vexx, Duchess, hell everyone has tried to talk to me at one point or another about my drinking but I always brushed it off. I can't keep doing this.

Slowly, I make my way out of my room and walk into the main living area where Sugar and Addison are watching something on the idiot box.

I drop down on the couch next to them. They both look at me and then each other, neither of them saying a word in my direction.

The tension in the air is thick, and I know it's because they are thinking what no one wants to say. I try to stay quiet try to just let them have their peace but I feel like I'm going out of my mind.

"Am I really that much of a fuck up?" the question is out of my mouth before I have a chance to think about the words.

"What, baby?" Sugar looks at me with clear concern in her eyes.

"The drinking. Have I really fucked this up this bad?" I ask tears spilling down my cheeks.

They both gasp and rush over to me to pull me into a hug.

"Bee, you're just going through something right now. You can kick this. I know you can." Addison combs her hand over my hair.

"Absolutely sweetie," Sugar smiles and squeezes me tighter.

"I don't know. I don't think I can."

"Shh, don't talk like that. We're all here for you. Whatever you need. You know we're going to be right here for you." Sugar continues trying to make me feel better but all it does is makes me feel worse. I feel like a failure. I promised these women that I would always be there for them but how am I supposed to have their back when I can barely stand on my own two feet.

It feels impossible.

When the two of them let me go I don't feel any better than I did before. In fact I don't think I've ever felt this lost before in my life. I could always talk to Free about what's going on but she's a proactive kind of person she'll want me to make plans and goals. I don't have it in me right now to do that.

I just want some sort of purpose in my life. At one time Eve's Fury was all the purpose I needed but now it's clear to see that even this sisterhood isn't enough to bring me back from whatever dark corner I've crawled into.

I walk out of the clubhouse ready to make my way down toward town. I make this trip nightly, or at least so it seems. Every step I take brings me closer and closer to the bottle.

"No." I stop myself and turn back toward home. I make it about ten feet before I turn right back around and continue walking in the direction of the bars. I'm going in circles. I'm not as strong as I thought I was. I've been living in denial for so long that now I don't know what to do with the fact that I may truly have a problem.

All I can think about is the way I hurt right now. The way a cold tumbler of liquor would feel burning down my throat.

"Please, no more. Just stop it. All you have to do is stop." I whisper to myself as I turn down a side road and wander into what I'm sure is someone's farm land. It's a

wide open field with very high grass.

The tears are coming non stop now as every muscle in my body screams in pain. I dry heave over and over, and it feels like I've got a fever of 200 degrees. I want to peel all my clothes off and at the same time I'm shivering.

I can't do this.

I let myself fall to the ground, the tall grass hiding me from anyone passing by, and I just lay there in misery. The secluded spot gives me time to be alone with my thoughts. All of which surround the fact that I've failed both myself and my club. I'm supposed to be a beacon of hope for the women in town. A bright spot in everyone's lives but I'm dying on the inside. I can feel it with every breath I take, I'm just that much closer to death.

I'm on the ground for a long while, and the dimming sun turns to haunting moonlight much faster than I expected.

I scream in frustration when I realize what that means. I've missed another run. I don't know if Vexx is going to tolerate it this time. This could be the last of my time as a member of Eve's Fury.

I'm on the verge of losing it all, and it's high time that I admit what I've been trying to deny for so long.

I need help.

Who do I turn to? Who can I call?

I'm sure if I call one of the girls, they'll come running, but I've messed up their lives enough as it is. At least that's how it feels right now. Like I've just become a burden

on them. I'm not usually the one who is in need of saving, but right now all I can think about is the one person who has saved me already.

Rye.

The bear with the heart of gold.

It's a struggle to get up to my feet. I fall down a few times in the process getting dirt and whatever else is in this field all over my clothes. When I do finally make it to my feet it feels like salvation is so far away but I have to try. I just have to put one foot in front of the other.

It's never taken me this long to get to town before but I'm happy that I'm making progress.

Finally I make it to the bar and nearly cry when I see the sign, Rye and Whiskey. It's not illuminated like it usually is. There's no movement inside. He's gone.

I'm overwhelmed by the fear that I've missed my chance. Suddenly with a burst of energy I push myself up the side stairs that lead to his apartment door. He has to be here.

Please, let him be here.

At first I knock politely but with every second that passes it feels like I'm losing the battle. Like a big bad monster is right there in the dark waiting for me to fail.

"Rye!" I bang on the door harder, desperate to get inside. "Rye, please." My voice cracks and even I can hear how pathetic I sound. I don't want him to see me like this, hell I don't want anyone to see me like this.

"What the fuck is your pro-" Rye swings the door open, he's in his boxers and clearly agitated. But the second he sees my face he drops the anger and grabs hold of me. "Bee, oh god. What's wrong?"

"Rye, I need help. Please. I want to stop. Please." I cry against his shoulder, and he holds me like he's been holding me his entire life.

"Okay. I'm here. I'll help you." He softly strokes my hair and for the first time all night I feel safe.

I don't know what it is about this man that let's me know that everything is going to be okay but I just do.

The problem with that is the last time I allowed a man to have this much control over how I was feeling he ended up telling me that I was just a good time and what I felt meant nothing to him right before he was taken away in the back of a police. car. I promised myself I'd never let another man that deep into my life but Rye is already here I just didn't know it.

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Rye

Talk about taking my work home.

It's been a full day since Bee showed up at my house, and it's not be a cake walk.

I hate seeing people hurting. Even if they have nothing to do with me. It literally angers me.

Bee is curled up on the couch, her body shaking like a leaf in a storm. She's a mess—sweat-dampened hair sticking to her forehead, dark circles carving hollows under her eyes. Her hands twitch against the blanket I tossed over her, and she keeps cursing under her breath like she's trying to scare the withdrawal away.

I've seen a lot of people go through this. It's never pretty. But Bee? Even at her absolute worst, she's got more fire in her than anyone I've ever met.

"Fuck, I hate this," she mutters, her voice raw. "I'd kill a nun for a drink right now."

I smirk, crouching beside the couch, keeping my hands to myself even though everything in me wants to touch her. Hold her down, steady her. "Yeah? Any particular nun, or just the first one you see?"

She gives me a half-hearted glare, but the corner of her mouth twitches, and for a second, I see her. The Bee from before. The one who walked into my bar like she

owned the place, with that smart mouth and eyes that dared me to take her on.

Then the tremors hit her harder, and she curls in on herself, breathing through clenched teeth. I reach for the damp cloth on the table and press it against her forehead.

She jerks like she's gonna shove me away, but she doesn't.

"Why are you even doing this?" she grits out, not looking at me. "You don't owe me anything."

She's wrong. I don't owe her a damn thing. But I want to be here.

I exhale slowly, dragging a hand through my hair. "Because someone should."

Her gaze flicks to mine, sharp and searching, like she's waiting for the punchline. When it doesn't come, she looks away, licking her chapped lips. My stomach tightens at the sight of her tongue.

I should not be thinking about her like this. Not now. Not ever.

But I do.

I think about what that mouth would feel like on me. How it would sound if she moaned my name instead of cursing the world. I think about how easy it would be to give in—to let myself fall, because hell, it's been so long, and if I'm gonna fall for anyone, of course it'd be the woman who's gonna rip me to fucking pieces.

It's a pattern. A sickness.

And I can already feel the fever setting in.

Bee shifts, and her fingers brush my arm. It's the smallest touch, but it feels like a brand.

"I hate this," she whispers. "I hate feeling like this."

I clench my jaw, trying to shake off the hunger crawling under my skin. She's not yours to want, Rye. Not now. Maybe not ever.

"I know," I murmur, pulling the blanket up over her shoulders. "But you're gonna get through it."

She laughs, but there's no humor in it. "And then what?"

And then what? Then I'll either walk away before she destroys me, or I'll let her take me apart piece by piece.

But I don't say that.

Instead, I just watch her, and I know, I'm already too far gone.

Four days later

"Did you at least eat any of the food that I left out?" I sigh when I walk back into the apartment after being down at the bar for most of the night and see that Bee is still in the same position I left her in.

She's no longer feeling the physical withdrawals from the alcohol, but the mental pains are still there. Raw and open.

"I'm not hungry."

"Like hell, you're not hungry. I haven't seen you eat anything besides a banana in days." I huff and pick up the small plate of food I left on the counter for her earlier.

Over the past few days, I've gotten to know Bee intimately. In ways, I'm not sure anyone else knows her. I've seen her go into a manic rage when I wouldn't let her go downstairs to the bar because I knew it would trigger her. Then I watched her fall into a deep depression because she feels like she let everyone down in her life. The whiplash of emotions has my head spinning, but I'm not going to give up on her. I'm already too invested.

"Rye, honestly, you don't have to do this. I'm sure you've got other things that you could be doing right now." She sighs and slowly sits up on the couch. She's taken to wearing my clothing, since she doesn't have any of her own to where. I made a big deal about it when I had to rummage through my shit to give her something to wear, but now that I'm seeing her in my stuff it makes me feel good. Like she belongs... No! I won't even let myself go down that road.

I promised myself that I wouldn't do this shit again. I don't have the time to rebuild my life after a wildcat like Bee comes through and rips it to shreds.

Walking over to where she is, I place the plate of food in front of her face, it's not even warm but the aroma coming off it is still strong. I'm hoping that will be enough to get her to want to eat. She doesn't budge.

"You're going to make this hard for me, aren't you?" I hitch an eyebrow in her direction and she just grumbles in response.

With a sigh, I grab the plastic spoon and lift a healthy bite up to her mouth. This time she's the one to hitch her eyebrow. She wasn't expecting me to actually force her to eat.

Slowly, she opens her mouth and I slide the food into her mouth. My eyes settle on her mouth and I watch her chew slowly, an involuntary moan of pleasure coming from her.

I didn't start this thinking it would be sexual, but just that one little sound is enough to get my blood boiling. I gulp my desire down and pick up another spoonful before bringing it to her mouth. This time when she opens up, she has to dart her tongue out to lick the side of her lip.

I have to bite down on the inside of my mouth to keep from moaning out myself.

"Is this some kind of kink for you?"

I blink a few times and wonder if I actually let a sound slip. I don't think I did.

"What? What are you talking about?"

"You seem overly interested in making sure that I'm eating." She closes her mouth around another spoonful of food.

She's right. I'm too interested. I need to back away. Dropping the plate of food on the small coffee table in front of her, I get up and pray that I'm not hard enough that she'll notice through my pants. "I'm not overly interested in making sure you eat. I'm interested in making sure you don't die in my house. You've just been through a serious withdrawal, and you're doing nothing to take care of yourself. How are you expecting to get better if you don't take care of yourself?" I question, but don't even allow her to answer. I simply fling my hand in the air, dismissing the entire conversation.

This time when I walk to the small kitchenette to get myself something to eat, she follows behind. I look at her over the lip of the fridge door and see that my shirt is

barely hanging on her. It's slipped down her shoulder and I can see her collarbone.

Why the hell is she this damn sexy.

When she was partying downstairs in my bar I knew she was a beautiful girl, but something about seeing her like this at her most vulnerable just takes her hotness to a whole nother level.

"I'm not trying to be a bitch, but in my life, the only time people do something for you is when they want something in return. Is that you're hoping for? That I'll repay my superman with my body?" She takes her finger and delicately traces the hem of the collar of the shirt she's wearing.

She's trying to bait me. I know this trick. She's not the first woman to try to play it on me.

"You think I'm trying to fuck you? Are you serious? I've watched you throw up all over yourself, piss your pants and call for your mother in your sleep. The last thing I'm thinking about right now is fucking you." It's the last thing, but it's not like I'm not thinking about it.

Her mouth drops open and after a second she grabs the shirt and fixes it on her body so it covers her up. It's obvious she's not used to being turned down. "Then what the hell do you want from me?"

"I don't want anything from you. What part of that don't you get? For fuck's sake, are you so jaded that you can't recognize when someone is just trying to do you a solid. You need help. I can give you that help. I'm not here to judge you, fuck you, or persecute you. I'm just here." I slam the door to the fridge shut, no longer interested in eating.

"Well... what do I do with that? I don't know what I'm supposed to..." Her words cut off, and she drags a hand through that luscious blonde hair.

"You get better, say thank you and move on with your life." I shrug, allowing myself to calm down. I don't need to beat her down any more than she's already beating herself down.

She looks up at me with those clear gray eyes and I see a little twinkle in them. "Thank you." She whispers and I feel it down in my bones.

"Of course, get some rest." I gesture to the couch, where she's set up a little bed.

Leaning against the small counter, she chuckles, "I think I've slept my last wink on that couch. Honestly, I don't know how men do it." She reaches up and rubs her neck.

"What do you mean?" I look from her to the couch and back again.

"When I was going through the thick of it, I couldn't feel shit but the pain of wanting another drink, then when I got to the tail end of it everything hurt. But I think I'm through the forest now and that couch has got to be the most uncomfortable thing I've ever laid on. I can sleep on the floor." she shrugs, and the thought of her on my floor makes my stomach turn.

"No, absolutely not. There's a draft that comes up from downstairs." In the pit of my gut, I know what I'm about to say, and I know how bad it can look.

"What do you suggest then?" She crosses her arms over her chest and tilts her head.

"Well, you can take the bedroom. I can sleep on the floor." I do my best to keep my voice steady.

"You won't let me sleep on the floor because of this horrible draft and you think I'm going to let you sleep on the floor? What kind of woman do you think I am." She takes a few steps closer to me. So close in fact if I moved my arm I'd be able to touch her breast. "Are you going to be a good boy?" She whispers and I feel it in my bones.

Fuck this woman is a problem. The best damn kind.

"I can't promise you that but I can promise I'm not going to touch you." I give it as good as I get it.

"So be it. We can sleep in the bed together. I just want one good nights sleep." She presses her hand to her mouth and yawns before she taps my chest and walks around me.

I turn to watch her making her way to the back where my room is.

This is going to be the longest night of my life.

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7

Bee

Talk about out of the norm.

I'm at a freaking farmer's market.

When I think about a good time, this is the last place that I would picture myself going, hell it's the last place I'd picture anyone going to have a good time. For as long as I can remember, my good times all revolved around having a drink.

I've been with Rye the last three days and I haven't even had one. He got me through the worst of my detox but even now it's still hard.

Thankfully, I wasn't too far gone. There were times when Rye thought he was going to have to take me to the hospital to get through the worst of it.

I'm happy it didn't need to go that far.

But now I'm here, at a farmer's market, looking at one hundred different flavors of jam.

"You seriously come to this every time it's here?" I turn to look at Rye who is holding a small whicker basket. It looks so out of place in his massive hands.

"Yeah, every second and fourth Sunday of the month. I may not always buy things,

but it's a good way to keep in touch with the local businesses." He shrugs and picks up a jar of jam before paying the lady at the stand.

"I guess that makes sense." I turn to look around at the picturesque farmer's market only to have Mojag standing not more than three feet behind me. "For fucks sake! Make a noise. You scared the shit out of me!" I yell at him and Rye instantly grabs hold of my arm to pull me back.

I hold my ground though. "It's alright. This is Jag, my brother-in-law."

Rye relaxes and lets my arm go. I don't want to admit it but it feels good to know that Rye is ready for whatever comes his way when it comes to trying to protect me.

"Who's that?" Jag's gruff voice comes out hard, almost like a threat.

Rye comes to step up next to me his chest puffed up a bit but he doesn't say anything waiting for me to do the introductions. After the past few days that he and I have spent together it feels weird to label him as just my friend but that's what he is. We haven't even kissed yet. I guess he was telling the truth about not wanting to fuck me. It feels strange not to wield that power over a man. Usually I can bat my eyelashes and get a man to do just about anything I want them to do, not with Rye.

"This is Rye, a friend of mine." I glance up at him just to make sure I'm not saying something he didn't expect.

"Good to meet you." Jag puts his hand out to shake Rye's and I watch the exchange. Two powerhouses, strong silent types. For some reason, I think the two of them would really hit it off. This could be the start of a blossoming bromance. Just the thought makes me giggle. Rye looks down at me confused but I'd rather not bring him into my mind right now.

Jag focuses his attention on me, "You know you're going to have hell to pay right?"

I groan, and my entire body nearly deflates. I knew this was coming. I've been out of communication with the club for the past three days.

"Where's Free?" I ask knowing that Mojag will know where my sister is at all times.

"She's by the donation truck."

"Donation truck?"

He points toward the east corner of the farmer's market, and all the way at the back I see a large box truck. Lined up next to it are several familiar bikes. How could I have missed that.

"If I were you I'd go handle that before they start burning shit down." Jag laughs and walks off. It's only a second before I lose sight of him. He's probably in the shadows somewhere watching everyone. The man is like a ghost.

"Everything straight?" Rye asks, his eyebrow hitching up.

"Yeah, it's just time for me to pay the piper. You want to come meet my sister. She may try to kill me." I laugh but I'm really worried about that. Free's temper is renowned.

There's no point in delaying it. I grab hold of Rye's hand and beeline straight in the direction of the donation truck.

"You fucking bitch! I should fucking kill you!" Free yells the second she sees me.

"Sis, wait." I finally drop Rye's hand and put my hands up to deflect any blows she

throws at me. She's not usually violent but I can tell by the anger all over her face that she's not past that point.

"Wait my ass! You didn't show up for the run. You left your phone and your wallet. You were talking crazy to Sugar and Addison. You were fucking gone for days and didn't think to pick up the damn phone!" Free yells in my face. Rye is still standing right next to me and even though he doesn't say anything I can feel him tensing up next to me.

He knows what I've been through over the past few days. Calling anyone was completely out of the question.

"Bee." Vexx calls out from me as she jumps down from inside the donation truck. "You better be a figment of my fucking imagination."

All of the girls find their way in my direction and they surround me. The anger is real, but I know it's all coming from a good place. They were worried about me. This is my family. I can't believe I actually thought they'd abandoned me.

"Where the hell were you?" Vexx demands.

I smile softly looking at all of them, "I was detoxing."

It's almost as if everyone stopped breathing. I can't hear a sound.

Instantly, the anger I saw in all their faces drained away. I keep my eyes trained on my sister now. I'm surprised when her face crumbles and she races to wrap her arms around me.

"You did? Oh god. You did?"

"Yeah, I'm straight now. No more booze." I pull back and am surprised to see the tears coming down my normally hard sisters face.

"Why didn't you let us help you? We would've been there for you." Sugar reaches around Free and rubs my shoulder.

"I know. Well at the time I didn't. I was so lost in my own head that I was sure that you'd turn away from me. I know that's not true. I just had to go through it. I had help though." I look over at Rye and suddenly he's the center of attention.

"I know you." Riot tilts her head and squints her eyes. "You're the bartender."

"Yeah, that's me. Rye."

Vexx doesn't even address him, instead she grabs hold of my hand and pulls me away from the group. She's the president of the club. She can chose to strip my patch from me and I'll have to live with that.

"You sure everything is right with him? Did you know him before all this? I don't want him taking advantage of you."

I smile, of course Vexx wants to know I'm okay, "He's probably the best man I've ever known."

Vexx nods her head, "That's good to hear. I was starting to think you'd never settle down."

"I wouldn't say I settled down. The man won't even touch me. It's annoying." I scoff and Vexx laughs.

"So you're back with us? Nothing feels right with you gone."

"I'm here Vexx. I'll always be here. Just tell me where you want me." She's giving me another chance and I'm so grateful.

"Well right now I need you going around asking for donations. We've got the woman's welfare drive next month and we could use the help."

"I'm on it!" I pull her into a quick hug before turning to walk back over to where I left Rye getting the third degree from Free and the rest of the girls. I'm sure if I left him there for a second longer Free would've forced him to give her his social security number.

He's not flustered, though. It's impressive.

"Let's go to work." I pull him away from everyone.

"What are we going to do?" Rye questions.

"Well, you're going to help me get some donations for a woman's welfare drive the club is putting on."

"Sounds good to me."

He's so open to helping me, so open to just being there for me. It's such a fucking turn on.

Everything feels like it's going so perfect. For the first time in a long time I'm happy.

I walk over to a small booth ready to start on my spiel about Eve's Fury and what we do for the community when a familiar voice stops my heart.

Slowly I turn around and all the pain I've been trying to push away comes rushing

back like a freight train.

I'd never thought I'd see him again.

It's Cage.

He's here.

And once again, my heart feels like it's being ripped to pieces.

"Cage?" I say out loud almost as if I can't believe what I'm seeing. No, not almost. I can't believe it. I never thought I'd see him again. When he was pulled away in the cop car I did my best to erase him from my life.

Honestly, I can say it was the moment I realized that alcohol could be a great friend. Not great for me but it worked to get my mind off him. I can't blame it all on him but I can say without a doubt that he was one of the main reasons for the start of my downward spiral.

"Bee, wow." His eyes open up a little wider. "Out of all the farmer's markets, in all the world." He smirks at me and I can feel the very beginnings of the butterflies trying to go ham in my gut.

This man has a direct line to my desire. He could sneeze and make me horny.

My eyes drift to the side and I see a woman standing next to him. I'm glad he's her problem now.

"Right. Nice to see that you've got out." I look away as if I'm trying to find someone else. I don't want him to think I'm too interested in anything he has to say. He broke me. I don't want him to know he has any more power over me.

"Yeah, recently actually. How are things with you?"

"Good. Perfect, actually." I lie.

"You selling?" He gestures to the other stands in the area.

"No, my club is here trying to get donations for a woman's drive." I gesture to the large truck in the back of the area. I don't see any of the other girls around so I'm assuming they are out doing what I'm supposed to be doing right now.

"Your club?" He raises his eyebrow, those dark eyes piercing into me.

"Yeah, Eve's Fury. We're a motorcycle club." I explain. Usually when I tell someone this I'm waiting for some type of snicker or sly remark but I know Cage knows the power of an MC. He knows exactly what comes along with it. When I see the slight expression of him being impressed, I do a little dance on the inside. I don't know why I'd be happy with him being impressed but I guess I just want him to know that my life didn't end when he left me.

It almost did but that's not what we're talking about.

A deep sigh to my side reminds me that I've forgotten something very important. Rye is still here standing next to me obviously feeling like a very uncomfortable third wheel. I wonder if that's how the woman feels as well.

Neither one of us, Cage or myself, bothered to introduce the people that we were standing with.

"Oh, sorry, I was caught off guard." I grab hold of Rye's shirt and tug him forward a little. If anything the man deserves the respect of at least being introduced. "This is Rye."

Cage nods once, puts his hand out and shake his hand. "Cage."

"Good to know you." Rye is respectful but I can tell from the way he's looking at Cage that he's sizing him up.

If I'm real, I'm not sure who'd win in a one to one battle between the two of them. Cage is all raw, crazed muscle but Rye is dormant, untapped bear like strength. It would be a great fight.

Not that I want that to happen...well at least not very much.

Cage takes the time to introduce me to the woman he's standing next to and I shake her hand.

Part of me feels bad for her like I know what kind of devastation he can bring to someone's life and I hope she's doing what she can to protect her heart. I'm not here to be her savior though. I've got my on shit to deal with.

"Anyway, I've got other vendors to talk to. It was nice to see you." I give Cage one last smile, one that I'm sure doesn't reach my eyes before I turn and walk away.

Somehow it feels like I'm closing a door to a part of my life that has held me in a noose for so long. It's freeing and every step I take away from Cage feels lighter than the last.

"You good?" Rye asks.

I thought I'd done a good job at hiding my true feelings, but just like everything else it seems like Rye has seen right through me.

"You remember that guy I told you about. The one who left me in a hotel after I

basically professed my love to him."

"The one that was taken away by the cops?" Rye's head twitches as if he wants to look back but thankfully he doesn't.

"Yup, that's the one." I sigh and shrug.

"Damn, well, at least there's no hard feelings. Right?" he slows his pace.

"Not at all. We're both on different paths in our lives. I don't know what demons he's fighting but I wish him the best as long as I'm not part of the battle." I let my head fall back so the wind can brush against my skin.

If this were any other day I'd be searching for the nearest bar so I can erase all the memories that are surging through my body. Seeing Cage is overwhelming too say the least.

Rye reaches up and places a soft hand on the back of my neck, massaging the small space where my hair meets my skin and instantly all the tension leaves my body. I don't know what it is about Rye that simply connects with me but it just feels so good.

"You're so fucking strong. It amazes me." He whispers and I have to gulp down a lump in my throat. He barely knows me but the fact that it seems like he genuinely means that strikes a chord in me. How long have I wanted someone to see me as strong. As something more than just a wild child?

When the fuck did this happen.

"Yeah well, it took a long time for me to get this way. I had some help along the way." I wink at him and he chuckles slightly.

I stare into his eyes and see something more there. Something all of me wants to identify but I know what that will open me up to. I'm not sure I can handle it. Slowly, I move away from his touch so I don't hurt his feelings. What I need right now is some space. I need to get my mind right before I even attempt to look for something more with anyone.

"Let's get these donations!" I clap my hands together forcing some enthusiasm into the atmosphere.

"I'm right behind you." Rye gestures with his hand that I should walk ahead of him.

After all the headache I've already brought into his life I wonder how long he'll be behind me, supporting me, encouraging me.

I definitely know I don't deserve it but it's good feeling.

When it's gone I'm not sure how I'm going to cope.

I'll have my family at Eve's Fury, I'll have my sister, Free, but I already know that life without Rye is going to be much harder than I want it to be.

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8

Bee

"Ahhhh Eeeee" Glenn comes speeding in my direction. His little legs moving faster than his body can keep up with.

I drop to my knees and crawl to him.

I've only been gone a week, but I swear it feels like this little tyke has grown half a foot since I last saw him.

I love me some Glenn and he loves me. We always have the best time.

"Ahhh Eeee!" He slaps his hands on my face, probably much harder than he intended to. I laugh at his exuberance. He's not saying many words yet, but I like to think those vowel sounds translate to "Auntie" and it makes my heart swell every time I hear it.

"Hey, Buddy! How've you been? You been a good boy?" I squeeze him tight to my chest and watch as both Addison and Hardy come out of the back room. He's putting his shirt back in. I'm sure my arrival interrupted a good time. I can't help but smile.

It's not the best feeling having a cop coming in and out of the clubhouse, but Hardy is so good to Addison, all of us overlook it. On top of that, Hardy is one of the good ones. After all that shit went down with Riggs, he stood by us. It's nice to know that we've got back up with the big gang. That's all the local PD is, one big lawful gang.

"He's been a menace." Addison hisses, but her face breaks out into a wide smile. No one could ever say that she doesn't love this little boy, and I see the same proud look on Hardy's face. He may not have been here from the beginning, but there's no denying that man loves this little boy.

"That's what I'm talking about, Glenn! Make them work for it." I tickle his little Buddha belly, and he squeals in my arms.

The hug time is over, Glenn wiggles out of my grasp and takes off for another area of the house. Hardy chases after him, leaving Addison with me.

I stand up to my full height and look at Addison, just to gauge how she's feeling about me at the moment. I've done a lot of fucked up shit, and just because I'm on the straight and narrow now doesn't mean she isn't still upset about what went down.

I should've known.

Her face breaks into a full smile, and she rushes to pull me into a hug. "I'm so happy you're home!" She squeezes me almost as tight as Glenn did.

"Yeah, had to get myself together." I nod and pull away.

"Vexx was freaking out."

I cringe and shove my hands into my pockets. Addison isn't the first one to tell me that Vexx was mad. I did the one thing that could probably get under everyone in this club's skin. I disappeared. While I was at Rye's house, I was so focused on getting through the withdrawals that I didn't think to call anyone to let them know where I was. Then when I was through the worst of it I was too embarrassed to make the call. I knew eventually I'd have to deal with the girls, I just kept pushing it off.

"I'm sorry."

"No, don't be sorry. You did what you needed to do. From the looks of it, it was the right thing." She reaches up and pushes some of my hair out of my face.

"Yeah?"

"Are you kidding me. I can see the old Bumblebee in there now. You look fresh...healthy." She nods, and I take that as the compliment she meant it as. Although there's a part of me that wonders what I looked like before. I'm sure I was a mess.

That's the past.

"So, what's been going on?" The last time I saw any of the girls was two days ago at the farmer's market.

I spent the night with Rye again, but I couldn't keep staying there in his space. Not because he didn't make things comfortable for me, but it honestly felt like I was getting too comfortable. Like I was seeing his place as my forever home instead of just a place for me to get back on my feet. I don't want Rye to only see me as someone he has to take care of. Even if nothing more comes from our time together, I don't want to be his burden.

"Actually, things have been rather quiet. We got a lot of donations from the last farmer's market. Vexx should be calling church soon to discuss how we're going to get it to them."

It feels good to get back into the swing of things here. Like I'm taking the steps to get my life going in the right direction.

"Okay, I'll be-" My words cut off as Vexx swings the door to her room open and glares at me.

"Bee." She states.

I can't read her expression. I'm not sure if she's mad. Relieved. Surprised. She's always been a tough cookie to crack.

"Hey, Prez. I just got in." I say already trying to explain what I'm doing here. When we were at the farmer's market, she told me this would always be my home, but I have to wonder if she meant it.

"Church." She says and starts walking in the direction of the room where we all usually meet. Addison turns to follow us, but Vexx puts her hand up. "No, just Bee."

Fuck. I'm about to get reamed out. I can feel it.

I sigh and square my shoulders. I fucked up, which means I have to deal with the consequences.

"You're so strong."

Rye's words echo in my mind and I fight to believe them. I don't feel very strong right now. In fact, I feel like a little girl about to get screamed at by the principal. In the past I'd dull the sting of anything bad with booze, but I don't want to do that now.

My eyes drift to the side. Down the hall and to the corner is a large section where we keep the liquor. The good stuff. It's like my body is attuned to where it is. It takes everything in me to keep my feet moving forward, following behind Vexx and not to run to get a drink.

If I thought the hard part was the actual withdrawal, I was wrong.

Vexx pushes open the door and I follow behind her.

"Shut it." She orders and I do so.

Vexx walks to her seat and drops down. For a moment, I'm not sure what I should do.

"You just going to stand there with your thumb up your ass?" She raises an eyebrow.

"It's much better than trying to sit with it up there, don't you think?" I joke, but she doesn't even crack a smile. Talk about a tough room.

Slowly, I make my way to my seat. I used to be comfortable in the chair, but now it feels like I'm sitting on spikes. I don't know what she's going to say. She can have my patch for what I've done.

The heavy wooden table in the Church room feels colder than usual under my arms. Maybe it's just me. Maybe it's just the way I feel like I'm under a damn microscope every time I sit in this chair now.

Vexx is sitting across from me, her fingers drumming lightly against the table's surface. She doesn't say anything right away, just looks at me. Stares, really. Her pretty eyes unreadable, sharp.

It grates on my nerves.

"What?" I snap, leaning back in my chair, folding my arms over my chest. The tension is too thick.

Vexx tilts her head, still watching me, still thinking. "You still clean?"

My first instinct is to be pissed. To let the frustration crawl up my throat and spit out something sharp in response. But I swallow it down. Because this is just my life now. This is the reality I chose.

I was a drunk for so long, of course people are gonna ask me if I'm still clean.

So instead of biting her head off, I take a slow breath and nod. "Yeah, I'm still clean."

Vexx's fingers stop drumming. "Good."

Silence stretches between us for a second, but it's not uncomfortable. Not really.

I wonder if she believes me. After all, it's only been a week. How many people have promised that they'd stay clean only to fall right back off the wagon days later. I know it's going to be the fight of my life, but right now, at least, I think I'm up for it.

"You thought about what living clean's gonna look like?" she asks, her tone softer now.

I exhale, running a hand through my hair. "I know I can't be around the same shit I used to be. I know I gotta keep my hands busy, my mind busy, or I'll go crazy."

Vexx nods like she already expected that answer. "Then we'll make sure of it. We can change some things around here. Keep the bottles out of sight, at least."

That surprises me more than it should. "You'd really do that?"

Vexx shrugs like it's no big deal. "You're family, Bee. And family takes care of each other. I'll do what I can to help you stay sober."

Something tight in my chest eases just a little. I've spent so much time trying to do this alone, trying to prove to myself that I could stay clean without anyone holding my damn hand. But knowing that someone's actually got my back... it feels good.

I nod, clearing my throat. "The best way to keep me clean is to keep me busy."

A slow grin spreads across Vexx's face. "Good, because I need you to go on a run."

I blink. "A run?"

"Yeah," she says, leaning forward. "We need to get our hands on some infant medicine, and there's a supply across the border. You in?"

I stare at her, waiting for the catch. Waiting for the part where she tells me she doesn't trust me to handle shit like this anymore. But it never comes.

"You're still trusting me to do my normal club duties?" I ask, almost not believing it.

Vexx lifts a brow. "Why wouldn't I?"

Because I fucked up. Because I spent years drowning myself in booze instead of being a reliable member of this club. But she doesn't say any of that. She just looks at me like she already knows I can handle this.

And fuck, that feels even better than the offer of help.

I smirk, shaking my head. "Guess I better get my shit together, then."

Vexx grins. "Damn right."

We sit there for a few minutes, and she tells me that Catori has been bitching about

the fact that we're not doing enough for the little ones in the community. The women's outreach is going strong, but she feels like we've been neglecting the ones that can't do for themselves at all.

I shake my head at that. She's not wrong, but honestly it feels like nothing is ever enough for Catori. She's a hard woman, but her heart is always in the best of places. If she thinks the babies need more love from us than that's just what we're going to do.

Vexx shows me a map of where I need to go and it dawns on me that she's not just allowing me to go on the run she's trusting me to take lead. Usually, it's Duchess or Riot who takes the lead for out of town business. Free and Vexx stay here to make sure home is good. I've always just been a bystander mostly because I couldn't be counted on. Now that I'm sober I guess she feels like she can trust me to do this.

It's a heady feeling.

I make mental note of everything that she's telling me and take a photo of the map so I know exactly where I'm going. The run is not for a couple of days but I want to make sure I'm completely prepared.

Finally, Vexx stands up having told me all I need to know. I stand as well ready to go do my research. "You know how much you mean to us right? I'm so fucking proud of you." Vexx says and I'm frozen in my spot.

I know that my club cares for me. Where a sisterhood after all but I always think maybe I'm not good enough for them to love me as much as they do. It's hard to accept sometimes.

"Uh... thanks." I smile and turn to the door, wanting to get out of this uncomfortableness.

I don't get far. The second I open the door, Free is standing there with her arms crossed over her chest.

This expression I know.

Anger.

My sister is going to have a lot to say.

I'm looking forward to every word of it.

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9

Bee

"Free, before you start, can I at least go to my room and get changed. I've had these clothes on for a while." I walk by her, knowing full well that she's going to follow right behind me.

"Free, be nice." Jag mutters as he pushes a toothpick from side to side in his mouth. He's leaned up against the wall, looking at the both of us.

Free and Mojag are so perfect for each other, but I still don't understand their dynamic. Most of the time it seems like they hate each other, they argue like mortal enemies, but I've never seen two people more committed to each other. More supportive.

It's just another version of love I've never got the chance to experience.

The type of love I thought I could've had with Cage.

I stumble as I hit the first stair and the thought flashes in my mind. Why can't I get him out of my head. I wish I would've never seen him at that farmer's market.

Ever since that small interaction with him, I've been questioning so much about myself. Like what the other woman he was with has that I didn't. Am I truly just not lovable.

"You okay?" Free softens a little and reaches out for me.

I jerk away before she can touch me. The last thing I need right now is for anyone to pity me. I'm going to be fine. I'm not a victim.

" You're so strong. " Rye's words echo again, and I pull myself up straight before I start making my way up the stairs.

I don't see the rest of the girls, but that's not abnormal, they're probably out on a ride or doing something for the club. There's never been a lag in work for us to do.

When I push open the door to my room, I'm surprised by how disappointed I feel.

It's exactly how I left it. A mess. Bottles and clothes all over the place. My photos are still on the wall. My makeup and jewelry still on the dresser, yet it feels empty. It's like something is different.

It only takes me a moment to realize what it is.

Rye isn't here.

I may have only been staying with him for a short time, but I've grown used to seeing him walking around in those low lounge pants and a plain black t-shirt. The man did absolutely nothing to enhance his looks but by god every day that I was there with him, I found more and more sexy about him. The way he was good with his hands. Strong when he needed but so gentle at other times.

The way he bit his bottom lip when he was concentrating on something.

The way his shirt sleeves hugged his biceps.

Fuck, he's sexy.

"Bee!" Free snaps my name and I shake my head.

Was she talking? Did I miss it already? "Hmm, sorry. What happened?" I ask, turning to look at her.

As my big sister, Free always feels like it's her duty to take care of me. To a point it is, when I was younger I followed behind her like a puppy. But I'm grown now, I make my own decisions. I got myself into this mess.

"Do you understand how worried I've been?" She squints her eyes at me and I sigh.

"You knew where I was? I just saw you the other day."

"Bull. I knew the location, but I've never been to that man's house. I didn't know if he was keeping you there against your will. I didn't know if you were safe. I didn't know shit."

"I told you I wanted to be there, that he was helping me."

She scoffs, "Plenty have men have come into our lives under the guise of helping us out, only for it to all turn to shit." She's breathing fast, her eyes darting around.

This is a trigger for her. It should be one for me, but I know Rye. I know he's nothing like those assholes who pimped us out when we first got to the states.

Mine and Free's introduction to the United States came at great cost. We came here for a better life. A way to survive, only to be tricked and sold as sex workers. It's one of the main reasons we fit in so well with Eve's Fury. All of us come from some sort of trauma at the hands of men.

"He's not like that, Free. I know you don't know him, but I do. I trust him. He's a good man." I nod, trying my best to put my sister at ease.

"If he's such a good man, why didn't he come to find us? I'm sure he knows you're part of this club." Free is going to find something wrong with anything I say. It's just her way.

I release the tension in my hands, I know she's not going to like what I'm about to say. "I... I told him not to. I didn't want to bring my mess to the club. I've done enough damage."

Right away, Free's mood sombers, "Bee," She puts her hands on my shoulders, "Tati," My body tenses even more when she calls me by my birth name. Ever since we were given our road names we barely every use our real names unless it's extra serious. "Your mess will forever be my mess. I don't care if you just set off a nuclear warhead and started another world war, I always want to be by your side. Don't ever feel like you're a burden or that I don't want to help you. I'm your sister. Don't cut me out of your life, I won't survive without you."

Those same emotions I fought to keep shoved down just a few seconds ago with Vexx raged back up, but this time I can't stop the tears.

Free doesn't need me to say anything in return, she just pulls me in her arms and holds me.

I missed her. Not just when I was with Rye, but when I was deep into my alcoholism. She's always been here, but I couldn't see past the bottom of the bottle to reconnect with her.

We stay there holding each other for a minute until I hear a small commotion coming from downstairs. It's just the excuse I need to stop the tears. "Let's go down there

before they burn down the house or something." I joke with Free, and this time she laughs.

"Alright...you sure, you straight?" She stops me before I take a step.

"I'm doing good. Probably better than I have in a long time." I smile and make my way out of the room.

" Raas! What wrong with your hands dem! " Riot is fussing, her accent taking on her natural Jamaican dialect.

It's not unusual that she's fussing about something, but I didn't even think that anyone else was in the clubhouse.

I make my way down the long hallway that leads to the larger room in the clubhouse and see everyone else huddled around a large water cooler. The large twenty gallon jug of water is upended and spewing water all over the place.

I'm confused.

None of this was here last week.

The wall that was once lined with booze and beer is now lined with bottles and bottles of...water. The shelf that held all the mixers are now full of water enhancers. Bottles of soda are in the small fridge. On the bar is an actual coffee machine. Not one of the little ones but a legit commercial one.

"What is all this?" I ask and everyone stands looking a little embarrassed.

Sugar comes up to me, her signature sweetness oozing from her pores. "We were trying to get everything set up before you got home. We're running a little behind

schedule."

Duchess steps forward. "I told Sugar we should get a coffee machine, and she went a little crazy." She rolls her eyes.

I know that's not true. They're doing this for me.

The love I feel for all of them is overwhelming. I know I'm never going to be able to repay them for this, even if it's just a little thing. They're all changing their lives for me. It's a big thing.

"Of course she did, if we're going to do coffee, we gotta do it right!" I laugh and grab the rag out of Duchess' hand to help clean up.

No one will admit that they're waiting for me to breakdown, but I know they are.

"Relax, guys, I'm not going to rip up the floor boards looking for my Jack Daniel's. I'd guard your closets, though."

When I hear them all gasp, I look up and laugh, which cuts the tension. Everyone joins in. Some of us cleaning the mess on the floor while the others go back to stocking what I'm sure is going to turn out to be a great coffee nook.

Nighttime.

This is the absolute worst.

I've done good all day with my urges. I can't say I haven't thought about going to find a drink somewhere, but I was able to push it out of my mind pretty easily.

Unfortunately, I've spent so much of my pastime drunk and out on the town that the

nighttime has become my biggest obstacle.

I'm bored out of my mind.

Everyone is in their own space, either with their significant others or their kids.

Hell, Roth is even down here for a visit with Vexx. I don't expect to see her for a few days. That's usually how it goes when he shows up.

So I'm left on my own. Utterly alone. With nothing to do but count the cracks in the ceiling.

I'm sure I can go into anyone's room and sit with them, but I don't want to intrude on their time and space.

What I need is a hobby. Something that's going to eat at my time until I get to tomorrow.

I'm not an artist, not a writer, not a seamstress... I'm the party girl.

Logically, I know going out to party so soon after I've given up drinking isn't the right thing to do. Too many temptations. I think I've got a handle on my will power, but I'm not sure that I'm that strong yet.

The clock continues to tick, but I swear it feels like the seconds are going so slow.

"Ugh!" I groan and jackknife up in bed before I swing my feet over and plant them on the floor. This is so annoying. Surely, I can find something to do.

I go into the bathroom and take a long shower, washing my hair, shaving my legs. Doing everything I can to eat up the time, still even after all that only an hour has

passed.

Before I think too much about what I'm doing, I'm getting dressed and walking downstairs.

Addison is in the kitchen and she sees me. "Hey, you okay? You need something?" She rushes over to me, a small bowl of spaghetti-oh's in her hand. I guess she's about to feed Glenn.

"No, I'm good. I'm just going out for... a ride." I decide in that moment.

"A ride?" She asks, her voice going up a little. She's not trying to question me but I'm sure this seems familiar for her. I've gone out for a ride before only to come back completely bombed out of my mind.

"Yeah. I'm okay. I promise. I'll be back soon." Giving her the most reassuring smile I can I turn and make my way to the door. I'm sure if anyone else sees me they're going to try and get me to stay in the house.

I want to stay sober but I don't want to feel like a prisoner, either.

I'm strong.

I can do this.

I repeat that mantra in my head over and over again as I get on my bike and fly down the road.

Turns out this town isn't as big as I thought it was.

It's not even an hour later when I get all the way to the other side of town.

I'm still full of restless energy, nowhere near ready to go to sleep for the night.

Sadly, there's nowhere else for me to go.

I turn my bike and head back in the direction of the clubhouse. I'm on autopilot not really paying attention to the roads I'm taking. I can get back to the clubhouse with my eyes closed if I needed to.

It's not until I hear people laughing loudly that I realize what I've done.

I'm here.

I'm outside of Rye and Barley.

My nerves skyrocket when I realize my autopilot is still trained to bring me to the bar. I shouldn't be here. I promised everyone that I wouldn't drink anymore. Hell, I promised myself that I wouldn't drink anymore.

I lean forward on my bike and let out a deep groan. How sad is it that I can't be trusted to be on my own. Like I need a chaperone with me at all times just to make sure I don't go drink.

I feel weak.

What kind of grown woman needs someone looking over their shoulder to make sure they do what they need to do?

My head pops up and I look at the sign above the worn wooden door.

What if I don't need to bother my patch sisters with being my chaperone? After all, Rye and Barley has one of the best chaperones I've ever met working right behind the

bar.

Rye is here.

Instantly, my mood perks up.

It's only been a few hours since I've seen him but I'm looking forward to seeing him again. I wonder if he's having a good day.

This is what I need in my life.

A good person who isn't going to judge me. I've never stayed in AA for very long but maybe Rye can be my sponser or something like that.

Yeah, this makes sense. He knows what I've been through. Helped me through the worst of it.

It doesn't even cross my mind that he might be tired of me. He's a good guy. The kind of guy that I'd see in one of those hallmark movies. A good influence.

With a little bit of pep in my step, I park my bike and make my way to the door of the bar.

My eyes go wide and I'm stuck, frozen in the doorway.

Rye's eyes dart to me for a second before they go back to the man in front of him. The same one he's got his gun trained on.

So much for him being a goodie two shoes.

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10

Rye

This feels weird.

"Baby, just one more drink." A young woman that I've only seen a couple of times lays her head down on the bar, all the while she's lifting her glass up as if she's waiting for me to refill it.

"Sorry, sweetheart, I think you've had enough." I mutter and move away while her girlfriends try to persuade her to leave.

I've been running this bar for years, but this is the first time I've felt like maybe I'm not supposed to be here. Like there's something missing.

I already know what it is.

Bee.

When she told me this morning that she was going to head home, I didn't want to admit to her that I didn't want her to leave.

She had no reason to stay with me. She was through the most dangerous parts of the detoxing. She was proving to be capable of not running straight to another bar. More importantly, she's not my responsibility. Still, I wish there was a reason for me to keep her around. I like having someone to come home to. Someone to talk to besides

the random customers looking to drink their emotions away.

Most of all, I love the way it felt to have her in the bed with me.

Every night that we slept together we started on opposite sides of the bed, but at some point in the night the both of us sought comfort in each other's arms. Most people look at me and just because I'm big and rough around the edges, they don't think I'm the type who likes to cuddle.

That shit is fucking awesome.

The feel of a soft woman tucked softly under my arm, her hair fanned out over my chest, her leg hooked around mine. It's perfect, at least it was with Bee.

Now, I'm alone again, and it's actually sort of depressing.

Looking around the bar, I realize that it's slow. I'm grateful for it.

Instead of worrying about who needs their drinks filled, I have the time to try to dig through my feelings for Bee. I know I shouldn't get attached, but it's hard. She's exactly my type of woman. The type that's always gotten me in trouble.

That should be enough of a warning, but of course it's not.

My mind is flooded with thoughts and images of Bee during the time she stayed with me. Even at her worst, she was absolutely breathtaking.

I'm so lost in my own thoughts that I'm not paying attention to the bar and the people inside of it. It's only when I hear the door slam that I look around and realize that there's only a handful of people left sitting at one of the tables. In front of them is the one person I absolutely don't want to see.

Evan.

The low-level henchman who has been making my life complete hell.

My muscles clench tight and I stare at the back of his head. Seconds later whatever he was telling the men in the corner make them get up and leave. I'm sure it was some sort of threat. That's the only reason Evan comes here.

To make threats.

Threats that I'm going to have to start taking serious.

About two years ago, I was in a bad fucking place. The bar was bombing and I didn't have the credit I needed to take a loan from the bank. I needed cash and quick.

So I did the only thing I could do. I borrowed from some fucked up people who did even more fucked up things. Sonny the Shark.

Thirty thousand dollars.

Fortunately, the bar hit a spike and business really starting booming.

I paid back every last dime and even seven thousand dollars in interest. I thought I was through with Sonny and all of his back alley connections. Unfortunately, it's two years later and for some reason he seems to think I'm still beholden to him.

He's nothing but a big fucking bully, and the last thing I'm going to do is let someone strong arm me. Only his threats are becoming more and more intense, and it's costing me business.

Evan is the only one so far that he's sent to talk to me.

"I've told you before, you're not welcomed here." I grit out as the last of my paying customers rushes out the door.

Evan turns in my direction and smiles at me. His teeth are rotten and cracked, but it doesn't stop him from flashing them any chance he gets. "Not welcomed. What do you mean? Where friends, aren't we? I mean, Sonny seems to think we should be very friendly."

"You can tell Sonny I don't need any more friends." I toss the rag in my hand down on the counter and cross my arms over my chest. There's no doubt that I can break every bone in Evan's face without much effort but the last thing I want is for Sonny to call anyone else in here to make a point.

"Yeah, sorry buddy, seems like you don't have much of a choice." Evan shrugs and walks closer to the bar.

His body order is so strong I have to take a step back. How the fuck does anyone let him get close to them.

"I don't owe you or Sonny shit. I've paid all my debt. I'm done with you." I keep my eyes on him. I don't know what he's got on him and I don't want to be caught off guard.

"Done with him?" Evan throws his head back and cackles, "You think you're ever going to be done with him. That man owns you. It doesn't matter what you've paid back, you asked him for a favor, and now he's going to need you to reciprocate." Evan settles his glare on me. "After all, this place wouldn't be here at all if you didn't get help from him. Don't be so difficult, just go along with the plan, and I promise you things will be smooth sailing from here on out. You're the only one who's holding out. You don't want to end up like the Greek restaurant down the street, do you? They tried to get out of the tax and things ended badly for them." Evan tilts his

head, and my anger flares inside of me.

There were rumors that the fire that decimated the small restaurant was started because of Sonny, but I wasn't close enough with any of the business owners to really get the answers I needed. This wasn't a veiled threat. It felt like a full-blown attack.

If I didn't kowtow and give Sonny what he wanted, my entire way of life can be taken away from me. Yeah, I have insurance, but it wouldn't nearly cover the damages.

I could go to the cops, but they've spent years looking into Sonny and have never been able to find anything that'll stick in court. Not only would that just make things so much worse, but then I'd have to worry about the blowback from that.

"I'm going to give you one last chance to get out of my place." I keep my eyes glued on him. I see what he's about to do before he even moves his arm completely.

He reaches into his pocket obviously about to pull out a weapon, "No, I'm giving you-

"

I cut him off before he has a chance to finish his sentence as I pull my 9MM out from under the bar. I'm liscensed to have it in here but if it came down to a large gun battle it's not going to do anything for me.

Evan's eyes go wide. He wasn't expecting me to fight back. Wasn't expecting me to pull a weapon on him. From what I heard everyone else just goes along with the plan so they don't end up on the wrong side of Sonny. I refuse to do that. I've worked way too hard to get what I have to have someone pulling it away from me.

Not for nothing.

At that very moment, the door opens and I want to curse the gods for having this

happen in what should be the middle of my work day. Nothing says this isn't a bar you want to be at then the bartender holding a gun toward someone's head.

"You dumb fuck." Evan mutters, his face much paler than it was a few seconds ago.

My eyes dart to the door when I hear a gasp. I only have to look for a second to know it's basically the worst possible scenario.

Instead of it being a regular customer that may or may not come back after this display, in walks Bee.

I wanted to see her so bad today but I don't want her here now. Not when there's a chance that she might get hurt. I say a silent prayer that she'll have a normal reaction and turn around to run out of here but when she takes another step forward I know I'm not going to have any luck in that department either.

"No." I growl in her direction, though I'm not taking my eyes off Evan again. I know he's armed, and all it'll take is for him to catch me not paying attention one time before he'll have the upper hand.

"No, my ass. I don't know what's going on in here, but I'm not going to leave you here on your own." Bee snaps back at me, her eyes focused on Evan's position.

"Don't get this little bar bitch killed." Evan raises his eyebrow and starts to turn her head in Bee's direction, but I'm not going to allow that. I'm not going to allow anyone to disrespect her.

Using my free hand, I lunge forward and grab hold of his neck, yanking him down, so his face is pressed against the bar top. I move so fast, he barely has enough time to pull his weapon out of his pocket. Fortunately, Bee moves faster.

She's already right behind him while I keep him subdued on the bar top. She grabs the small 22 he has in his pocket and takes it from him. Now at least I don't have to worry about bullets flying around. Still, I need to make sure that Sonny knows under no circumstance will I be just another one of his whipping boys. I'm just not made like that.

"I'm going to tell you this one last time Evan. I don't owe Sonny anything and I'm not going to go along with his plan. The next time you or anyone else from that little group comes into my place there will be no talking. Bullets will fly and we'll see who comes out on top." I snarl at the man and press down hard on his head before I grab his collar and shove him backward.

He stumbles and shakes his head looking between me and Bee.

"That's the worst decision you've ever made." He sighs before he turns around and walks out the door. He doesn't even bother to take the gun back from Bee. I guess he's got more where he came from.

I hear his words as he leaves my place but all I can do is focus on the fact that Bee is safe. At least for now.

Shutting my eyes tight for a second I drop my weapon back behind the bar and make sure it's safely stowed away.

When I look up again, Bee is still standing there. The 22 is on the bar top and her arms are crossed over her ample chest.

"What?" I ask.

"What the hell do you mean what? Are you just going to gloss over the fact that you just had some man at gun point or maybe, you think, that deserve a few moments of

conversation." She bites out sarcastically.

I shake my head and try to walk away from her. Of course I should've known that she wasn't going to go for that. In a flash she jumps over the bar top and stands in front of me.

"Bee, this doesn't have anything to do with you."

"I never said it did but I know it has something to do with you. I'm invested now. We about to be Jack and Rose from Titanic. You jump, I jump." She parrots the iconic line and I groan. When I told her that I would do anything to help her I never once thought that she'd take the same approach to me.

"No, this isn't for you." I push by her, my shoulder barely bumping hers.

"Why? Is it because I'm not part of the dick committee?" She hisses at me and I turn my head in her direction.

"Don't be silly, this has nothing to do with the fact that you're a woman." I'm not sexist in the least. There's plenty of things I'm sure she's better at than I am but the thought of her risking her safety for me isn't something I'm going to be able to live with.

"Than what is it? It's clear you're into some shit that is going to get you hurt. Why won't you let me help you."

"Because you have to be safe." I snap back at her. I don't think she understands how vital her safety is to me.

Her mouth drops open for a second before she snaps it closed again and huffs a breath through her nose.

"So do you, Rye. I'm not going to let anyone my favorite bear." She smirks at me and I'm disarmed. I know I should fight harder but right now I'm just glad we're in no immediate danger.

With a sigh I lean forward on the bar top and just stare at her for a second before I squint my eyes, "Wait a minute, what are you doing here anyway." I've been around people who've just stopped drinking the last place that the need to be is in a bar.

She blinks a few times and looks around like she's forgotten where she is, "Oh, funny enough, I didn't come here for a drink I came here because I was bored and lonely. Missed ya." She tacks on to the end before giving me a smile.

It makes me feel good even if she's only playing around.

"Besides your the only person I know who can be my chaperone, keep me from drinking and still let me have a good time. So what do you say, can I hang around with you for a while? Maybe help out?"

Now it's my turn to blink in confusion. "You want a job?"

She tilts her head and her eyebrows go up, "Hmm, I never thought about it like that but I guess that's what I'm going after. What do you say?"

I don't really have a need for anyone else to work with me right now but it might be good for me to hire someone. It'll also be good for me to hire Bee so I can keep an eye on her, not that I'm accepting responsibility or anything.

"Yeah, I guess you can help clean up and stuff. I'll do all the pouring." I shrug and she claps her hands.

"Awesome! Great to be here boss." She juts her hand out and I laugh as I shake it.

"You're absolutely out of your mind."

Just in that moment the door flies open and four of my regulars come in. It's clear they've just come from work.

"Well let's get started." Bee tries to pull her hand away from me but I hold onto it a second longer.

Something tells me having her work here is going to be more trouble than anything Evan or Sonny can bring my way.

11

Bee

This is hard.

As much as I'm trying to act like I'm holding my own, maybe getting a job at a bar isn't the best thing for me to do when I'm so fresh from being an alcoholic.

Fortunately for me the bar gets pack and fast, before I know it I'm buzzing around picking up cups and chatting with the same people I used to get drunk with. I'm finding besides the desire to just put one of the cups up to my mouth for a swallow of that burning liquid I'm still able to have fun and be my normal self. The only difference, I'm much less sloppy than I usually am.

Rye keeps his eyes on me the entire time.

I should feel uncomfortable about it, but if I'm honest I like the attention. There are even times that I catch him biting his lip and his gaze much lower than my face. Yeah, he's liking what he's seeing. Maybe there is something more to what he's saying. So far he's only admitted to the fact that he's here to help me, but maybe he wants more the same way I do.

I want to feel his lips all over my body. Want those rough hands squeezing and pulling at me.

I just want this man.

The fact that he was so determined to keep me out of his troubles because he wanted to keep me safe is just another reason I want him. He didn't want to keep me out because he thought I couldn't handle myself, he wanted to keep me out to make sure I wasn't harmed.

I don't know who this Evan or Sonny characters are, but from what I saw going on earlier, it seems like they are bad news.

Bad news I'm definitely going to have to bring to Vexx's attention.

I'm sure with the club and with Rye, we can make sure that nothing happens to Rye or his bar.

I just hope he doesn't start feeling some sort of way having a bunch of women helping him. That's usually the rub when it comes to the men around here. They see us as dainty ladies when in reality we're all vicious lionesses. Rye will figure it out sooner or later.

I lean down to grab a cup off a table so I can bring it back to the bar to get washed, unfortunately the person that was drinking seems to think this is the perfect opportunity to stop me.

"Where you going with that, beautiful?" He grabs hold of my wrist, stopping me from pulling back.

In one second, I look him over and know that I'd have no problem putting him down if I need to. I'm hoping it doesn't come to that. It'll be fun if it does, though.

"Oh, no where far if you don't let go of me. In fact, I'm pretty sure you can find it rammed up your ass in the next ten seconds if you don't remove your hand from my wrist." I bat my eyelashes at him and all at once all the men that he's sitting with at

the table roar with laughter. Right away, he lets my hand go, and I'm walking with the empty glass back over to the bar.

Rye is standing stock still, his eyes no longer on me but glued to the profile of the man who just grabbed me.

"What the fuck was that about?" He growls, and I can already see his muscles bunching and coiling like he's ready to rip the man's face off.

"Easy, killer. It's nothing I can't handle." I stand in front of him and force him to look down at me. "You know if I'm going to be working here you're going to have to get used to the fact that some people might touch me. I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

His face softens, "You shouldn't have to. That's what I'm here for."

Those words hit hard, but I refuse to let him know just how much they mean to me. I've never needed anyone to save me, not even my sister though she tried her hardest. Maybe I can let this bear of a superhero be the first one to sweep me off my feet.

"That's what we're both here for." I correct him. "You've got me and I've got you. We've got each other's back. I'll let you know if I need you, okay."

"Swear it." He grits through his teeth.

I put up three fingers and snap my feet together, "Scouts honor!"

At once, the grim look on his face drops, and he smirks at me, "You're so strange."

"I'll take strange over drunk and deranged any day." I shoot him a wink and go back out into the fray to continue cleaning up.

By the time Rye and Barley is ready to close, I'm nearly dead on my feet. Rye and I never talk about my duties working here, hell we never even talked about pay, but I'm not sure how often I'm going to be able to do this. All I want is the bed.

"Go on, we're closed fellas." Rye rushes the last stragglers out of the bar and of course they come up with every excuse they can to get one more drink, but Rye stands firm.

"You can have another drink tomorrow."

I lean against one of the stools near the bar feeling my eyes already starting to droop. How the hell am I going to get back to the clubhouse like this. I swear I used to have more energy when I was drinking. I turn my gaze to the rows and rows of liquor behind the bar and once again I feel the urge to just reach over and grab one. I'm not going to. I'm doing so good.

To drink means I'll be failing the club, my sister, myself. It means I'll fail Rye.

Instead, I reach over and grab a bottle of water. It's nice and cold. Definitely not what I want, but it does give me a bit of a boost.

Rye turns to look at me and when he sees the bottle of water to my mouth, he smiles. "That's a good girl."

I shrug, "If you say so."

"I do."

With my help through the day, there's not much left at night for him to clean up. He closes out the till and hands me fifty dollars.

"This good for the night?"

Fifty? Just for picking up glasses? I wasn't expecting this much at all. "Super cool, in fact, it might be too much." I slide the money in my pocket.

"You earned it. Besides, it looks like you've cut my closing time duties nearly completely. Everything already is so clean. You're a lifesaver. Truly."

I humph not wanting to remind him that it's him who is the lifesaver. Just a few days ago I was banging on his door nearly one foot in the grave from detoxing.

He seems so docile and sweet, yet I know what's under it all. I saw him earlier with that gun pointed at Evan's head. I know Rye can get dangerous quickly. That only makes me want him more.

"So..." He says, looking around once all the busy work is done.

It's the end of the night, and he's about to go home.

Crap, that means I have to leave too.

"Oh, yeah right. I guess it's time for me to hit the bricks." I joke and chug the last of the water in the bottle.

"I didn't say that." He keeps his eyes glued on me.

"What exactly are you saying, then, Rye?"

"I'm just letting you know there's another option...if you want."

"And that other option is?" I plan on making this as hard for him as possible. I have

to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from smiling. I love getting him riled up.

"Bee, you've spent the night at my place before. Same rules apply. I'll stay to myself, but you shouldn't have to travel all the way back to the clubhouse so late at night... not if you don't want to." He shrugs before he reaches up to turn the lights off over the bar.

I could spend the night here with him. His arms around me in the middle of the night is one part of our time together that I miss. I didn't want to become dependent on falling asleep with him next to me, but now that he's offering it seems stupid not to take him up on his offer.

"Sounds good to me. Take me home, Bear." I joke with him, and he squints his eyes at me as if he doesn't like me reverting to his nickname.

I know he does. The way his chest puffs out just a little bit. He's easy to read when it comes to stroking his ego.

"Crazy ass." He mutters as he walks to the door snagging my hand on the way. We turn off the rest of the lights before he turns up the alley and walks up the stairs that leads to his apartment. Three steps up and I'm already dragging. I'm so tired.

"Really." He groans before he turns and in a swift move lifts me into his arms and continues his way up the stairs. I yelp at the sudden feeling of being weightless.

"Hell, keep this up and you're going to have to carry me up these stairs every time I visit." I joke and I watch the desire flare to life in his eyes.

This is the same man who told me that he would never touch me like that. That he didn't want to fuck me but now there's no mistaken what I see.

Oh...yes.

"You make it sound like you're going to be visiting often." He questions as he pushes open the door to his place.

"We'll see." I mutter as he gets me inside and slowly lowers me to the ground.

I don't want to assume he's on the same page as me so I make my way to the living room.

"When was the last time you ate?" Rye asks as he goes to the small kitchenette.

"Food? Uh..." My words trail off. I don't think I've eaten anything all day. No wonder I'm so lethargic. I've been going at a break neck pace for hours with nothing in my system besides water.

"Yeah, like I thought." Rye grumbles, his grumpy side already showing back up again.

I lean back and watch him working in the kitchen. He whips together some spaghetti so fast it nearly makes my head spin. I'm impressed that it's not just something he had to heat up. No, he sautes the meat and seasons the sauce. He checks the noodles to make sure they are the correct texture. I'm enthralled for the full thirty minutes it takes him to finish.

I was tired before but seeing him in the kitchen doing what he needs to do is more than enough to give me my second wind. My stomach growls loudly when he makes a plate and starts over in my direction.

"Come, eat." He gestures to the plate.

I'm not hungry anymore...not for food.

"That's okay, you eat." I nod my head so he knows I'm okay.

He presses his lips together tightly before blowing his breath out of his nose. "Why you always gotta be so difficult."

"Making things hard is my specialty." I smirk at him and his eyebrow hitches up. The innuendo isn't lost on either of us.

"Food." He twirls up a bit of the pasta making sure to get some of the meat on the fork before he purses his lips and blows it.

Good god, why is that so fucking sexy? Slowly he brings the fork to my mouth.

Opening up I take the food inside. The second the flavors hit my tongue I can't help the moan that leaks out. It's so good.

I chew it up and swallow. He's already ready with the next bite.

We do this for a few minutes, his eyes are focused on my mouth. His pupils wide and his breathing heavy. Something about feeding me is turning him on. I've been with a lot of people who had different kinks but this is a first for me.

"You like this don't you?" I ask just to verify.

He blinks a few times breaking out of the trance, "I like you being taken care of. I like taking care of you."

I'm not used to someone waiting on me hand and foot but if this is what he's like I'm not going to be the one to deny him. Besides I can get used to this.

After a few bites, I turn my head when he tries to feed me again. It wasn't much but I'm full.

"You ready for bed?" He whispers.

"Mmhmm." I nod and he puts the plate down on the small table in front of us before scooping me up and carrying me to the room. He's not even out of breath.

"You know I can walk." I poke fun of him.

"Hmm."

Quickly I get out of my pants and pull the blankets back so I can get under but he's still staring at me from the foot of the bed.

"You okay?" I ask. He's right it's not like we've never slept in the same bed before, this is already our nightly routine but something feels different.

"Yeah, you want a shirt?" He asks making himself move to the dresser where he keeps his limited supply of clothing. I'm sure since I've been staying with him I've gone through most of his stuff.

"Sure." I reach out for the long shirt he's pulled out for me. Usually I'd wait until he went to the bathroom or something to change but tonight I'm going to push him out of his comfort zone. I want him to see that I'm not just some broken woman he needs to take care of. I want him to see that I have other needs as well. Needs I didn't even think I'd get to fulfill with him.

Tonight is going to be fun, one way or another.

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Rye

What the fuck am I doing.

I'm just supposed to be making sure that Bee is okay. Making sure that she's on her feet and able to function.

I shouldn't have agreed to let her work at the bar. In fact, the second she came into the bar looking for something to do I should've sent her on her way.

Everything in me is telling me it's a bad idea to get involved with her, but my need for her is getting way out of control. It's like I'm fucking obsessed.

I try to shake off the thought as I pull my shirt over my head, tossing it onto the chair by the bed. The sheets are pulled back, the lamp still on, casting a warm glow over the room. I rub a hand down my face, exhausted but wired at the same time. Then I hear it, the rustle of fabric behind me.

I glance over my shoulder just in time to see Bee, half-naked, standing in the middle of my room, pulling her shirt over her head.

My stomach tightens.

She's in nothing but her bra and underwear, her skin soft and smooth under the golden light. My breath gets stuck somewhere between my chest and my throat, and

before I can stop myself, I groan, low and deep, more animal than man.

Bee pauses, looking at me like she wasn't expecting a reaction. Like she's completely oblivious to what she does to me.

"Jesus, Bee," I mutter, dragging a hand through my hair. I need to look away, I should look away, but I don't. I can't.

She smirks, like she knows exactly what she's doing to me. "What?"

I shake my head, turning my back to her as I exhale slowly through my nose. "Nothing. Just... hurry up and get in bed."

It takes everything in me to keep my eyes forward as I hear her slip under the covers. I follow after her, sinking into the mattress, rolling to my side like we always do. The same routine we've fallen into since she's been here. Space between us. No touching.

But tonight feels different.

Tonight, I can feel the heat of her body like a flame licking at my skin. I can hear the unsteady rhythm of her breath, faster than usual. It takes every ounce of willpower not to reach for her, but I'm losing the battle fast.

She shifts, just slightly. Not away from me, but toward me.

Fuck it.

I exhale sharply and close the distance, letting my arm drape around her waist, pulling her back against me. Her body molds against mine, and I can't help but let my fingers ghost up the curve of her hip. Slow. Measured. Just enough to feel her shiver beneath my touch.

I fight to keep things from going too far. From turning into something neither of us are ready for. But the tension is thick, suffocating. My heart is hammering. Her breathing is uneven. I can feel the way she trembles against me.

Then, she tilts her head up, her lips just shy of my jaw, and whispers, "Am I wrong?"

I swallow hard. "What?"

Bee shifts again, this time turning in my arms just enough to look up at me. Her eyes search mine, dark and full of something I can't ignore.

"Am I the only one this is affecting?"

Fuck.

I cup the side of her face without thinking, my thumb grazing her cheekbone. "No, Bee," I murmur, my voice rough. "You're not the only one."

"Then why are you fighting me so hard?" She turns and gently lifts her leg so it's draped over my thigh. My hands go down to her leg and I squeeze gently.

I've always been self-conscious of my size. I'm a big man and Bee is nothing but a slip of a woman. If I'm too rough, I could hurt her. I don't think I'd ever be able to forgive myself if I did anything to hurt her.

"We shouldn't..." I pull her face closer to mine. She's right there... I let my mouth just barely graze over hers.

Damn, I want this woman. So fucking bad.

"I think we should." Slowly, she snakes the tip of her tongue out and traces my

bottom lip.

If I had any will power left, it just flew out the window.

I slam my lips against hers, she squeals in surprised before she melts into me. Her leg tightening on my thigh pulling me closer while she opens her mouth to accept me more

The fire burning between us is so great that I have to pull back just because it feels like it might consume me. I want this to last.

It's not what I expected, but I'm more than ready for her.

"Are you fucking sure, Bee." It just occurred to me that I don't think Bee is her real name. If I'm going to be inside of her, I want to know who she is. I need to know what name is going to be scribbled on my heart when it breaks to pieces after this is all over.

"I'm sure." She breathes and tries to pull me back down on her, but I hold back.

"What's your name, Bee? You're real name." I look down into her beautiful eyes and see the vulnerability there. It's clear this isn't information that she tells most people.

She closes up a little, the shyness I've never known her to have taking over. "Tati."

Fuck me. How is a name even sexy.

"We stop when you want to stop, Tati. You understand."

"Then don't stop."

This time, when she pulls me down, I let her. My mouth collides with her and I don't hold back. Our lips and tongue swirl and swipe against each other. Her leg hitches up higher on my hip and I press myself down on her. My cock is nestled perfectly right between her legs and I can feel the heat coming off her. I rock myself against her, slow at first, but the intensity of her hands all over my body makes it impossible for me to keep that pace.

I'm moving so fast that if I don't stop, I'm going to blow my load before we even get started.

"Mmm, Rye. That feels so good." She lets her head fall back, and I instantly go for her neck.

She gasps when I kiss and suck on the sensitive skin there. I want to hear more of those sounds. Hell, I want to hear them for the rest of my life.

Quickly, I push that thought out of my head. It's typical of me to start planning my future when all I'm guaranteed is a good night. It's the main reason I rarely give in and have sex. The women I usually end up with tend not to do well with long term commitments. It's always just me and my wishful thinking that's thinking of what I can have in the future.

Pulling myself back just slightly to remove the pressure, I let my hands slide down her body.

"No, come back." She tries to pull me back until she realizes what I'm doing.

I yank her panties to the side and slowly begin to massage her wet, tight pussy. She's so fucking small. I'm nearly too excited to get inside of her. I need to make sure she's ready for me. Open, stretched.

"Oh, Rye... yes, don't stop." Tati moans and her hips rock back and forth on my fingers.

I can tell that she's not just doing this for my enjoyment. She's enjoying this. If she likes it, there's no way I'm going to stop.

"No way." I groan and get as close to her as I can without pressing my cock against her. I need to calm down a little before I slide into her.

I start off slow, plunging one finger deep inside of her moving back and forth making sure to pay attention to her clit. When I think she's used to the one finger, I double up to two. I keep this going until she's absolutely full with three of my fingers, and she's already come at least one time.

"Rye! Fuck!" She screams and grabs hold of my wrist.

She's right on the edge of another climax, and I'm nearly as desperate as she is to get her there. I suck my breath in, only wanting to hear her noises. Everything around me goes silent for a second, that is, until I hear the one sound I don't expect.

Breaking glass.

"What's that?" Bee jerks up in the bed and slides back, so I'm no longer knuckles deep inside of her.

She heard it too. I turn my head in the direction, trying to figure out if it's coming from inside the house or not. It sounds far away, but not far enough away that I don't have to be concerned about it. I hear another loud breaking glass, and it's only then that I realize where it's coming from.

The bar.

"Fuck! Stay here!" I order her and quickly jump out of the bed and slide some clothes on. I don't even bother with shoes.

I barge out of the house and quickly run down the stairs that lead to Rye and Barley.

I get down there just in time to see three men jump into a car and speed off into the night. I've seen the car before. It's Evan.

He's come back.

This time he didn't just leave, this time he destroyed my place before he did.

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Bee

Rye rushed out so fast, I'm certain he didn't grab anything to protect himself with.

What the hell is he thinking. Not everyone is afraid of a big tall man. He's not superman. He can be shot. He can be killed.

I jump out of bed and try my hardest to get my pants back on. My legs give out and I fall to the ground.

"Damn it."

That orgasm he just gave me is throwing off my coordination.

I don't know who is downstairs but whoever it is better pray that Rye deals with them before I do. How dare they stop my good time. I was so into it.

It felt so good, better than I thought it would.

Finally, I slide my shoes on and take off down the stairs behind Rye. I expected to see a fire or something crazy so I'm grateful to see the bar is still standing tall just a little broken up. The glass windows are all broken in, the tables are all turned over, and the till has been thrown across the room. The worst of it is the vandalism of the walls. There's graffiti and horrible words inked on the wood.

It really brings the whole vibe of the place down.

"Rye!" I call out for him and he pops up from behind the bar. He was bent down looking at something.

"I thought I told you to stay upstairs!" He barks at me before he rushes from around the bar, steaming mad walking in my direction.

I jerk back at his aggression. He's never spoken to me like this not even when I was absolutely out of my mind drunk.

"What the hell do you mean you told me to stay upstairs? Do I look like a dog to you?" I cross my arms over my chest and glare at him. He's going to learn and quick that I can't be forced to do anything I don't want to do.

"Goddamn it Bee. I don't know if they're going to come back or what. You don't need to be here right now." He grabs hold of my arm as if he's about to tow me back upstairs but I'm not having it. I yank my arm away and take a few steps back from him.

"And how does me being upstairs help you? You think you can take on the group of them on your own?" I stare at him.

"I didn't ask for your help!" he bellows in my direction. He's so loud I swear I feel the hairs that frame my face blow back.

I don't let his volume deter me. If he wants to act like a bear I'm going to let him.

"You may not have asked for it, but that doesn't mean you don't need it. What you're seeming to forget right now is I've been in these kinds of situations before. I know what it's like to be in danger. I'm not scared, Rye. I'm not scared, and I'm not just

going to run and hide like some victim. I'm going to help you. Now, get the fuck over yourself and help me get this place straightened up before you lose a toe or some shit." I gesture down to his still bare feet, and he looks down.

He opens his mouth once but then snaps it shut before he throws his head back and roars in absolute frustration.

I'll let him do what he has to do but in no way does that mean I'm going to leave him here to deal with this himself.

"You're so damn aggravating."

"Look in the mirror, big boy, you're not sweet as pie either." I reach down and grab the edge of one of the tables. It's a lot heavier than I thought it was going to be.

Rye huffs another frustrated sigh before he comes over to where I am and helps me pick it up. "If they show back up you're out of here, do you hear me? I don't care what kind of experience you have. I'm not going to allow you to be in danger while I'm around." His voice is softened, and I know in that second all the anger was just a front for his fear.

"If they come back we're out of here together. This place is just stuff, your life isn't worth this." I reach my hand up and caress his cheek once softly before we get back to cleaning up.

Thankfully they don't come back for the rest of the night, and I would know because I spent the rest of the night helping Rye clean up the place. He boarded up the windows as best he could, but there was no way he'd be able to open the next night.

Finally, when we were able to sit, Rye lifts my leg into his lap and begins to massage my calf. My eyes roll back instantly. It's like the man's hands are made of gold.

"I'm sorry that this mess interrupted our time together. You shouldn't have to deal with this." He says softly.

At least I think that's what he said, my mind is already floating from the awesome massage.

"Hmm, no... I mean, don't worry about it. It's not your fault, unless you're admitting to me that you planned this for the insurance money?" I look up at him with a smile on my face. Hopefully a joke will break the tension.

"I wish... no, this isn't going to be over with a simple insurance claim." He takes a deep breath and reaches for my other leg, but I pull it away before he can take it.

"Wait... What do you mean this isn't going to be over? I didn't want to pry before, but I'm assuming this has something to do with that stand-off I walked in on earlier?" It's time to get some answers.

"Yeah, unfortunately."

"Well, who is this Evan person and why is he doing this?"

He shakes his head and gets up from the chair, "No, Bee, you're not going to take my problems on your own. I'll figure this out on my own. You're not the only person who's had to experience fucked up shit before. I'll be fine."

"Would you stop with that macho man bullshit. I'm sure you will figure it out on your own. I'm sure you'll put your blood sweat and tears into finding a solution, but I also know that if you let me and my club help you, we can find a solution faster and easier." I stand and get closer to him.

"What the hell? When did your club get in the picture?"

"Are you kidding me? This is what we do? We protect people. Especially if they are important to us."

"Bee..." I can hear the aggravation in his voice. He doesn't want me to be part of this problem, but I already am. If it has anything to do with him, then I'm involved.

"Stop fighting me. I thought we were past that." I say softer and slowly wrap my arms around him. If I can't catch the bear with honey, I'm not sure what else I can do. Thankfully, the moment my arms wrap around him, I can feel him softening. He really is a big teddy bear.

"You really are going to be the death of me, aren't you?" He whispers back.

"No, I don't think so, unless you continue to think of me as some helpless little girl. I was more than ready to show you just how much I can take when we were up in your room." I add on seductively, and his chest rumbles with a soft growl.

I move back before we get too carried away. With Rye, I know it's only one touch away from the both of us exploding and him taking me right here on one of the tables. We've got work to do.

Sitting down in the chair, I cross my legs and keep my gaze on him. Now... tell me all about Evan and what is really going on."

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Bee

Honestly, it all sounds like a bad mafia movie.

Sonny the shark?

They can't be serious with this shit.

It took everything in me not to laugh when Rye started telling me the story of what was really going on. Of course by the time he got to the end I realized just how serious it is. This Sonny the Shark was tormenting and harassing the hard-working people on this strip.

I'd heard about the Greek Restaurant being burned down, but I didn't know it had anything to do with this Sonny the shark.

He had to be stopped, and it didn't matter what we had to do to stop him. I was sure that Vexx wouldn't have an issue getting involved in this. After all, this is our town. If we weren't going to protect it, then who was.

Once I was sure that Rye would be safe, I took off to go back to the clubhouse.

The girls had to hear about this now.

I just hoped Vexx didn't give me too much shit for getting involved in who she might

consider a stranger's business. If it were anyone else, she'd be ready to do what we needed to do.

Moving as fast as I can, I quickly park my bike in front of the clubhouse and walk in.

Everyone is up and in the main room.

It's surprising but it makes things easier. When I walk in, instead of smiles and hello's everyone glares at me.

It gives me pause.

"What the hell is wrong with all of you? You look like you're about to skin me alive."

"We just fucking might." Riot snarls at me.

My mouth pops open, I don't know what I could've done in less than twenty-four hours that would cause everyone to jump down my throat like this, but I'm not prepared for it.

"I knew it." Duchess comes closer to me and audibly sniffs me.

"You knew what? What the hell are you doing?" I shove her lightly out of my space.

"I knew that you'd go straight back to that damn bar. You were doing so fucking good. You promised!" Duchess yells in my face, and I lift my jacket to my nose. I take a whiff and boy is she right. i smell like straight alcohol.

"Bee, how could you do this." Free doesn't even look at me. I can see she's disappointed, and part of me is hurt that she doesn't even hear me out first. They all just assume that they know I've been drinking.

I feel the rage building inside of me but quickly force it back down. I did this. It's because of all my past broken promises. All the times one of them has come to find me nearly passed out in some bar somewhere.

"Free, girls, I know what this looks like-" I'm cut off before I can finish what I'm saying.

"Where were you?" Vexx seethes.

I let out a sigh, I'm not going to lie but I can already tell that when I tell them all where I've been they're going to lose their shit.

"I was at Rye and Barley."

It's like a riot. The minute the words come out of my mouth all of them move as if they are about to race out the door and do more damage.

"Stop!" I get in front of all of them and put my arms up to keep them from taking another step. "I know what this looks like, trust me I do. And I know it's no different from any other night, but I swear to you, I've had nothing to drink. Nothing." I try to capture Free's gaze, but she still won't look at me. I turn my eyes to Mojag who is still leaning up against the wall. It's his favorite spot, back where he can observe everything.

"I'm not drunk. I didn't drink anything. I'm still clean." I keep his gaze. We stare at each other for a few seconds before he walks over to Free and bumps her so she has to look up at me.

"Nothing?" She questions softly, her eyebrows hitching up in suspicion.

"Nothing. Water, and barely enough of that." I smile at her, trying to get her to see

the sister that she knew from so long ago.

"Then why do you smell like that?" Riot questions.

"I was cleaning up a lot of spilled alcohol. I've been with Rye all night. I'm pretty sure he'd rather drag his feet over hot coals before he'd let me put another glass of hootch to my lips." I try to lighten the mood.

"If you were with him last night, why didn't you just call and let us know?" Addison asks.

She was the last person to see me last night. I'm sure Vexx and the rest of the girls have been giving her hell for letting me leave late last night without coming with me, just to make sure I stay on the right path.

"Well, I actually was working. Like I got a job..." I pull the fifty dollars I still had out of my pocket to show them, "Then I went home with Rye, and things got... fun." I wiggle my eyes and everyone besides Vexx and Free chuckles slightly, "Then the bar was attacked."

"What the fuck!?"

"Raas!"

"What the hell do you mean it was attacked?"

All the questions start coming at once.

"Easy, girls, I can talk fast, but not that fast." I walk by them and go sit on the couch. Everyone comes and surrounds me.

Even Press, Hardy and Jag come closer so they can hear what I'm talking about.

I give them the whole run down and unlike me both Riot and Duchess couldn't hold back their laughter when I said the big bad in this story was someone named Sonny the Shark. They cackled and I allowed myself to join. Of course by the end of the story everyone was as serious as I was when Rye finished telling me the story.

There's a sigh from the corner and when I look up I see Hardy rubbing a hand across his beard.

"You know something."

"I don't know much, but what your friend Rye was saying is true. We've been chasing after Sonny for years. He's slippery. We've never been able to make anything stick. Crazy part of all this is the last time I heard anything about Sonny, he was still a little fish. If he's going around trying to implement a tax on the businesses in the area, that means he's off leash. That's not going to be good for anyone."

"Yeah, I didn't think so. If these guys were so bold that they'd destroy the bar like this and not have to worry about any blowback, I can just imagine what they're going to do if they really get a footing in the underground world. We need to stop this before it gets out of hand." I look over to Vexx.

As the president of Eve's Fury she's the one who gives word on whether or not we're going to get involved in this.

"Stop." Hardy puts his hand up before he leans over and kisses Addison. "I'm still a cop, and I'm sure whatever you may or may not do won't be by my rule book. Let me leave before you say anything else."

"Good man." Duchess says over her shoulder.

We all wait for Hardy to walk out of the clubhouse. A second later, we hear his car stop up, and he's gone.

Vexx still hasn't said a word, and I'm starting to feel like she's not on the same page as I am.

I stand and move closer to her, "Vexx, you have to see that we're needed on this."

"What I see is you're really close to a man you just met. How do we know he's not more involved in all this than what he's saying? What if this is more his doing than he's telling you? You did say he'd done business with this Sonny character before, didn't you? What if he's still in the red, and he's just using you to get out of paying what he owes."

Quickly, I shake my head, "No, he's not like that."

"How do you know? The only time you've been around him was when he was getting you blasted out of your mind. So now he helps you get clean and all of a sudden now he's Superman?"

I gasp at her words, they may not know him the way I know him, but I don't know what would give them any reason to think he was just another scumbag. "Yes, he is my superman." I close my eyes, not wanting to relive what I'm about to tell them, but I need them to know what kind of person Rye truly is. Want them to see even a small part of what I know. "I never told any of you guys, but right before I decided to get clean, I was attacked. I was at the bar like usual, Rye told me I had enough, but I wasn't listening to him. I was so inebriated, I wasn't paying attention. I couldn't protect myself. I was going to leave with another man, but even before I got outside, I knew I was too drunk. I tried to get away from him, but he didn't seem to understand the word no..."

"Tati!" Free rushes forward. Her face and eyes already showing signs of anger and fear for me.

"I was so messed up. He dragged me to the back of a dumpster. I couldn't fight him off." My voice cracks and Sugar comes to kneel in front of me. She put her hand on my knee and squeeze gently, not interrupting me but just letting me know that she's here for support. "I gave up, just laid there while he tried to rape me."

"The fuck." Press growls but I don't look up at him.

"It would've happened had Rye not come out. He ripped the guy off me and fought him. The attacker had a knife but Rye didn't even think about his own safety, he was only there to protect me. When it was over and the man had run away he brought me back to his house, let me sleep and in the morning I surprised him with a knife to his chest. Still, he tried to make sure I was okay. Rye is one of the good ones. I don't care what the circumstances look like, I can feel it in my bones. He's not working with Sonny." I finish my story and look up at Vexx.

She knows how serious this is.

I have to make her see.

"I hear you. Fine. If we're going to get involved in this then we have to make sure we have all the information. That means we're going to have to get the other business owners to tell us what they know." Vexx gets right to business and everyone turns in her direction.

We've got a new mission.

Save Rye.

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15

Rye

I haven't heard from Bee all day, and I'm about to lose my mind.

She said she was going to talk to the girls at her club and even though I'm not exactly happy about the arrangement, I can't deny that I need the help.

Rye and Barley is everything I've worked for in my life.

Still, I'm not used to being on the receiving end of assistance. That's my job.

My savior complex is itching at the back of my brain.

It's only right then that I realize Bee doesn't need saving, and it doesn't make me want her any less. She can leave me in the dust, going on with her life and be good. I'll probably lose my shit, but at least I know she'll be okay.

This is the first time that I can remember really having strong feelings for someone who viewed me as a member of her team and not just someone to swoop in and save the day.

It's freeing.

I lean up to stretch before leaning back down to soak the scouring pad in my hand. Even after Bee left, I stayed in the bar to clean up the walls. It's a bunch of gibberish

spray-painted up here, but the message is clear, Sonny is telling me he's not through with me.

Every time I have any dealings with that man, it makes me regret I was ever desperate enough to need to take money from him. It doesn't matter that I've paid him back in full already. The man is like a filthy stain on my soul that refuses to wash away.

I knew what I was getting into when I let him put that money in my hand. I just prayed that it'd be long over by now.

My arms are hurting, and my fingers are already blistering but I need to get this done. I don't want Sonny or that bastard Evan to think that he's won. Besides I've got a lot of extra energy to get rid of.

Bee and I never finished what we started last night and my body knows it. We were so close. Fuck I can almost feel her hands on my body now. The way she moaned and said my name. God. Fucking. Damn. It.

I launch the scrubber at the wall and throw my head back on a growl. I need to get her off my mind.

I don't think I'm going to be able to. Not until I feel her soft body against mine again.

On the other hand, part of me actually hopes that she doesn't show back up. That she thinks my drama is too much for her to handle. I won't fault for her if she does. It's actually better that way, it just means that she won't get hurt.

Of course, I know that the possibility of her staying back and just letting me handle it on my own is slim to none she already told me that she was as committed to getting to the bottom of this as I was.

That means having to deal with the fact that she might get hurt.

Before I can think too much about that I hear the sounds of engines pulling up to the front of the bar. The sign out front clearly says I'm closed so whoever is out there isn't here for a drink.

I thought I had more time. Thought I would be prepared the next time Evan or someone else decided to show up.

Quickly I look around the place trying to find a weapon that I can use to protect myself. It sounded like a few engines, meaning a few people.

I rush over to the bar and see if my gun is still hidden away. Thankfully it is. I take it out and wait.

I don't have to wait long.

I lift my weapon and aim it at the door as it swings open with force.

"You better be ready to pull that trigger if you're going to keep that gun in my face."
A woman with dark hair and light eyes seethes at me.

I blink a few times. This isn't what I was expecting. I look down at her clothes and realize that she's wearing a vest. Right on the chest is a patch that says Eve's Fury.

Fury is right. I can feel the anger pulsing off this woman standing in front of me in waves.

She's with Bee. A friend. Not an enemy.

Quickly I lower the weapon and take my finger off the trigger. "You'll have to forgive

me. I've had a trying night." Now that I know none of them are here to hurt me I go back and replace the weapon behind the bar.

"So it's true, then? Bee said your place was ran through last night." She looks around the place as if to take stock of exactly what happened.

"I'm not sure why she would lie about something like that?" I eye her warily. It's obvious she's trying to dig for information but I don't have time to play twenty questions. "Did you need something?"

"Yeah, I'm trying to see if you're real or not? Bee seems to think we can trust you and after all you've done for her, I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, but if there's something more that we need to know I'd prefer not to be surprised."

She's straight out asking me if I had anything to do with this. Not with her words but the tone.

"There's nothing for you to find out. I'm assuming Bee has told you everything about my history with Sonny?" She nods, so I continue, "Then that's all you need to know. On another note, I never asked her to help. I appreciate it but if this doesn't sit right with you, please spare me the suspicion and just go on with your day."

The corner of her lip hitches up, and she looks away from me as if she doesn't want me to see her reaction.

"No suspicion, just being cautious. We're here to help. I've got some of the guys out front if you need anything fixed." She looks up at me, waiting to see what I'm going to say. I don't want to be rude, but in the same breath I'm already uncomfortable with just her here.

"That's okay. I'm good." I nod and shove my hands in my pocket. The raw parts of

my hands scrape against the fabric of my jeans. I really should accept the help. I don't know why it's so hard for me to do that.

"Suit yourself."

As she's turning to leave the bar, the door opens again and another woman walks in. She looks like Bee but different. A little older. This must be the sister.

"You're Rye?" She questions. She's seen me before when she's come over to pick her sister up, but this is the first time that she's ever taken the time to speak with me.

"Yeah, we met at the farmer's market." I guess it makes sense for her not to remember. All the girls were focused on Bee. She's all they cared about.

That's how it should be.

She nods once, and before I can react, she's coming up to me and wrapping me up in a tight hug.

"Thank you. Thank you for saving my sister when I couldn't." She presses a kiss to my cheek before she backs away, leaving me completely bewildered.

"Talk about keeping it in the family."

Instantly, I take a step away and look over the woman's shoulder to see Bee standing at the door. A smirk on her face.

"Don't be an ass." The woman in front of me snaps at her sister. She walks to the door, hip bumping Bee before she leaves us.

"Your family is serious about your safety." I say when it's just Bee and me alone.

"Of course they are. That's what family does." Bee saunters over to me, and I'm already on a hundred. I need to calm myself down.

"I wouldn't know. I've never had family like that."

"Now you do." Bee wraps her arms around my neck and presses her body against mine. "You've been busy." She looks around.

"Trying to keep occupied." I reply, my hands dipping lower against her hips. I give a little squeeze, trying hard not to overstep the bounds. Trying so hard.

"Maybe it's time for a break?" Her eyebrow goes up.

"Aren't they expecting you to go back with them?" I question knowing where this is already leading.

"No, they have a few other stores to hit up. They don't need me for that. I'm all yours."

All. Mine.

It's like the feral part of my brain completely takes over and I don't give a fuck about the bar or Sonny or any vandalism. All I can think about is her saying she's all mine.

Cleaning can wait. What can't wait is my need for her. If she's giving herself to me I'm going to take until there's nothing left.

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16

Rye

I don't think I've ever moved this fast in my life.

Tossing her over my shoulder, she squeals as I take large steps out the bar and up the side steps that lead to my apartment.

There are a few laughs and shouts from behind, and I realize that the girls she showed up with can see me manhandling her. I don't care. As long as I have the go ahead from Bee, nothing is going to stop me.

It takes only a few seconds for me to get Bee into the apartment, and the second I do I have her pressed up against the nearest wall.

We have to finish what we started last night.

It's a requirement for me to keep living.

Bee slides her hands into my hair and tugs hard at the strands while I nearly smash her body against the wall with mine. There's not even a sliver of space between us.

The tension between us is so thick.

When we first met I was sure that I wouldn't have anything to do with her not because she wasn't my type but simply because she was and that meant she was bad for me.

But now I'm ready to throw all caution to the wind. I want her... for the long haul.

"God, I feel like I've been waiting forever. Take me Rye. Please." She begs between her gasps of breaths as I continue to kiss and lick on her body.

She doesn't have to beg me. I'll give her everything that she wants. If only she'll let me.

Quickly I grab hold of her and nearly run to the bedroom where I can take care of her properly. I want to make sure she's ready for me. Ready to take all of me but I have a feeling that I'm not going to last that long.

Our hands are all over each other. Both of us ripping at the other's clothing. I usually like what she wears but it's so tight I'm out of breath as I try to tear the clothes off her. She laughs when she has to help me shimmy her pants off.

Finally, when she's laying in front of me naked, and I have my eyes on the prize, I crawl up on the bed, hitching her legs on my shoulders. There's no way I'm not going to get a taste of her this time around.

I ravage her like a man possessed. There's no warm up, I just go straight in and have my meal.

Her legs try to straighten, but I need to keep her in the right position. I want to taste every fold and crevice of her.

"Holy shit! Rye!" She cries out as I continue to lap and suck at her, quickly getting her first orgasm and instantly becoming addicted to her taste. I could stay down here for years and not ever grow tired.

Unfortunately, my cock has a much different plan. Even as I'm feasting on her, my

hips are pressing hard against the bed trying to get some friction. It feels so good, and it's been so long.

Her second orgasm has her speaking in tongues, and I know this is as good as it's going to get. She's as ready as she's ever going to be. In the back of my mind, I remember how tight she was with just my fingers, but she opened up well for me. I'm just going to pray that she's game enough to work with me.

Even the sheet pressing against the head of my cock as I slide up on the bed is a bit too much sensation. I have to stop before I even fully get in between her legs to take a breath.

"Rye, please. Now."

I groan and make my way up to her.

Notching the head of my cock against her folds, I slide myself up and down, making sure to get soaked with her natural lubricant. There's so much. I love it.

Finally, I try to push in but just like I thought she's so tight that I can't.

"Little... just give me a little." She slurs as she opens her legs up more for me.

I fist my hands into the sheets and do as she asked. She knows what her body can take.

I rock my hips back and forth slowly, just able to get the very tip of myself into her. It's like I'm going out of my mind. I've never felt anything like this before, and I'm not even all the way inside of her yet.

"You're destroying me." I whisper against her ear. "So fucking perfect. The way you

feel, the way you taste..." I press a kiss to her mouth and she moans. Her body opens a little more and I have to fight back my own groan as I feel myself slip in a little further. The head of my cock completely engulfed by her now. It takes everything in me not to just go ham with just the tip inside of her. It's so sensitive. To feel that tight ring right there. The thing is I know there's much more to come. I have to be patient.

"You feel the connection. You feel that, Tati?" I ask her and she whimpers a yes. "It'll always be like this. Always." Her body opens up a bit more, and I slide in even further, having to lean up on my forearms for better leverage.

We go at it like this for a bit, inch after inch of me filling her up.

I mutter words of encouragement and wonder in her ear until I hear her gasping for breath. My dick touching parts of her that I'm sure she's never had touched before. It's cocky of me to think that, but I can read the surprise all over her face. This is all new to her.

It's new to me, too.

Finally, with one last thrust I'm all the way into her and I can't even pretend to have a hold on my will power anymore.

"You okay?" I ask through gritted teeth.

"Yes, It's perfect. Made for me." Bee replies.

I could have said a prayer right then and there to the Gods for sending her to me. She's absolutely right. It feels like I was made just for her. Every inch of her wrapped around me perfectly.

Pulling back, I test the resistance before slamming back home again.

Over and over until we're moving so hard and fast the headboard is banging against the wall. I've never been more grateful that I don't have neighbors as I am right now. Surely someone would have definitely called the cops by now. I don't want to have to deal with any more interruptions. I'm going to give this girl what I should have been able to give her last night.

We switch from position to position. I force my body to edge my release, just to make sure she's pleased. When we finish here this afternoon, I want her to know without a shadow of a doubt how good we can be together. I want her just as obsessed with me as I am with her.

"Rye! It's so good!" She cries out as she grabs hold of my back and drags her nails down. Both of us up in a sitting position now. She grinds down on me while I use my arms to bounce her up and down on my cock.

"Come for me... Come for me again, Tati."

She gasps and we lock eyes for a second. In that one moment, I can see everything written on her soul.

I see her need and desire. Her lust. Her confusion. Her fear.

I know it's still in there, but part of me is wishing that this will be enough to erase that from her. I know it won't be. I know this won't be enough to prove to her that she doesn't have to be afraid as long as I'm with her. I've got her now.

A moment later, her eyes squeeze shut, and she tosses her head back. Her body bowing against me as another orgasm rips through her. It's so intense, I swear I can feel the vibrations slamming through me.

Vibrations that push me clear over the edge. There's no holding back. I wrap my arms

around her tightly, squeezing her against my body. Keeping myself seated deep inside of her as thick rope after rope of my cum shoots deep inside of her. I bite down on the thick part of her neck and growl my release.

It feels like it's going on forever. I'm suffocating, but have too much air at the same time. I feel light-headed and too heavy. It's a mix of feelings that I'm having a hard time getting a hold on.

Then at once it all starts to slip away, making me feel weightless.

We collapse down on the bed, both of us sucking in deep breaths. Sweat glistening on both of our bodies. Clothes strewn all over the floor and the sun shining brightly through the window.

I don't know any better way to spend my day.

"Well, damn. I'm going to have to poke the bear more often..." She laughs before she turns to get closer to me.

She feels so fucking perfect tucked under my arm.

I wish it was enough.

I wish I could shut my brain off. That I was like the other men who could just take sex as just that, but of course I'm not. I've never been the type of person who could just have sex and not want to know what comes next.

I bite my tongue to keep from speaking out.

"You good?" Bee leans up and looks into my face. She must feel the change inside of me.

"Yeah." I lie.

The atmosphere in the room is quickly turning, and I don't know how to stop it.

We lay there for a while, both of us getting our body back to a settled state. Unfortunately, it doesn't take long for Bee to start shifting around.

"Well, I guess I should get my stuff. The girls are probably waiting on me to get back to the clubhouse."

I knew this was coming. Bee isn't the kind of girl that wants to be tied down. She's only looking for a good time. A good time we both definitely had, but now it's over.

"You going to come back tonight?" I lean up and ask her as she gets out of the bed and starts searching for her clothes.

"I'm not sure. Are you going to open up? You need me to work?"

"No, I'm not asking you to come back to work. I'm asking if you're coming back to me." There's no mistaking where I'm going with this conversation.

Her face pales and I watch as she tries to cover up her uneasiness.

"Damn, you just got some. You can't be hard up for another taste already." She laughs but I'm not finding any humor in the situation.

"Tati, I'm not playing games with you. I want to know what is happening between us. If it's nothing then I want to know now." I'm doing my best not to sound like a little bitch.

"Rye," she sighs and slides up her pants. "We had a good time. I'd like to keep having

a good time with you, can't we keep it at that. We don't need to put any labels on this right now do we. I mean we both got other things that we need to be focusing on right? You've got your bar and I've got the club. We both need to worry about Sonny and his goons..."

I put my hand up to stop her. I don't need to hear any more excuses. I get it.

"Yeah, you're right. Let me know if yall find anything." I say and swing my legs over the side of the bed so I can get dressed myself.

"Oh, come on Rye. Don't be like that." Bee tries to come over and touch me but I move away. I've been down this road before.

"I've got to get downstairs and finish cleaning up if I want to open up for tonight. I'll catch you later." I nod once before grabbing my shirt and slipping it back over my head.

Bee gets quiet and finishes getting dressed. "I'll call you okay."

It feels like the end. An end I knew was coming but for some reason I'm still not prepared for. I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up. I knew who Bee was from the beginning. This was the only logical direction this could've gone.

I try my hardest to not be disappointed when I hear my front door open and close.

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17

Bee

To say I wasn't expecting that is an understatement.

Rye is everything that I never thought I'd have for myself.

My entire time here I've seen the girls with their significant others. Riot with Treble. Free with Jag. Even Sugar and her little group of lovers. I've always wanted something like that. A commitment but I never thought it was for me.

In fact, after Cage, I completely gave up on finding anyone that would fill that role for me. I thought I was content with just being on my own and having fun. I mean, I'm still young.

Yet, Rye is offering me all of that, and I still can't seem to take the next step.

He made it abundantly clear that he didn't want this to be a one time thing, and honestly neither do I.

That dick is just way too good for me to only have one ride.

But a relationship?

I just can't understand why he'd want a relationship with me. He's seen me at my absolute worst. He's held my hair back while I threw up my guts in his toilet. He

patted the sweat off my head when I was going through my detox. He's seen me out of my mind drunk.

I don't want to be just some project for him. The next woman for him to have to save.

Is that what he thinks I am?

A victim?

I shake my head from side to side as the wind pushes my hair over my shoulders and I rev my bike to go faster. I need to get all of this off my mind. I was telling him the truth when I reminded him that we both had other things on our plates right now. I'm not trying to hurt him.

Soon he'll see that I'm right and a relationship with me isn't the best thing for him.

Feeling good about my decision by the time I make it to the clubhouse, I'm a little lighter when I walk in the doors.

"There she goes. Stress-free and walking funny." Duchess chuckles from where she's sitting with Press on the couch. Glenn squeals and run from side to side in the space.

An instant smile appears on my face. I love that little kid.

"Ahhhh Eeee!" He shouts when he sees me and rushes over to me with his hands up. I lean down and capture him in my arms to cuddle to my chest.

My heart squeezes a bit when I realize that I may never have the opportunity to feel my own child in my arms. How can I expect to have a kid if I can't even get over myself enough to commit to one man.

"How you doing, buddy? Taking care of everyone?" I ask the little boy, who is more interested in putting his hands in his mouth than the words I'm saying. I press a kiss to his head before I set him down again and make my way to the couch to sit with Duchess.

"I'm surprised we even are seeing you tonight. From the look of that man carrying you up the stairs earlier, I would've thought you were out for the night."

"Nah, we've got business."

"True." Duchess nods and crosses her legs so she's facing me.

I look around the clubhouse and notice a few people's doors are open. They must be out on a ride. "Where's everyone? Did we get any more information?"

"Riot and Vexx are out talking to one last business owner, but it seems like what you told us is all accurate. This Sonny bastard is really trying to take over shit that doesn't belong to him. Vexx isn't going to let that shit fly. It's only a matter of time before he goes from harassing the businesses to showing up on our doorstep. We need to get ahead of this before it gets out of hand." Duchess' expression is dead serious.

This is what I wanted. What we all joined Eve's Fury to do. Protect our community. How can we call ourselves community activists if we allow some bully to come in and set up shop?

"So what's the plan? I'm sure we're not just going to go in guns blazing?"

"It might come to that." Press says from the back. "I've been around his type for a long time. Sonny is just coming up in the ranks, so he's going to take everything to the extreme. He probably thinks he needs to show everyone who's boss. The only way he's going to back down is if we show him he's not the big dog around here."

It's not what I want to hear, but I'm prepared for it. I've got no problem joining in a fight if it means that everyone is safe. That Rye is safe.

Just thinking of him brings my mood down. I hate the way I left things with him.

"Uh oh, what's that?" Duchess nudges me and I quickly try to fix the expression on my face. It's too late.

"Nothing. I'm good." I force the words.

"Bullshit. You don't have the glow you should have. Don't tell me...he's a big man everywhere except where it counts?" Duchess chuckles and Press groans.

"And that's my cue." He stands from where he's sitting, shaking his head as we both laugh at him.

"Oh don't go! What's your take...how big is big enough?" I shout in his direction. In return, he flips me off, and I clutch my stomach with laughter. I love poking fun at the guys. This is an all female MC club, so sometimes the conversation that we have are a little too much for the men who spend time here with their women.

Once Press leaves the room though the atmosphere in the room changes. The only joy coming from Glenn who is still running around.

"Now spill, what's wrong?" Duchess doesn't even pretend like she's going to let anything go.

"Nothing, I swear it."

"If nothing was wrong, you'd be much more exuberant. Honestly now that I'm looking at you, it seems like someone ate the last slice of cake or something."

"Duchess..." I don't want to bother her with my small problems, especially when I know we all should be focused on other things, but I've never really told anyone my feelings about this subject. Any other time I was feeling bad about not having someone I can call my own, I found relief in a drink. I can't do that now.

"It's silly." I sigh, and she gets more comfortable in her seat. "I've always known that I was the fun girl. The one people went to for a good time."

"That's what he did? The fucking asshole!" Instantly, Duchess is up in arms.

"No, no, no... he didn't." I let out another breath before I continue. I don't even know how to explain this to her, "It's me. I was so sure that I'd never have someone who wanted to deal with me on a long term basis. I mean, let's be real, I'm a mess. Rye wants...more. He said it straight out without being creepy about it. Like I don't see what he sees in me besides the crazy fun girl. The drunk. The victim. I don't want that for me or for him. I don't know if I'm capable of giving him more."

With it all out in the open, I wait for Duchess to tell me I'm right. To tell me that I need to do more work on myself before I even think about starting anything with Rye. Instead, she sucks her teeth together and rolls her eyes. A very Riot-like expression.

"Bee, you're always going to be the fun girl. You're always going to be a mess in one way or another. It's just in your genetic makeup but let me let you in on a secret. We're all a mess in our own way. I don't know much about this man, but Rye sees that. There's no way after spending all this time with you that he doesn't see that. You told us before that he didn't even touch you while you were detoxing. If all he saw you as was a victim, nothing would've stopped him from pushing while you were vulnerable. I don't think he sees you like that at all. I think he sees the strong woman you are. That's why he's so into you now. That's why he wants more now. You're scared that he's going to be exactly what you need. We've all been through it." She reaches over and takes my hand. "Do you think I thought Press was going to be my

one and only when I met him? No ma'am. But there was no denying it. We just completed each other as cheesy as that sounds. From what I saw and what I know about you and Rye's relationship... I'm thinking it's the same for you, too."

"I don't know how to do this. I've never..."

"There's nothing to it. If it's what I think, then it should be as easy as breathing. All you have to do is let it happen."

Let it happen?

When I was with Cage, it felt like I was forcing everything. Sure, the sex was out of this world, but it never felt as good as what I have with Rye and I think that's because of the connection between us.

My mind jumps back to a few hours earlier when he told me our connection would always be there.

I know he's telling the truth. I can feel it in my soul. Even if we don't stay together, I know Rye and I will have a connection that will never disappear. Maybe Duchess is right. Maybe all I really have to do is let it happen.

18

Rye

I'm angry.

I do my best to let my direct my feelings into my chores. Sure enough about twenty minutes before I'm supposed to open I've got the walls cleaned off as best as I'm going to be able to do. Thankfully, there's not a lot of light coming into the small bar. The windows are still boarded up, but I'm supposed to be having a new glass delivery tomorrow. It's not like the usual folks that come in here are interested in looking out the windows anyway.

They are here to drink.

That's all they need me for.

Making the last few adjustments, I make sure the area is safe for people to come in. The last thing I need is for someone to cut themselves on some glass or something like that.

I go to the door and switch the sign to open, before I even make my way back to the bar, the door to the front swings open.

Part of me wants it to be Bee, but I force that feeling away. I'm not going to torture myself pining over a woman that doesn't want to be with me. We both had our fun and that's enough.

I wish I truly believed that, but I don't have much of a choice. It's the only option I have.

Instead of it being Bee, I'm surprised to see its Richard. He owns the small convenience store on the corner. He never comes in here.

"Richard?" I question when I see him looking around. I've done a good job cleaning up, but that doesn't mean it's not obvious that something serious happened here.

"Yeah, I was just coming over here to let you know that a few of those girls on the bikes came by earlier."

"Oh?" I'm not shocked. I knew they were going to go around, I just am not sure what Richard would want to talk to me about it for. We've never really been friendly like that.

"Yeah, well..." He rubs the back of his neck like he's uncomfortable. "I know you've got a shit deal from Sonny the same way the rest of us have and even if nothing comes from what those girls want to do, I just wanted to make sure I let you know I appreciate you even trying to fix this mess."

My eyes open wide. I'm not expecting this, "I'm not doing anything. I just won't let those assholes strong arm me. We don't owe them anything."

"We don't, but it's easier to stand when someone else does it first. You were the only one to push back. Even though it's clear that it's come at a cost. I don't know what I can do to help, but I just want you to know that I'm behind you as well as everyone else. We just needed someone else to stand up and fight back first."

I'm stunned. "Yeah, no problem." It's all I can say in return.

He reaches out and shakes my hand. "I'll see you around, if you need anything to help with the cleanup, let me know. I'll do what I can."

When I made up my mind to fight back against Sonny, I didn't think it would be the start of a whole freaking revolution, but I'm happy that at least one person got something out of this. It makes me feel good.

I just hope it all ends up the way we want it to.

The night goes by in a flash. If I thought the broken windows would deter anyone from coming in I was wrong. In fact, it feels like there are more people in the bar now than usual. Everyone but the one woman I'm used to seeing.

Bee hasn't called or showed up, not that I really expected her to.

It's past one in the morning, and I'm pouring one of my regulars his third drink when trouble makes their way into my space.

One of Evan's flunkies walks in followed by another and another. Finally, Sonny the Shark himself walks in.

Instantly I reach for my gun but think better of it. There's too many of them in here mixed with the large crowd of people that are just here to have a good time.

"Well would you look at this place just thriving," Sonny talks loud and everyone in the room quiets down. "It's nice to see my investment paying off."

"You've got no investment in my place, and you're not welcomed." I say, moving out from behind the bar. My eyes scan the crowd. There's way too many people here right now to have a full on brawl.

"Not welcomed? Really, you think you can tell me where I'm welcomed?" Sonny squints his eyes at me. He pulls out his weapon before he shouts, "I own this block. I'm welcomed wherever the fuck I want to be welcomed."

The patrons scream, and soon it's a mad dash to the door. Panic claws at my heart as I watch the people desperate to get out. There's nothing I can do about it now. All I can do is hope that everyone makes it out without any injuries.

When the majority of the people flee, Sonny smirks at me again. "You see what happens when you go against me? Chaos. We don't want that, do we? You already know what I can do, Rye. I've got the power now to take everything you've ever worked for and destroy it."

"I don't care what you say, Sonny. I'm not going along with whatever you're trying to do here. I don't need your protection. I don't need your money. I don't need anything from you."

The door opens again, but just before I'm about to warn whoever it is away, I notice that it's a few of the other business owners. Richard was telling the truth. They have my back. It feels good to know I'm not standing against Sonny alone.

"Leave him alone. We don't want you here." Richard speaks up.

Sonny turns and chuckles when he sees the small group of shop workers around him.

"You're just a stupid bunch, aren't you. I see I'm going to have to prove my point with all of you again." He sighs before turning his gaze back on me. "You say you don't need my protection, but does that count for everyone you care about? Did you think we wouldn't figure out what you were trying to do? That we wouldn't notice that feisty little piece of ass coming in and out of here? It's sweet that you've got your woman going to war for you."

I surge forward. He's talking about Bee. This is why I didn't want her involved. Now she's a target.

"Don't worry. We've made sure her and all of her little biker girlfriends know better than to mess with us. She should've stayed her drunk ass at the bottom of a bottle."

"What the fuck have you done?" I growl at him, taking another step in his direction, my hands already in fists. I'm willing to do battle for Bee without a doubt, but first I have to make sure she's okay.

"I've made sure they all know their place. No one fucks with me. That clubhouse should be up in flames by now. Maybe she'll call your name as she burns to a crisp in her bed."

Right now... they're hurting her right now?

I don't see anything in front of me but red.

Panic and fear slice through me.

She might not be my woman, but that doesn't make her any less mine.

She needs me and nothing is going to stop me from going to her.

I push through the crowd of people, both Sonny's goons and those that are there to help me. I don't care about the bar or what they can do to it. All that matters is getting to Bee before it's too late.

Bursting out the door, I see my car is blocked in by Sonny's people.

I'm not going to wait or try to get them to move... instead, I turn and take off running.

The distance can't close fast enough.

If I ever needed the ability to really turn into Superman and fly, it would be now.

19

Bee

"Now that we know exactly what we're dealing with, it's clear that we're going to need to deal with this problem before we even think about doing anything else." Vexx says from her spot at the head of the table.

I'm anxious for Church to be over.

I want to go back to the bar and talk things over with Rye. Let him know that I'm ready for whatever it is that he wants to try. I don't know how good of a girlfriend I'm going to be but I don't want to miss out on what I can have with him.

Of course, just before I was ready to leave out, Vexx and Riot came back in and Vexx called church.

My relationship status is important, but it doesn't take precedent over club business.

"What about the rest of the business owners, do they know that things can get bad before they get better. I mean, I don't really think Sonny is just going to walk away without trying to milk these people for all they have."

Vexx sighs and rubs her fingers along the bridge of her nose, "That's what I'm hoping to avoid. The owners that we talked to all just seemed happy that someone was ready to stand up to them. A lot of people are still too skittish to come to us for help on their own. It's lucky that Bee found out what she did from Rye, or it's possible that all of

this would have gone down without any of us knowing anything about it. At least now, we might be able to stop it before it gets any worse."

The girls all look in my direction and nod. I don't need any props. I didn't bring this to their attention so I can be praised. I brought it to their attention because I wanted to help Rye. He's done so much for me, it's only right that I do what I can to help him, too.

"So has anyone been able to get in contact with them? Do we know where Sonny is holed up?" Riot questions, getting everyone back on track.

"There has to be someone who-"

BANG

The sound of the club door being kicked open has all of us out of our chairs in an instant.

"What the fuck?" Vexx yells out as we rush to get to the door.

The second the church doors are yanked open, I hear the one sound I don't expect to here.

"Tati!" Rye is yelling my name.

Rye is here. Not at the bar? What the hell?

I push to the front and out of church.

"Brother, I don't know what your problem is, but you're going to have to back the fuck down." Press stands in Rye's way. Jag, Hardy and Judd backing him up.

"Get the hell out of my way." Rye growls, and I can see he's seconds away from throwing hands with Press. There's no way that situation ends well.

"Rye!" I call out to get his attention. My eyebrows furrow in with confusion. I don't know what he's doing here, but he's out of sorts. The man looks like he's been running for miles. I realize that I didn't hear an engine rumbling up, so it must mean he ran the three miles from the bar here. Something is really wrong.

He turns his head in my direction, and the way his body nearly crumbles is enough to know how right I am for wanting to have more with him.

He pushes through the guys and rushes over to me. "You're okay. Oh, fuck. I thought..." He doesn't finish his statement, just slams me against his body, holding me tight, kissing the top of my head and breathing me in deep.

I have to forcibly push myself out of his arms, "What are you talking about? Of course, I'm okay? Why wouldn't I be okay?"

He puffs out a deep breath before he continues, "Sonny was just at the bar, or he still is. I don't know. I told him I didn't need anything from him, and he made it sound like he was already here. He said he burned the clubhouse to the ground."

"What?" My heart is hammering in my chest. Something could've happened to him. I could've lost him right when I just got him.

"They followed you." Jag snarls and everyone looks in his direction.

Rye turns, "What?"

"They fucking followed you. They didn't know where we were. They're outside now. I can see people sneaking along the perimeter." Jag's eyes are glued out the window. I

look in that direction and I don't see anything. But out of everyone in the room, Jag has nearly superhuman instincts. If he says there are people outside. There's a threat.

The air shifts.

It's not something I see, not yet, but I feel it—thick, suffocating tension creeping in through the cracks of the clubhouse. The chatter dies. The girls around me stiffen. Then, through the window, I see them. Shadows moving in the darkness. Too many of them.

Vexx is already standing at attention. “Weapons. Now.”

There's no hesitation. No wasted time. The girls move, grabbing whatever they can, loading up, preparing for the inevitable. My pulse is steady as I reach for my gun. This isn't my first fight. It won't be my last.

Then, a hand grabs my wrist.

I turn to see Rye, his dark eyes locked on mine. He doesn't say anything at first, just looks at me, his grip tight enough that I know what he's about to say before he even speaks.

“Stay,” he says, voice low, almost pleading. “Stay with me.”

I shake my head, my stomach twisting at the look on his face. He's worried. For me. But I can't do what he's asking.

“I'm good at this,” I tell him, forcing a small smirk. “I've been here before.”

His jaw clenches. “Bee?—”

I step forward, pressing my palm against his chest. “I promise you, everything will be okay.”

The words are easy, but the truth? I don’t know if we’ll make it out of this. None of us do. But I have no choice.

I turn before he can say anything else and move with the rest of the girls toward the door. Vexx leads us out, and the second we step onto the gravel lot, I see them.

Evan and his men. More than a dozen. Maybe twenty. Armed. Waiting.

The silence stretches thin. Then...

Boom.

From the side, someone throws a Molotov cocktail against the side of the building, and it engulfs in flames.

The first shot cracks through the night, and chaos erupts.

I move fast, years of muscle memory kicking in. My gun lifts, my aim steady, and I take the first shot. A man drops. I spin, fire again. Another one down.

Shouts. Screams. Bullets tearing through the air.

The smell of gunpowder burns my nose, but I don’t stop. I can’t. My body moves before my mind even catches up. I duck low, rolling behind a car for cover, reloading in one smooth motion.

Another shot. Another body hitting the dirt.

I don't look back. I don't think about Rye inside, about the promise I just made. Right now, all I can do is survive.

Vexx shouts orders and I get to the position she wants me to be in. I continue to take down the threats around me. I take a glance back and see Rye rushing out of the building with Addison and Glenn in tow. He got them out safe.

Just like him to find someone to save. I can always count on him to do what needs to be done. They run off into the trees before I see Rye run back into the house and pull out Celia and another of the women that was there while we find them housing.

It's like the best of teams. He's picking up the slack where I need.

"You bitch, you should've kept your nose out of our business." Some snaps in my direction and when I look I see it's Evan, and he's got his sights set on me. He raises his gun and I drop to the ground with just a second to spare.

Evan jumps on me while I'm trying to get my footing again. My gun goes scattering across the dirt out of reach. Evan pulls his hand back and swings hard against my ribs. All my breath puffs out, and I see double for a second.

I curl up, trying to protect myself while he continues to beat on me.

I brace for another blow, but instead I feel Evan ripped off me. Rye has made his way over here and is now on the ground with Evan. The bear is loose.

Even I flinch when I watch him pummel the much smaller man. The roars coming out of his mouth with every blow is frightening. I'm not used to seeing him like this.

I don't have much time to stay and stare. Riot cries out and I rush over to help her.

We all come together to get a hold on what's going here when all of a sudden another flurry of cars pulls up.

This time a man in an ill fitting suit steps out, "Destroy them all!" It's Sonny.

"Get rid of him!" Vexx orders, and it doesn't take long before we all start to converge. The women of Eve's Fury flanked by the men who love them.

Vexx is the first one to raise her weapon, and we all follow suit.

"Put your weapons down now!" Hardy calls out and at first I think he's talking to Sonny, but he's not. He's talking to us.

"What the hell is he doing?" Rye barks from behind me.

I look to Vexx and then Hardy confused. Before I have a chance to ask what the hell is going on, a bright light shines in the distance. Red and blue lights close in and everyone but us start to scatter.

Men fully clad in police uniform rush in and cut off any exit Sonny and his men might be able to take.

Sonny came here to ambush us, but it looks like he's not the only one who knows how to catch someone by surprise.

I laugh loud as I watch two cops tackle Sonny to the ground. "Long live the king! I'm sure you'll find plenty of people looking for favors where you're going!" I yell out as Sonny is being yanked away by police.

I don't know how Hardy pulled this off, but I'm suddenly so glad that we've got a cop on our side.

The intensity of what just happened slowly starts to wear off, and I look around just to make sure that everyone is okay. I breathe a sigh of relief to see everyone is still in one piece. All that mayhem for Eve's Fury to still come out on top.

I finally turn to the clubhouse and see Rye along with the other guys working to get the side of the building extinguished. The damage isn't very bad. The wall is scorched but not destroyed.

Hardy takes point and tells the authorities what is going on, and it doesn't take long for our property to be free of the filth that tried to take a stand against us.

It's over, at least for now.

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Rye

Bee is absolutely amazing.

I was worried. Scared that I'd put her in a position to get hurt, but it was Sonny that should've been worried.

She and her group of biker sisters were more than just prepared for this, it was like they were made for this.

I stay back and just observe as the cops and the club gets rid of the mess in the front. I do what I can to fix the destruction the fire nearly created.

This could've gone in a much worse direction.

"Even with all this, I promise you, she's still worth it." The man that was there earlier. Bee's sister's man says as he walks by me.

I don't know what to say to that.

I already know that she's worth it, but she doesn't want what I want. It's clear that we make a good team. Unfortunately, that's not enough.

Now that it's all over I'm finding myself feeling out of place. This is Bee's family. Her space. It's not for me to be here.

I turn and sigh knowing that I'm going to have a long hike back to the bar. Hopefully, Sonny didn't do any damage before he left. Even if he did, I'd rather deal with fixing things up than doing business with Sonny again.

Maybe I can do some kind of community outreach with the other business owners to help everyone else. That could be something to keep my thoughts off Bee's. I feel like I'm going to be doing a lot to keep my mind off her.

I take a few steps away from the property.

"Such a man to leave the women to clean up all the mess."

When I turn back, Bee's standing there with a sweet smile on her face. There is a bruise on one side of it, and I'm instantly angry all over again. My eyes search the area and I see an ambulance. Evan is in there. I really wish I would've killed that bastard.

"Hey, I'm sorry about all this." I rub my hands over my head.

"Ah, don't worry about all that. We've had worse." She shrugs and takes a few steps in my direction. "Are you heading back to the bar?"

"Yeah." I don't know what else to say to her. All I wanted from her was the chance to let her see just how good we could be together. She doesn't want that, and I'm not going to force myself into her life. I want all of her, not just a piece.

"Can I come with you?"

I squint at her not sure what kind of games she's set on playing. There's no reason for her to come back to the bar with me. The danger that we were all so worried about is gone. We can both go on with our lives.

"Bee, I'm not fucking you again?" If that's what she's after she's going to have to go somewhere else to find a boy toy. I'm not the one.

Her eyes open wide, "I'm not sure what kind of relationship you want to have, but if this is your way of trying to get me married, I have to say...it's working."

Married? What? How did we get from just friends to married.

I shake my head. My brain feels like it's about to dribble out of my ears. "What the hell are you talking about. I'm not trying to get hitched. I'm trying to say I'm not going to have a no strings attached relationship with you. I'll always be here for you but not like that."

I've broken the cycle. Bee has still ripped my heart to shreds but at least I'm ending things on my terms. At least, I think I am.

She looks down and closes the distance between us before she finally looks back up at me, "And what if I want all the strings?"

No...she can't be saying what I think she's saying.

"Enough with the jokes. Talk to me, Tati."

I fight to keep my hands at my sides. I want to touch her. Want to hold her in my arms, but I won't give in until I know for sure.

"Rye, I'm never going to be normal. I'm a hot mess on a good day. I'm impulsive, aggravating, head strong, and I'll probably get myself into more trouble than even I know what to do with. But...I don't want to fight against you. I deserve this. I deserve you. If you're still up for the challenge, that is." Her eyes sparkle in the moonlight and I swear she's never looked more beautiful.

"You're going to be a problem aren't you?" I finally let my arms wrap around her and pull her closer to me. She melts into my body, "Every moment of every day."

I lean down to kiss her. The moment our lips touch, all the pent-up emotions I've been trying to hold back come rushing to the surface.

I want this. I want her. Again.

"You got your own room?" I grumble against her lips.

"I do. You want to see it?" She whispers back.

"I don't think I'll be doing a lot of sightseeing." I squeeze her ass, and she squeals before grabbing my hand and pulling me toward the clubhouse. She stops short just before we walk inside.

"Vexx?" She calls out, and I turn to watch the interaction between the two of them. Nothing is said but from the looks they are giving each other it's clear a whole conversation is taking place.

"Approved." Vexx calls back before turning her eyes to me, "Welcome to the family, Rye." She smiles lightly before turning back to take care of everything that's still going on.

I'm family now.

Just hearing it and seeing the happiness on Bee's face is enough for me to know it's worth it.

I'm determined to show Bee that she has nothing to be afraid of when it comes to me. I may not really be superman but when it comes to her heart, body and soul I'll always be here to protect her.